



Lesbians and Nature

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A Journal by and for Lesbians

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Notes for a Magazine

“The more clearly we can focus our attention on the wonders and realities of the universe around us, the less taste we will have for destruction.”

Rachel Carson, 1954 www.rachelcarson.org

“It is one of the perils of our so-called civilized age that we do not yet acknowledge enough, or cherish enough, this connection between soul and landscape—between our own best possibilities, and the view from our own windows. We need the world as much as it needs us, and we need it in privacy, intimacy, and surety. We need the field from which the lark rises—bird that is more than itself, that is the voice of the universe: vigorous, godly joy. Without the physical world such hope is: hacked off. Is: dried up. Without wilderness no fish could leap and flash, no deer could bound soft as eternal waters over the field; no bird could open its wings and become buoyant, adventurous, valorous beyond even the plan of nature. Nor could we.”

Mary Oliver, *Long Life: Essays and Other Writings*. Da Capo Press, 2004, p. 91

This issue of *Sinister Wisdom* explores our relationship with the earth. What profound connections do we, as Lesbians, have with specific animal and plant species, rocks, rivers, oceans, mountains, and deserts and how do these connections give us joy and sustain us during difficult times? In what ways do these connections inspire our creative work? What work are we doing to protect the earth? How have we learned to cope in a society that is indifferent to a planet in pain? As Audre Lorde wrote, we cannot make love to concrete.

What are we doing to combat environmental racism and classism? It is unconscionable that hazardous waste sites, landfills, incinerators, and polluting industries are intentionally located in areas where people of color, migrant farm workers and poor people live. What can we do about acid rain, clear-cut logging, greenhouse effect, extinct and endangered animals, insecticides and pesticides, nuclear waste, oil spills, overpopulation, ozone hole, toxic chemicals, and war? And the list of individual, government, corporate, and military assaults on the earth and all her inhabitants goes on. May the pieces in this issue of *Sinister Wisdom* inspire dialogue, research, and action in our communities. And may we each awaken, rise up and become passionately involved in the Environmental Revolution, the EcoJustice Movement to save our home, our beloved planet Earth.

Fran Day
Sebastopol, California

Upcoming Issues

Please read the submission guidelines on the inside back cover very carefully.

64 Lesbians and Music, Dance, Drama & Art

Deadline: January 1, 2005. Editor: Fran Day

This issue will celebrate Lesbian music, dance, drama, and art. How has your life as a Lesbian been touched by one or all of these creative arts? How has Lesbian culture been impacted? When did you first hear Lesbian music or see a Lesbian play or art exhibit and how did that inspire you to build community? Lesbian musicians, dancers, choreographers, playwrights, actors, artists and others are invited to write about their experiences. Related interviews, photographs, and book reviews are encouraged.

#65 Lesbian Mothers and Grandmothers

Deadline: May 1, 2005. Guest Editor: Merry Gangemi

Short fiction, poetry, non-fiction, and art that explores and celebrates Lesbian mothers and grandmothers (including Lesbians who adopt and Lesbians who are co-parents). Fiction and non-fiction should be double-spaced. Font should be Georgia or New Times Roman. Short legible handwritten work will be considered. No more than ten pages for fiction and non-fiction. No more than five poems per submission. Name and phone number or email top right of each page. Submissions on disk are fine, but must be in MS Word or Corel WordPerfect for PC.

Submissions for 65 only should be sent to: Merry Gangemi, 985 East Hill Road, Marshfield, VT 05658 or email mgangemi@sover.net

66 Lesbian Activists

Deadline: August 1, 2005 Editor: Fran Day

Activists, this is our issue. What areas of activism are we involved in? What forms is our activism taking and how has this changed through the years (if at all)? How and why did we get involved in the work we are doing? What strategies have we tried that worked and which ones didn't and why? How do we "keep hope alive"? What ways have we found to inspire/encourage other Lesbians to be politically active? What ways do our personal lives — our childhood experiences, our class and/or racial/ethnic identities, whether we are disabled or able-bodied, old or young, live in urban or rural areas — reflect in our political work? What galvanizes us (music, art, drama, literature, actions, etc.) to continue the struggle? What work are we doing to protect the earth, to promote peace, to combat lesbophobia, racism, anti-Semitism, classism, ageism, looksism, size oppression, sexism, ableism, etc.?

Barbara A. Taylor

Planetary Passion



"Tefnut: Goddess of Daybreak" 4'x3' ©1983 by Sudie Rasukin

and violent world grew
and winter a new cold war began
into its final of nuclear power
and condensation an evil venom
at this fascist into Age of Aquarius

Barbara A. Taylor

Planetary Passion

*In this enronomic disneyland of worldcoms,
flapping patriotic flags and so-called
"compassionate conservatives," where
vulnerable improbable events converge
they shake the compost of civilization –
our values tumbled upside down, inside out:
cell circles of chaos – she's passionate
about the chocolate soil in which our
gardens grow. She loves
the fertilizing worms. Like them, we live
on nature's terms, will enrich the dirt
with blood and bone. She's passionate
about this planet (already raped by
careless men), where disintegrating
coral reefs – our oceanic ecosystems –
are now all breaking down. Rare rainforests
plundered, exploited, deliberately destroyed.
Raging global fires of extinction (mysteriously
fundamental their impact on moral revolution),
they savagely burn, tear our jungles apart,
smother the lungs of the planet —
they are out of control, leaving
endangered species to flourish
only in captivity, subject
to the Euro or the Dollar.*

*In four decades one third of earth's
native species will have gone.
Non extant. Gone forever.
Twelve billion peoples' needs
must be found from diminishing
resources in a chemically polluted
cosmos of choking fossil fuels where
endless cfc's abound. In a fearful
and intolerant world, greedy, obscene
and sinister, a new cold war emerges
with its threat of nuclear power. Terrorism
and vandalism. an evil venom strikes
in this Tantric new Age of Aquarius. Ha!*

when planets align in optimistic sweet,
sweet harmony. But, "All we are saying is
give peace a ..."

All we can do
is recycle, focus on peace. And hope.
Hope there's no disaster, no asteroid
comes crashing, for disaster means
bad star. She's passionate about
the chocolate soil in which our
gardens grow. She loves the
fertilizing worms. Like them,
we live on nature's terms, will
enrich the dirt with blood and bone.

June 2003



Photo by Judith K. Witherow and Sue Lenaerts

Barbara A. Taylor

In The Cool Of The Night

Colorado, 2000

My journey there is gently circled, by
women of soft curves and mounds
in changing shades of mottled lights.
Warming Chinooks sweep over breasts of
rolling hills and big bison plains where
eagles fly – high, then drop, deep into
shadow'd crevices, between verdant valleys
of the womb, to rise again in golden rays,
soaring over knotty nipples pinnacles.
Ice-flocked forests of grandeur spread
dark shadows on silvered Aspen slopes
splashed pinkish-mauve at sunset.
Tufted candy-floss skies, a warning:
snowfall, must keep that pile of Piñon dry.
It gets real cold up here from just on Fall.
Soon, long wintry days end early. All life it
seems is frozen. But I wanted, did you know?
I wanted to tell how through these slatted blinds
and sunrise-filtered rays, I look for her, my
Amazon by my side, in the sun and the moon
and in radiating stars. Dawn skies awake
splendiferous in apricot and strawberry juices
melding in delight. But by noon gray clouds are
merging, forming gun-smoke signals, spiralling the sky
like some alien primordial amoebae, or dark
sea-horses drifting, sailing by. I wanted, too,
to tell you about the birds, the animals, prowling,
feasting in days and nights of danger — then
gunshots loud and clear - bastards shooting deer!
Disrupted: sweet vanilla-scented nights
under skies of swooping stars; winking heavens,
crisp and clear in landscapes virgin white.
Serenity in gently falling snowflakes. Each crystal,
some punctilious possibility of knowledge,
sparkles in signals, beckoning us, but quickly
breaks. Like fragments of memory they fade
away, disintegrating into cold and icy wetness.
Ah, Colorado, your vast horizons, blue, blue forever,
and the shadowy snow peaks are your air.

Snowflake-cloaked spread limbs, your ice.
Piñon pines burning and sweet vanilla wafts,
your heated fire. Flames roar. Snow melts,
your water. Fresh whiteness your aura.
Chinook-swept touches, your precious earth.

Barbara A. Taylor

Drought Dreaming

*I was in the lushness of a cool rainforest,
then cuddling on top of puffing volcanoes;
Drifting in mosquito-infested chartreuse rivers
journeying to the centre of the universe.*

*Before, I was trekking in another country
in the granite rocks of your Southern Midwest
high on the sweetest scent
of squeezed berries and flowers.*

*I was wandering, lost in
a grand cathedral of pines,
checking out fresh footprints
in blankets of soft silvery snow.*

*I was scribbling earnestly, in
a writers' retreat at Provincetown,
USA. Inspired and creative
in every imaginable way.*

*And today, on tv, I'm teaching women in Lesotho,
riding ponies in the poorest African nation,
generating industry, making the tourist
dollar work to help prevent starvation.*

*Outside, reality is grass that's yellow stubble
like my peach-fuzz'd jaw. There's no water in my tank.
Pumped out. A withered rose. Now, I only think of her.
... a wallaby has just passed by.*

*There's just me and my Mother Earth. Dry
cracked soil an earthy mosaic,
Sec. Tinder perfect
for a single match.*

Kathy Scout Tomyris

Desert Walk

The writer in me saunters down what passes for a road in this desert and hears lines like words on paper emanating from the sagebrush, the rocks, the piñon pines and juniper. I scan the flat before me, squinting into the sun, looking for a group of trees that form a sentence. They write in couplets, haikus and prose about the deep winter snow that bends trunks toward the north. They sing in the wind of sheltered spaces, windbreaks and sunny exposures.

As I step gingerly around small sage plants and the delicate summer wildflowers I hear the sound of my boot soles crunching into the rocky soil. I pause for a moment in the shade of a tall pine and breathe in the silence that surrounds me. It is so quiet here at times that my ears buzz with the electrical field, ever present but so seldom sensed. Moving on, I am drawn to a view that speaks of expansiveness or an isolated blossom that cries out joy in vibrant shades of purple.

The writer in me bubbles over in delight as all my senses are stimulated. The heat of the sun on my bare arms rushes from pain to pleasure on the wave of a cool breeze. My throat dries quickly in this arid place. I pull out my water bottle, unscrew the cap and suck down the life-giving liquid within. I give thanks that I have plenty of water to drink today – that even in the desert I can experience moist lips and supple skin. The pause and nourishment revive me and I continue my zigzag journey down toward the flat.

I wander off to stare in wonder at a circle of large stones about 12 feet in diameter. I'm told that these are the remains of the foundations of ancient homes built by the aboriginal peoples who migrated here each year to gather piñon pine cones and their treasure of sweet oily nuts.

I am free to wander in search of phrases for a story while I imagine these families searching earnestly for the food that would keep them alive over the winter. There is a luxury in being a writer. It does not seem like work, this gathering of images and storing of details. My burden feels light compared to that of my ancestors.

I walk slowly, carry my walking staff and glancing occasionally at my watch. I am aware that someone expects me to return to camp at a certain time and that I will be missed if I am late. What a wonderful feeling it is to be wanted, to believe that I am important and needed, that there is a community waiting for me to return with a story. Whether I write the words or

speaking them matters little to me. I might lose the bits of paper or helplessly watch as ink-based words dissolve in a sudden rain shower. As I tell the tale, I hear the words disappear into clear air.

It is with reluctance that I turn around when the time comes. I am drawn into this landscape more surely than into the pages of a well-crafted novel. Though I also learn about how to be a writer from those examples, I notice that I would rather sit in the soft duff under a juniper. Each blue berry clinging to those deep green branches tells me something about the vibrancy of life that surrounds me here. There are gifts to be found in the city for sure, but they are different. I look down suddenly, my glance captured by a glint in the dusty path. Digging into the soil I fish out a small crystal. This is where I belong.

Kathy Scout Tomyris wrote this piece following a 2.5-hour solo hike in a high mountain desert, June 2004. This was the longest solitary walk she had taken since a stroke in 2001

Sonia Connolly

Last Time

*Circles within circles stood the straight trees
Linking shining sky to tired dark earth
Drawing down the energy for rebirth
Each a friendship bringing bright laughter's ease.*

*But now each stump, each reaching rootlet grieves
Uprooted by the winds of change and spite
Coldly bared to the indifferent moonlight
Bereft of splendid trunks and shading leaves.*

*Twice they have returned, painfully regrown
From seedlings to cathedral arch once more
Now the land lies quiet, drained to the core.
Where the forest was, sand drifts, wind-blown.*

Chrystos**For the Trees**

The buzz saw cuts out my heart
 leaves stumps tombstones
 goes through my bones
 changing blood to sap
 I feel my flesh give way crack of death
 The heavy satisfaction of the logger who cuts
 down life in its prime
 The uncle who once raped me regularly
 came to this country as a logger
 Don't have to know english to slash
 Comes natural
 For a moment the buzz saw stops
 air breathes a sigh of relief
 I was so proud & happy the day the dog & I found
 all their yellow plastic ribbons saying execute
 this one & this
 Here is the road through the heart of our crushed ferns
 splinters, shards of bark, our deep ridges of bulldozer
 Here is where we sweat & laugh our hands
 sticky as butchers'
 I removed every yellow ribbon in the forest
 stuffing them greedily into my pocket sure
 that I was delaying them for weeks
 only a few days passed
 They put up large angry signs every few feet
 saying No Trespassing
 Every day they come insistent on cutting
 I sit in my studio unable to work
 on paper that was once a tree
 My hands sticky with fear
 I burn a red
 candle of love & sorrow & death
 I want to use
 the stolen yellow ribbons to make
 something that will stop clearcutting
 Silver graveyards where nothing grows for years & years
 unwanted wood rotting & choking the earth
 Too barren even for bugs
 When I saw my first clearcut I fell down
 weeping couldn't get my breath
 screamed anger for the waste

threw rocks at passing trucks
 with logs stabbed together
 bleeding bark down the road
 No one
 tills a clearcut for food or flowers
 no animals graze
 The silence stares up into the sky
 Wind comes through a knife saying
 I'm raped I do not move I'm impaled I'm avoided
 Eyes seek the green ribbon of the false scenic root
 Smokey the Bear protects the lumber industry's crop
 Fire is not profitable
 Do you wonder
 when I obsessively reuse scraps of paper
 write on the backs of movie listings, car wash fliers,
 restaurant placemats, bill envelopes, reading posters
 Every paper is a green leaf, root, branch, swirl of grain
 a heart of life now dead
 Do you wonder that I burn to get warm
 with downed branches, paper trash
 the neighbors' discarded xmess trees
 Abundance seems to stupify
 I've been jumpy all week as they cut
 Afraid that they would slip & get me
 Afraid that when I can go back in the woods
 I won't be able to stand the gore
 Afraid that I am the one
 who has broken the law
 The day I took the yellow ribbons off
 I thought of sneaking back that night
 to dig up some of the smaller trees to plant here
 No one "logs" a front yard
 But we were too tired I thought
 I had plenty of time
 All week they have been crying out to me
 The yellow ribbons mock me, a mask of war
 They still believe they have to conquer
 & are different from the desk jockeys
 who use reams & reams of paper
 to say not much
 The day I removed their yellow brands
 I got lost in the woods
 couldn't find the trail out again
 I laughed so hard at myself
 My dog was the one who led me back to the road

I am
 part of the plundering & raping
 accustomed to warm fires in winter all day
 fresh vegetables in January, someone else to bring water
 I am the very person who breaks
 my heart open with sap
 I couldn't live simply in the gentle ways of my ancestors
 I don't want to spend all day
 gathering food
 preparing it
 making clothing against the cold
 I like to draw my visions with prisma colors
 & paints from a tube
 Use fountain pens, books, stereo
 electric blanket on frosty nights
 I'm as much to blame as the buzz saw
 which tears my ears
 I didn't start out
 to see myself reflected in its blade
 This was going
 to be a passionate plea for an end to logging
 Especially across the road from me
 The trouble with writing is that you end up
 being cut by the truth
 Sorrow turns to laughter at the self
 who would claim innocence
 The task I'm left
 is learning to live more simply
 with less waste
 resisting more firmly
 fads for more things
 even from the wildlife protection catalogue
 or the feminist bookstore
 Remember now that my great-great-grandmother lived
 her entire life without reading a book
 or going to market for vegetables
 How can I learn to step as softly as she did
 I begin using only cotton rag paper to draw
 gather more downed wood instead
 of buying a cord already split
 Give attention to my laziness
 The buzz saw eats the edge
 of my ears as I write
 close enough to kill



Photo by Dean Brittingham

Lilith Lynn Rogers

Rachel Carson and Me

I have been working with Rachel Carson for over three years now and she has had a profound effect on my life. She has deepened my understanding and respect for nature, she has enlightened me about the beauty and complexity of the world around me, she has enraged and saddened me with her insight into modern humanity's senseless and short-sighted destructiveness of the precious gifts we've been given, she has awed me with her dedication to her work and her principles, and she has inspired me with her example of what one woman can do to set things right when she really puts her mind to it. All this I've received from a woman who died forty years ago.

When I mention the name "Rachel Carson" to most people, they usually get a mildly puzzled look on their face. Then I say, "The author of *SILENT SPRING*," and they say, "Oh right, the book about pesticides." And of course, that book was of profound importance, ushering in as it did the modern environmental movement and putting an end, in the United States at least, to the use of DDT and other long-lasting, non-specific "biocides" as she called them. If only it had put an end to the use of all biocides! More about that later.

But last year, during a trip to the Big Island of Hawaii, while spending several of my days there sitting on a black lava sand beach waiting for the dolphins to come in so I could go swim with them, (they finally did come in but teased me by hanging around near the beach just until I got my mask and flippers on and paddled out toward them and then turning up their tails to me and frisking back out to sea) I dipped around in her first major work, *THE SEA AROUND US*. It's so amazing! *THE SEA AROUND US* is a biography of the ocean and therefore, since the oceans came millions of years before humans—or any living creatures for that matter—it's a story of timeless time. Of billions of years before human history. Of how long it took to create this most amazing ecosystem—making it even more distressing then, of how frighteningly short-sighted we are in our careless destruction. An example of that: I am visiting my eighty-two year old mother in Texas and yesterday we were getting in the car to run a few errands. I handed her my beautiful blue glass water bottle to hold for me for a moment. "Where did you get this?" she asked. Thinking she was admiring it, I answered proudly, "Oh, they sell it at the grocery store in California. Full of water, of course. They mean for you to use it once and toss it, but I've had that one for six months now. I like to drink out of blue glass." You mean you've been

lugging around this heavy bottle for months—even brought it on the plane? I have plastic bottles in the cupboard. They're much more convenient. And cheap. I get a case at Walmart for \$6.99. And we have recycling here, so the bottles aren't going in the garbage if that's what's bothering you." "Yes," I replied in as level a tone as I could muster and not even going into my anti-Walmart spiel for the umpteenth time, "but the 'recycling' just sends it to China or the Philippines or some other poor country where they're piling them up by the billions and polluting the air when they burn them or whatever and then did you hear about these hundreds of square miles of plastic 'islands' floating in the ocean? And then there's the fact that I can leave this bottle in the sun and my water is still safe to drink but if I put the plastic one there the heat releases toxic chemicals into my water and poisons me when I drink it and..." My mother rolled her eyes in that way she does when I've been "too California" for her. "Well, I still think it's stupid to carry such a heavy thing. But I guess you're young and strong." I didn't want to fight with her at the outset of our trip—or at all for that matter—but I couldn't help saying, "Well, I think it's even more stupid to make such a mess of the world for the sake of so-called 'convenience'. When you were a girl, didn't you just bring your bottle—a heavy glass one—back to the store and get it refilled with beer or oil or soda or whatever?" "Yes, but that was the Depression and we were too poor to buy new ones and then there was the War and there were shortages. Now we don't have to bother with all that."

What a strange world we live in, indeed. We have become convinced that it's more "convenient" to create toxic waste by the ton than to carry a glass bottle! That it's a bother to live simply—or more simply. One of my favorite bumper stickers says "Live simply that others may simply live." Of course, I'm not always able to follow this motto but at least I try. And of course, sometimes I end up using a throw away plastic bottle, but not as often as I would if I didn't carry my trusty—but heavy—blue glass one.

Anyway—back to Rachel Carson. She talked about this whole idea of convenience, too. In *SILENT SPRING* she said, It took hundreds of million of years to produce the life that now inhabits the earth—eons of time in which that developing and evolving and diversifying life reached a state of adjustment and balance with its surroundings...Given time—time not in years but in millennia—life adjusts, and a balance has been reached. For time is the essential ingredient; but in the modern world there is no time. The rapidity of change and the speed with which new situations are created follow the impetuous and heedless pace of man rather than the deliberate pace of nature....The chemicals to which life is asked to make its adjustments are no longer merely the calcium and silica and copper and all the rest

of the minerals washed out of the rocks and carried in rivers to the sea; they are the synthetic creations of man's inventive mind, brewed in his laboratories, and having no counterparts in nature. To adjust to these chemicals would require time on the scale that is nature's; it would require not merely the years of a man's life but the life of generations. And even this, were it by some miracle possible, would be futile, for the new chemicals come from our laboratories in an endless stream.... These sprays, dusts, and aerosols are now applied almost universally to farms, gardens, forest, and homes—non-selective chemicals that have the power to kill every insect, the “good” and the “bad,” to still the song of birds and the leaping of fish in the streams, to coat the leaves with a deadly film, and to linger on in soil—all this though the intended target may be only a few weeds or insects. Can anyone believe it is possible to lay down such a barrage of poisons on the surface of the earth without making it unfit for all life? They should not be called “insecticides,” but “biocides.” pp. 17-18.

In recent months, I lost two good friends to cancer—women in the “prime of life” who still had years of life to live, contributions to make. I have two friends whose young granddaughters died of leukemia. The children were born with this horrible illness and the families' whole lives for years have revolved around caring for them. Now they are left not only in grief but in bankruptcy from the costs of endless rounds of tests and surgeries and hospital stays. Though I don't usually say anything about it because I don't want to hurt their feelings, I get angry when other friends of mine collect money from our lesbian community—which has such limited financial resources anyway—to sponsor them on bicycle rides and marathon walks to raise money to “fight cancer.” The money goes to The American Cancer Society or some other part of the “cancer industry.” These friends are well-meaning, of course, but they are all taken in by the idea that what is needed is a “search for the cure.” How about spending the money on an “elimination of the cause?” Give the same time and energy to Pesticide Action Network, the Non-toxics Alliance, the local organic farmer? And how about cleaning up our own acts? Why don't we stop using Weed and Feed on our lawns, Raid on our roaches, D-con on our mice, and RoundUp on our blackberry bushes? Sure these products seem “convenient” because they rid us of these pesky pests in the short run, but how “convenient” is it to try to clean up the contaminated water and soil they leave behind? How “convenient” is it to spend our time, energy, and money on doctors, medicines, and alternative therapies for ourselves or our loved ones when the toxic build-up from these and so many more poisons make us sick? We don't even have to look as far forward as the Native American's “seventh generation” standard. Our own generation of friends and relatives suffering

from asthma, diabetes, Parkinson's, breast and colon and lung cancer, etc., etc. ad nauseum tells the tale.

So—enough already! Enough of this nasty stuff and enough of me reminding us that we need to change our ways. At the beginning of this essay, I talked about what a model Rachel Carson was for me because she believed—all her life—that one woman could make a difference and she proved it with her actions. I've decided to follow in her footsteps. Figuratively and literally. After studying her for three years—and of course every moment of those three years weren't dedicated only to her so it took me quite a bit longer than it might have—after three years I've put together a one-woman show about her. It's the most exciting, satisfying, and, I believe, significant thing I've ever done. And I believe I can, through Rachel Carson speaking once again through me, make a difference.

Because Carson did not believe her job was only about issuing a warning about the dangers of toxically altering our environment, the folly of destroying the balance of nature, the hubris of believing that somehow humanity was outside of or above nature. It was also about teaching us about our place in the web of life. It was also about offering alternatives to wanton destruction. It was about finding our place—again—and restoring us, and our beautiful planet—to harmony. As she expressed in a magazine article that was posthumously published as a picture book *TEACH YOUR CHILD TO WONDER*, Carson believed it was up to us to help our children keep alive their inborn sense of wonder, to rediscover with them the joy, excitement and mystery of the world we live in. As she said, "The years of early childhood are the time to prepare the soil. Once the emotions have been aroused—a sense of the beautiful, the excitement of the new and the unknown, a feeling of sympathy, pity, admiration or love—then we wish for knowledge about the object of our emotional response. Once found, it has lasting meaning" p. 45.

I think it is almost too late to save our world through our children or grandchildren. I think we must restore this "sense of wonder" in our friends, our lovers, and most of all—ourselves. And we can. Today, here in Austin, I left my mother's tidy yard of mown lawn and clipped hedges and ventured out into the creek bottom nearby. And there I found wildflowers and grasses, crickets and beetles. And most of all—spiders. Spiders who had spun their intricate webs to catch the obnoxious mosquitoes that also buzzed about. And I wondered at this beautiful world, this mysterious web of life. And I rededicated myself to using my Rachel Carson performance, and my poetry and my daily life—blue glass bottle and all—to restoring this sense of wonder in as many people as I can reach. Including you—the reader of this essay. Now go out and take a walk on the wild side!

Marinés Martini Teixeira

Poema Para Não Perder O Amor Às Coisas Simples

Me ajuda a ver os passarinhos
me faz aprender a não prendê-los
ajuda a minha pessoa
manda embora as fumaças
não me lembre dos feridos nem das caças
das longas caminhadas nos matos pelados
e dos bichos mortos
dos bichos inchados
varados de veneno e bala.

Me lembre a cor das borboletas
o desafio dos bichos lavando a vida
me ensinando a liberdade.
Me recompensa com um riso e outros tantos
quando eu puder ser una com eles
de frente pro céu, com meus pés neste chão
amando o lugar dos bichos sem a pressa da morte
sem a promessa da vida.

Me ajuda a ferver meus olhos
na cor das maritacas e dos grilos
me ensina a língua deles e a paciência também
e depois me conte como são as tardes
quando não há que se matar ou morrer
quando não há que agredir ou tolher.
Depois me ensina a paz
me ensina essa música
que brota toda noite quando é silêncio
e que eu possa morder um pouco a solidão
sem morrer com ela
sem me perder nessa cidade
sem estar pequena ou grande
sem precisar de tanto
estar apenas com tudo
estar nas coisas mais pequenas.

Me ensina a voar como eles
a esperar como eles pela hora do amor
e a morder um pouco todo dia
a cara aflita da vida.

Not to Lose Love for the Simple Things

Help me see the flock of birds
 let me learn not to trap them
 help me
 clear away the smoke of burning trees
 don't remind me of the wounded
 nor of the long hunts through the leafless forest
 nor of the dead animals
 the bloated animals
 beached by poison and bullet.

Remind me of the color of butterflies
 the challenge of the animals cleansing life
 teaching me freedom.
 I am rewarded with laughter and much more
 when I can join them facing the sky
 with my feet in this earth
 loving the place of animals
 without the haste of death
 without the promise of life.

Help me to sear my eyes in the color of the maritacas
 teach me the language of crickets
 and the patience also
 and afternoons where there are no
 intimations of suicide or death
 no inclinations to hinder or attack.
 Teach me peace
 teach me this music that sprouts all night
 when there is silence
 that I may be able to taste solitude
 without dying of it
 without losing myself in this city
 without being small or great
 without needing so much
 being only with everything
 being in the smallest things.

Teach me to fly
 as they do
 to wait as they do
 for the hour of love
 and to taste a little all day
 the afflicted face of life.

Footnote: "Maritacas" are green little birds, like parrots.

Tee A. Corinne

Two Gardens and Two Parties

When Beverly and I decided to live together in southern Oregon in 1989, she looked over the land where I had lived for eight years and decided where she wanted to put her garden. This was months before she would actually move in. The eight foot high fence was paid for out of royalties from my book, *Dreams of the Woman Who Loved Sex*. Thus, I began life with a serious gardener.

Each year there are three kinds of tomatoes (some with plants as tall as I am), a forest of corn, butter crunch lettuce, sugarsnap peas, green beans, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, beets, carrots, turnips, artichokes, and more. In the late winter and early spring we eat over-wintering broccoli, cauliflower, and kale. As the season progresses, there is an abundance of leeks, garlic, scallions (which we called “little green onions” when I was a child) two kinds of squash for storing along with enough green and yellow zucchinis to give away.

She grows eggplants, cucumbers, and okra just because I like to eat them, and escarole because it is a favorite of hers. After the first decade, the garden produced more asparagus than we could eat.

We eat very well. Beverly’s mother, who lives in northern California, gives us home canned tomatoes, peaches, and apricots along with her own dried Thompson’s seedless raisins. We dry tomatoes, green and red peppers, apples, and pears. One year, when she was off at a month-long educational program, I dried strawberries because the plants produced so many that I couldn’t keep up with them.

There were apple, plum, and peach trees here when I moved onto this land. One year, Beverly and I planted nine more fruit trees (two kinds of cherries and other varieties of apple and plum) along with two nut trees. The cherry trees are now over fifteen feet tall.

I come from a family of fishers and farmers, tailors and weavers. As an adult I have cultivated pictures and words. Keeping the grass mowed was my primary interaction with nature although I have planted day lilies and daffodils for years because they are so forgiving of neglect. Beverly encouraged me to plant other flowers. She mixed special soil, put the pots near the front door, and set six-packs of petunias and impatiens beside them. Plant them I did, but told her that next time I wanted to choose my own colors.

Years have passed. I evolved into a flower and herb gardener, cultivating varieties that attract hummingbirds, butterflies, and bugs for the always entertaining tree frogs. Beverly's garden blooms with nasturtiums, cosmos, and zinnias among the vegetables and fruit.

One of the secrets of her lush garden is cow manure, one or two dump loads of it each year which she liberally uses to build up the tilth (fluffiness and looseness) of the soil. She plants close and waters from sprinklers so that there is a moist macro environment that teems with life. Flowers attract the bees which pollinate and the wasps which act as predators, feeding on some of the less desirable visitors.

Because we have very little water (two one-half gallon-a-minute wells, one with a holding tank), mostly I do container gardening, often putting pans of water under plants that will tolerate this much moisture and watering everything by hand. "That must take you half an hour a day," one friend said and then added, "I bet it's one of the best parts of the day." It is.

I also love deadheading, going around and snipping off the spent flowers so that they do not form seeds because it is the seeds which tell the plant to stop blooming.

GARDEN PARTIES

Where we live in Southern Oregon we are part of a loosely-affiliated group of lesbian-owned lands that includes Rootworks (where *WomanSpirit* Magazine was published, 1974-1984), WomanShare (a collective), Rainbow's End (a cooperative? a confederacy?), Cabbage Lane (currently without residents), OWL Farm (stewarded by the Oregon Women's Land Trust), and numerous privately-held rural lands and urban locations where lesbian and women-only events take place. All of these lands have interesting and idiosyncratic gardens.

The Oregon Women's Land Trust was the first land trust for women in the United States. Founded in 1976 with the intent to provide access to land for women to whom it might otherwise be denied, OWL Farm has an iconic as well as a physical function, existing as a safe space in the mind as well as a place for women to go and craft a new existence for themselves.

In 1999, Fran Carroll, a longtime Rainbow's End resident, came up with the idea of holding Garden Parties as a way to raise money for OWL Farm (taxes, improvements) and the Oregon Women's Land Trust. The first three were held in 2000 and were an immediate success. These parties also increase networking and encourage the exchange of produce (including books, art, and crafts).

In August 2002, Beverly and I hosted one of these Garden Party fundraisers. Her garden was lush, and I love to throw a party. These gatherings often include moderated discussions of garden practices specific to our area, and that day she led a discussion which ranged across subjects such as fertilizers, how to keep out deer and ground squirrels, and where to buy seeds and which ones to choose.

A RESPONSIVE COMMUNITY

Eighteen months ago, late February of 2003, Beverly was diagnosed with metastasized colon cancer. Since then, my flower garden has given me sanity. I have expanded it from a small strip directly in front of three large windows, repeatedly moving the t-bar fence supports and chicken wire. Beverly laughs when I come in and tell her that I have moved the garden out another five feet in one direction or another.

In the first year after the cancer was discovered, she had surgery three times and underwent intense chemotherapy. The women in our community responded by coming over individually and in groups to work in her garden under her supervision. Beverly always seems happiest in her garden, and this allowed her to work as her energy and recovery allowed. Friends mowed the grasses which, if left to dry on their own, become a major fire danger by mid-June. Some stayed for supper and brought welcome company to break the dangerous isolation which encroaches insidiously.

One afternoon, a group of nine women amazingly moved and stacked five cords of firewood. Sometimes someone shows up and asks where the vacuum is and uses it, or dusts pictures, or washes dishes. Neighborhood lesbians and other women call to see if they can pick up something for us from town.

By spring 2004, the tumors were growing again. Beverly decided against more chemo, valuing quality of life over the possibility of living a few months longer, months in which she was likely to feel awful. She has passed along to others the 501(c)(3) nonprofit which she founded. With the occasional help of friends, she has shaped this year's garden. "It will be my last," she says. I have never seen her garden look more beautiful. We take photographs which she passes out like gifts.

Because this final garden is so vibrant, when someone who had planned to host a Garden Party dropped out, we offered to have it here. Over thirty women showed up. There was more than enough food to eat and crafts, books, art, and garden bounty to share. Late July in southern Oregon offers potatoes, onions, tomatoes, beans, zucchinis, cucumbers, and plums.

For this year's discussion, Ní Aódagáin suggested we go around the circle and have each woman say what she had brought. In the process, gardening questions were raised and answered. Beverly said that Ropreco tomato seeds are no longer being offered by Territorial Seed Company, a regional specialist, but that she had been saving seeds from the largest for ten years. She offered to share them with anyone who wanted to continue the line. Karen Suller said she would send some to a heirloom seed-saver's exchange, one of a number of voluntary groups which are trying to save open pollinated lines (as opposed to hybrids which cannot be grown from their own seeds).

Two weeks ago, Beverly registered with Hospice. It is so hard to plan for a catastrophically changing future. I have retreated to the very old (for me) pleasure of drawing. This past spring, I started drawing grasses that grow in the back field and along the creek. I have always thought they were beautiful and promised myself that someday I would draw them. That day is now.

I have also continued a practice I started many years ago of tossing around seeds of drought-tolerant varieties such as rose campion and silver dollar plant, each of which roots lightly, but firmly, in our tough clay soil. I spread them along the paths that I walk and when they bloom, two years after they initially touch ground, I feel as if a gift has been given back to me.



Suzan Jantz

Ode to the Broad-footed Mole

Broad-footed Mole:

*Falsely stereotyped as useless rodent,
Cruelly accused of rhizosphere intrusion,
Generally labeled as pig-nosed ugly—
Welcome to my dirt.*

*Your miniature volcano mounds,
Bordered by rich veins
Of excavated tailings—
Testament to your mining diligence—
Spark my curiosity.*

*Disproportionate front paddles—
Translucent nickel-gray, tipped
With five manicured nails—
Propel your amazing progress
Through one foot of soil per minute.*

*Connoisseur of prized lawns,
Fine golf courses, carefully tended
Gardens, you efficiently
Swim through fertile tunnels,
Naturally grooming your dense,
Mohair-brown fur.*

*Subterranean mammal,
Miniature ant-eater,
(Order insectivore):
Eat my grubs, centipedes, earwigs!
Rototill, aerate, and expose deadly
Sub-soil bacteria to the open air,
Make a mountain out of your mole-hill.*

*Shame on mortal sinners
Who ignorantly molest
Your humble, monastic
Solitude with lethal scissor-traps,
Who persecute and ridicule
Your handiwork with floods and poison.
Carry on! Glorify the green of my garden
With the enriching earth
Of your labors.*

Undrea Jones

Invisible Rocks

Living in an imprisoned world, one must find a little piece of the free world. One must take hold of that little piece. That little piece needs to represent who you are. In this imprisoned, oppressed, discriminating place called the "McPherson Unit," that little slice of freedom for my wife and me are rocks. Little smooth, hard, substantial, immovable rocks. In the one hour that we are led out to pasture (in what "they" call outside recreation), if our rocks have been confiscated, we search for replacements. More often than not, the rocks find us.

The rock that describes me to a "T" practically stops me in my tracks. On one side it's smooth and innocent looking. The other side has grooves that look like little secret compartments. It has a hole in it. It is a small rock. This rock is so much like me. I'm known to have smooth skin and a baby face. I'm also known to hold everything inside. And I keep secrets very well. I also have a hole in me. My hole is despair, fear, sadness, longing, wanting, and frustration. All the emotions that accompany a person who has done a lot of time with a lot more to do. I'm told that the holes in my rock and in me will get bigger as time goes by.

I am also small like my rock. I am small because I'm black in a white-dominated world, where the staff is all white and so are sixty percent of the inmates. I am small because I am a Lesbian in a Lesbian-hated inside secret society that vows equality for all. Which means everyone who is pleasing in their eyes. My wife and I don't fall pleasing in either one of their eyes, the left or the right. That's why we are like rocks. If you are not looking for them, they are invisible, out of sight.

Undrea Jones

The Look of Nature from a Cell

As I look out my window, I see life in all forms. The first thing I see is a little bug on my window. It looks like a flying ant to me. I see two birds playing on the ground. It looks like they are half playing and half searching for food. It shouldn't be hard for them to find food because there isn't much grass on the ground.

Now I see the horses in the horse barn. They are eating breakfast. I see grassy fields that stretch out wide as a lake or river. I see trees standing together like an army on the battlefield. It looks like they are watching over the fields, protecting them. The trees look more like mountains due to the fog and mist that has settled around them.

Everything I see is out of reach to me. Even the bugs, not to mention the trees.



"Rooted Together" by Tina Freimuth

Tina L. Freimuth

WomanSource Rising! A Local Ecofeminist Vision For Saving Our Violated Planet!

WomanSource Rising is an ecofeminist social justice organization in Southern Oregon designed to confront local inequalities in our false democracy. We are 90% lesbian with a mission to assist the earth in her healing journey. We are organizing and uniting at a time of great change, an epochal time for the planet and all living things. This current Environmental Revolution validates the radical, lesbian back-to-the-land movers and shakers of the 1970s who in their disgust for the Patriarchy, secured chunks of forested land in Southern Oregon that are continuing to serve women and the earth 30 years later. It's these women and these 14 plus women-serving lands that create the foundation for our new visions and initiatives.

What are the values of an Ecofeminist world-view?

Δ Ecofeminism is a deep connection between feminism and ecology, between women and nature.

Δ The Industrial growth society we have been living in which opposes nature through domination and destruction also dominates and subjugates women because women are believed to be closer to nature.

Δ Life on earth is an interconnected web, not a hierarchy. It simply won't work for some to tell others what to do. Humans need a structure that supports diversity of thought and a diversity of species. Ecofeminism seeks to show the connections between all forms of domination, including the domination of nonhuman nature. Ecofeminism is anti-hierarchical!

Δ Ecofeminism is a Movement! A decentralized global movement that opposes all forms of domination and violence. The wiping out of entire species corresponds to the wiping out of whole cultures of people.

Δ The survival of the species necessitates a renewed understanding of our relationship to mother earth. Ecofeminism demands a radical restructuring of human society according to feminist and ecological principles.

Δ Ecofeminism is creating a different kind of culture and politics that would integrate intuitive, spiritual, and rational knowledge, embracing both science and magic to envision and create a free, ecological society.

How are lesbians in Southern Oregon proposing to create a different kind of culture that honors all that is feminine on this planet?

The WTO (world trade organization), the IMF (international mon-

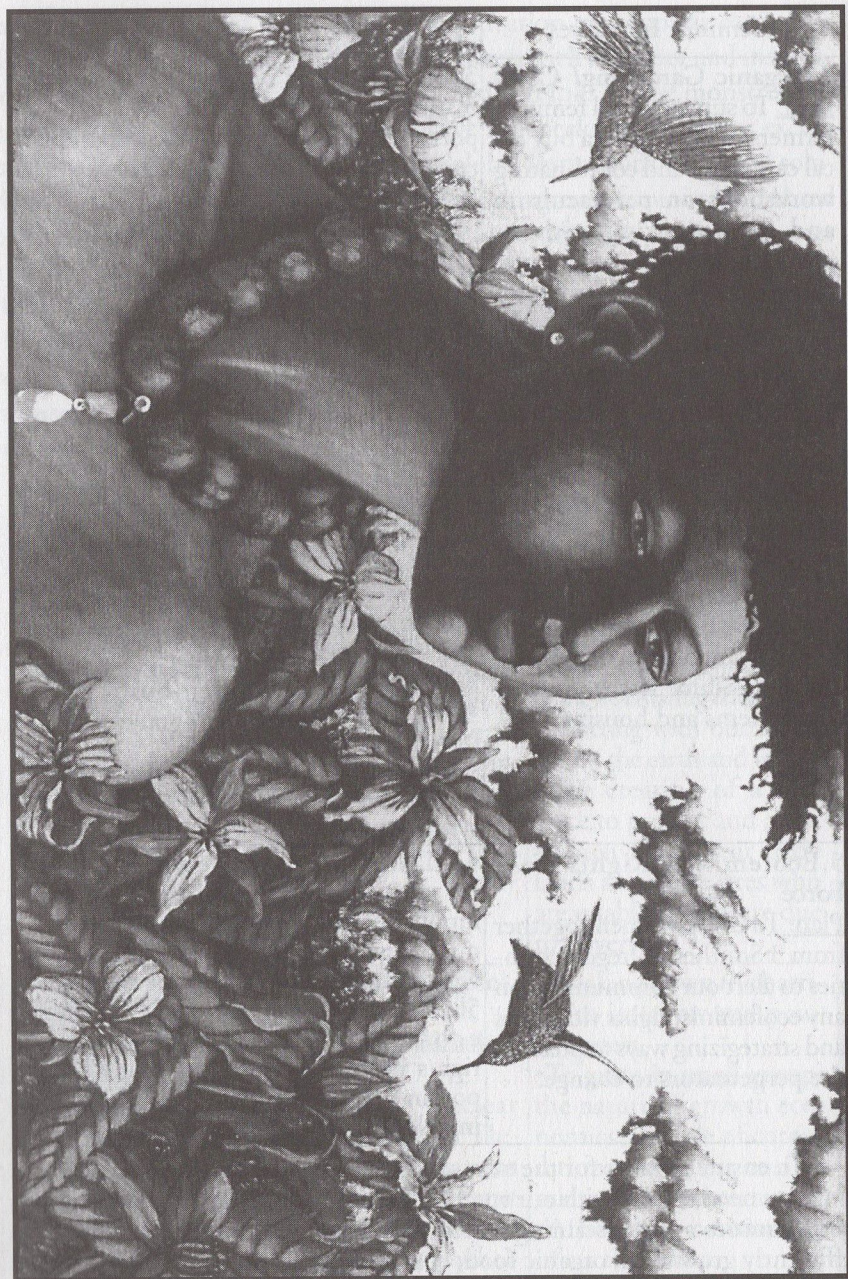
etary fund), the World Bank and other institution of corporate capitalism are meeting in secret, widening the gaps between rich and poor and instituting policies that result in staggering global death tolls. These monstrosities are manmade, not woman-made and have no checks and balances except us. We are confronting these devastating global institutions with local solutions that may not move beyond our own homegrown feminist land based communities, yet have all the makings of a national model. Mobilizing over a thousand women who did not have an opportunity to create the policies that control our national lives, but who had the foresight to move back to the earth and find a sense of justice and personal empowerment in the very roots of nature can hold a radical subversive role in the current state of this unsustainable industrial growth society. Below are a few of our desires and intentions:

Ecofeminist Initiatives	Activities / Components	Desired Results
<p>1.Environmental Activism Plan: Mobilizing S.O. Women in Jackson, Josephine and Douglas Counties to act for the earth by joining or creating local campaigns that demand clean air, clean water, clean soil and biodiversity.</p>	<p>1a.Forest Defenders Affinity groups 1b.No on GMO / Nano technologies 1c. Women's Lands Eco-justice task force.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Save our local habitats, which include forests, watersheds, rivers and mountains in Southern Oregon. •To alert our communities to the devastating effects that tampering with our DNA has on the earth and us. •The creation of a task force to protect and assist women living near toxic lands and waste sites who are unable to relocate due to poverty.
<p>2.Subversive Study Action Groups Plan: 1) Bring Women together to encourage a broad analysis of the origins and workings of the global economy. 2) To promote discussions, in a small group setting, of the impact of globalization on Southern Oregon communities and communities around the world. 3) Create a forum to generate strategies for effective local action.</p>	<p>2a. Deep Ecology 2b.Globalization/WTO 2c. Nuclear Waste & Depleted Uranium 2d. Deep Time/ 7 generations 2e. Eco psychology</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Breaking down the barriers to isolation and powerlessness. •To grasp in small groups the nature of growth economics, the role of corporations and their cost to our society and planet. •A healthier community of rural women.

Ecofeminist Initiatives	Activities / Components	Desired Results
<p>3.Organic Gardening/ CSA's Plan: To support local feminist farmers by setting up a buy local campaign and coordinating workshops on permaculture and food growing without chemicals or synthetic fertilizer. We plan to work closely with Spirit Gardens CSA and Siskiyou Sustainable Cooperative in setting up a local food sharing system in each county.</p>	<p>3a. Local Community Supported Agriculture systems (buy local). 3 b. Farmers Markets. 3 c. Southern Oregon Gardening education. 3d. Garden Parties.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Support local organic farmers. •Shorten the distance between food growers and consumer. •To see at least 7 of the 14 Southern Oregon women's intentional communities growing organic food by summer 2006. •Educate each other on gardening and come together often to celebrate our harvests.
<p>4.Alternative Energy / Building Plan: WomanSource Rising plans to coordinate a relationship between 3 local alternative female builders and 3 local women's intentional communities to produce alternative energy systems and housing.</p>	<p>4a. Cobb building workshops for women. 4b. Strawbale building workshops for women 4 c. Hydro, wind and solar power training. 4d. Biodiesel fuel as an alternative to oil.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •To ultimately have less of an impact on the earth through personal and community practices. •To learn to live without oil products •Women-built, earth friendly homes.
<p>5.Ecofeminist Rights Task Force Plan: To bring women together from 3 Southern Oregon counties to alert our communities on any ecofeminist rights violations and strategizing ways to pressure the perpetrators to change.</p>	<p>5a. Think tank for creative solutions to solve our alienation with nature. 5b. Bi-monthly ecofeminist rights news report in WS Rising Newsletter.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •To have equal representation in the S.O. environmental movement. •To diminish in S.O. the domination of women and the earth in politics and social services. •To have the right to live in a toxic free, peaceful earth.

To ensure a future for the next seven generations, about 200 years from now, we need to start with our rural land-based women and lesbian-serving communities a life-sustaining world. We have the savvy and resources to efficiently grow local, organic food, ensure clean air and water and generate energy through solar, wind and biomass power. We have the means to dismantle weapons, deflect wars and give everyone a voice in a democratic self-governance.

Join us! Copy us! Support us!



"The hummingbirds, trillium and me" 13" x19," 1989 by Sudie Rakusin

Ida VSW Red

The Greats: Groundhog Day in the City Again

Urban wildness still thrives here
 the great blue heron claims a nest in
 the center thrilling me and miz mole
 out of the blahs we ogle the big bird
 daily and circle the lake looking
 for a night heron or a horned owl
 something rare hardly glancing at
 squat flocks of gulls ducks juncos
 commoners of the park wondering
 why tall thin unique so cherished
 sought after immortalized in art
 while ordinary existence goes unsung
 or destroyed at home along with
 poisoned rodents and hardy pigeons
 barely discouraged by unwelcoming
 barbs glues chemicals fake raptors

Still doves mourn beautifully finches
 & sparrows feed above fat cats secretive
 squirrels and masked bandits at dusk
 so much insistent life despite fierce
 storms and constant traffic mere yards
 from swift iridescent hummers over
 intersecting tracks of vanished snails
 glistening in morning sun catching my
 eye as I make coffee and scones to tame
 the news soothe the heart build strength
 for another day of simply being a person
 in a complex tangle of reasons and
 necessities that yet leave open the
 choice to walk'round a golden gate
 island and pause in awe beside a great
 white egret wading fishing watching
 before I slog through mud and ennui
 toward not greatness but life exposed
 by the groundhog's shadow to a season
 of unreliable weather before the
 promise of an ever renascent spring

Ida VSW Red**Autumn**

Leaving the retreat center after a sweat
 I recognize the rusty-shouldered hawk
 looking directly ahead over roadside alleys
 lined with harvest gold grasses
 all the sheep going my way as I drive
 under trees, aware of a deepening persimmon
 blush seeping through dark silhouettes
 As I emerge from the woods at the river's mouth
 all tangerine breaks loose — the day-glow pumpkin
 sky vibrates, turns everything melon —
 river, windows, cars, the motel room
 filled with "wonderful ugly" driftwood and
 redwood burl creations of astonishing design
 I slide open the glass door and step onto
 a narrow deck over the swift-flowing river
 A great white heron flies before me
 at first a lustrous salmon color, then
 turning, startlingly white, neck crooked
 ready to land, ready for evening
 Lilith arrives, abundance herself as always
 pockets, bags, baskets overflowing —
 fruits, pumpkins, macadamia nut cookies
 carried from Hawaii, nasturtiums from the
 riverside wilderness below our room
 everything juicy, delicious, beautiful
 like us, like our connection, like our bodies
 our poetry, our lovemaking, our eyes
 blue to brown, brown and blue to shimmering
 sensation pulsating into twilight, moon and
 starlight, into sleep and dream
 sunrise and peachy morning heat

© 1994

Marjorie Norris

Horses

The horses clouded the horizon
 In that Mexican desert, they
 Ran with the heat of the plains,
 They harvested power, and
 Snorted as they passed:
 I had known them

In my dreams, they pulled
 Me on ropes and chains,
 They dragged me up from
 Revery, from a just meeting
 Of my mind, to know my
 Arms, my elbows, the strength
 Of my hands

I remembered then how I
 Knew the energy of their haunches,
 How like one crazed I too had
 Been through deserts, plains,
 How once upon a time in the very
 Long ago I had been a mystical
 Rider, I had been the mare, I
 Had been the plain that at last
 The rain had fallen on, the desert
 In full mad bloom

7/16/03

Jan Shade

Receding River

The River, bless her soggy little heart, is back within her banks. This is not to say that we have a beach, but HEY! Who's complaining? I would say that I have forgiven her for the trouble and trauma she caused us, but it was never for me to blame the natural forces of nature. That sort of thinking is the sort that brought humans to think themselves superior to nature, and to seek ways to harness her, thereby creating a massive, possibly fatal environmental disaster. It is we who are in the way of her regular cycle of purging.

And it is the unchecked, rampant greed of growth that has caused her to so often leave her banks. The constant proliferation of houses and asphalt have taken away precious earth that formerly soaked up some of the water, causing it to run off, unused by the earth, into the river channel and into people's homes.

What does the River bring into the people's homes? Sewage and chemicals and viruses. The castoff byproducts of overpopulation, overproduction, and unregulated growth upriver.

Sometimes I look at my River sadly, seeing her slow death. But then on a clear, night, I stand on Her bank and gaze lovingly at the moonlight on the water, and the hard times caused by Her flooding are momentarily forgotten.

Then I understand why I live here.

Stacey Shade

Ode to My Rototiller

*The thrill of the till
it's a beautiful thing
the annual, manual rite of Spring.
By the sweat of our brow
do we earn our tomatoes
cucumbers, summer squash, & potatoes.
Every year I look forward to this
the yearly ritual of garden bliss.*

Desireè Seiver

My First Love

Throughout my life, for many different reasons, I have never felt completely accepted. I've never been a part of anything; never felt that deep connection to another person. No matter how many people I surround myself with, all my relationships, be they familial, friendly, or romantic, remain superficial, and I am lonely.

I was raised in the Rogue River Valley, the very heart of southern Oregon, surrounded by endless trees and mountains, and countless bodies of water. It was here that I came to know the only woman who always accepts me, never accuses me, and loves me unconditionally. She asks only to be loved and respected in return.

I learned at an early age that no matter what ills I suffer at the hands of the world, I can always return to her. She caresses me with long blades of grass, delicate flower petals, and feather-soft leaves. She cradles me in moist earth, allowing me to shed my tears, as a breeze whispers comfort to my soul.

She welcomes me just as graciously when I have a smile on my face, embracing me in cool lake waters, leaving a warm kiss of the sun upon my cheeks. With her, I am never lonely. In her arms is the only place I feel truly safe. In the midst of a concrete jungle, I have only to walk through a park or look up at the sky to feel her presence. Each moment I am separated from her, I long to be with her. She is the air I breathe, the plants that nourish me, and the water of life that wets my lips. Without her, I don't exist.

Someday I hope to find a woman of flesh and blood to spend my life with. Someone to love and be loved by. Someone to share my world with, walking down wooded paths together, sleeping with nothing to cover us but a blanket of stars, and surrendering ourselves to the chill of a mountain stream. But no matter how intensely I feel for her, that love can never surpass the depth and strength of the perfect love I feel for nature.

Judith K. Witherow

Ceiling of Blue Floor of Green

Each day the bounty the earth once provided lessens. The Polar Ice Cap is melting and the Rainforest is being depleted at an alarming rate. That which was once readily available is neither endless nor necessarily renewable. Thinking, caring people accept these facts as truth that can be proven beyond doubt. While these words are true, and reason for fear, they should never close your eyes to the wonders that exist on a smaller scale.

Lift up that window; discard the screen, throw open the doors and let life come rushing in full tilt! Fill your lungs and senses with the wonders that you are beholding.

Whether you are peering out a window, taking a walk or just sitting outside on a bench, allow yourself to see what is subtle taking place.

The environment needs the constant care you would give to the newborn of any species. If this does not happen, everything that occurs because of neglect will happen to us. "Failure to thrive" is not just a phrase that applies to humans. Recognize what is happening to the earth on a daily basis. Learn to observe everything in your life. Hold what you see close like a much-desired lover.

Nature changes constantly and the majority of the time her moods are so gradual that you risk missing something important. Stay in tune with how everything looked an hour, day or week before, or you will miss the importance of what has shape-shifted.

I unabashedly love everything that nature provides. It's of little consequence if it's a wind-swept day that cheerfully tosses the clouds about, the phases of the moon or storms that reinforce how quickly our life can be changed. There is sorrow when anything is harmed, but it takes place because nothing in life remains stagnant. This is Mother Earth's domain. She is continually reinventing and changing in an effort to repair the damage that humans have caused. Nothing should be viewed as a mistake or a disaster. If you approach life with this attitude, you have lost touch with the realities of the grand plan that affects all of us.

It surprises me when others don't share my excitement at discovering something never seen before or the wonder that the changing of seasons provides. Perhaps my excitement is magnified because a lot of what I see is from my windows on the world. For many years I have

battled incurable illnesses. Often, they keep me from rambling at will through areas that I once freely explored. Everything I do is more difficult, but it has not lessened my desire to revel in the sheer pleasure at the gifts that are bestowed upon my daily life.

I have a tendency to share my information by word or picture with my women friends. Most of what is shared concerns what I consider interesting, puzzling or beautiful. Often it's a commonplace situation that has taken on a surreal beauty.

It's important that others develop the habit of recognizing what is taking place where they live. Many times their reaction is one of non-chalance. Society seems to have tamed and trained their ability to view their surroundings with a jaded eye.

My family observes and questions everything in the same manner that I do. We share information about what we have seen that has changed, and try to find a reason for its occurrence. If we are to stop the ongoing erosion of land and the pollution of bodies of water, we have to understand the impact on the most ordinary inhabitants.

When you become more attuned to what is happening, you will discover many beneficial events that take place in your own private paradise. The sky becomes a painter's pallet of brilliant colors when the weather is about to change. The shades of pink and red in the evening and morning blend and bleed to signal fair or foul weather. A solid line of low yellowish clouds signals a cold front, or change of weather coming through. When leaves on the tree show their underside it is a sign that rain will soon be appearing. A ring around the moon in the winter months is a sign that snow will soon be arriving. Many things become evident to those who remain aware.

Not every thing that you discover will be of benefit to the planet. Think about it: Do you see as many insects, plants and wild animals as there once were? Is there a noticeable lack of grasshoppers, ladybugs, inchworms, fireflies, honeybees, and other beneficial insects in your area? There was talk about bacteria affecting the bees, but nothing has been said about it in the past two years.

Neighbors, who are beekeepers, used to take their hives to the orchards in Maryland and leave them to pollinate various fruit trees. The hives are now empty because of the onset of this bacteria. African bees infiltrating the hives might have introduced the disease. A scientific answer would be very beneficial.

For quite awhile I have not seen honeybees flying from flower to

flower collecting pollen. This is disturbing because without the benefit of their non-stop work there is no pollination of crops, fruit trees, honey, beeswax for candle making, etc. Recently, my partner said that she saw a honeybee in our garden. This is reason for hope because another major loss has been taking place with little notice.

The invasion of African bees was once a hot topic. It's now just another news event that is no longer of interest to the media. Their "event of the day" attitude, with no follow up, is beyond despicable. When is the last time you saw A.I.D.S. coverage? The shallowness of reporting has become the norm. What the media calls "Reality" shows is nothing less than pap to dull the intelligence of the human race to an all time low. Where is the hunger for truth and knowledge? If people allow themselves to be distracted, they will become the dead bodies of bees that once inhabited a thriving colony.

The other side of what is taking place is an over abundance of some forms of wildlife. So much land has been used for development that there is scarce room for animals to live and find food in their former habitat. That is why their bodies are seen along the roadways from collisions with cars. Another tragedy is deer crashing through store windows because they see their reflection or what looks like forestland.

We have to be the ones that document what is happening. Nothing is irrelevant. The circle of life is broken whenever we minimize the usefulness of anything within our sphere of existence. The importance of shared information lies within all of us. It's imperative that we observe and make a mental or written note of what is occurring. Involve friends in the quest to preserve the world and keep it the way that we want it to be. Together we can prevent a catastrophe before it becomes a reality that can't be rectified.

We need to seek answers about beneficial insects disappearing while mosquitoes that carry the West Nile virus thrive and deer ticks that spread Lyme disease flourish. The Nile virus is killing off crows and others within their family—bluejays, ravens, etc. (I took Doxycycline for 30 days because of being infected with Lyme disease. Fortunately, I recognized the symptoms and had it treated early.)

Our yard contains various types of bird feeders. We spread mothballs under the bushes and trees to keep cats from using the area as litter boxes and to protect birds from being harmed. By chance, I observed three ravens picking up mothballs in their beaks and rolling them back and forth to each other. The one with the mothball would rub it on its

feathers then roll it to the next bird. This process was repeated numerous times. They now pick up the mothballs and medicate themselves. Care is taken in rubbing the mothball over as many areas of their body as can be reached.

The procedure has now evolved into breaking the mothball apart and carrying pieces up to a tree limb and cracking it into even smaller bits. Today I watched as a bluejay performed this ritual. (They are members of the crow family, and their numbers are also diminishing.) The birds now swallow bits of the mothball. I assume they have learned a way to protect themselves even further. As I observe this new practice, I wonder if they carry some of the "medicine" to their young ones and to keep their nest from becoming infected.

For months I have taken pictures of what has now become a daily routine. It never occurred to me that birds or animals could develop the knowledge to become involved in their own healthcare. What they are doing is apparently helping because I have seen an increase in their numbers, and others have joined in this daily event. Only time will tell if my observations are proof of a remedy that "lesser" creatures have discovered.

Morning is an amazing time of day. Everything is wearing a new coat of dew as if Mother Earth has washed away the previous day's grime and indifference. Birds chirp back and forth to one another. They tell each other how their night was, and where to find food to take back to babies nestled safely in the crook of a tree. Sometimes loud chattering is heard when larger birds try to push the smaller ones away from a feeder. The noise is followed by mutual agreement and everyone gets a chance to eat.

Monogamous mates work together building a new nest or reinforcing one that was previously used. The nest is constructed from knowledge passed on since the beginning of time. Many times I've watched as non-stop flights were made to a chosen tree. Close observation reveals layers of sticks braided together. When the basic foundation is complete, other scraps of material are gathered to fill the empty spaces. Plastic, string, papers and mud are used to build a home that will hold the eggs until they are hatched. Like female rabbits that pull out their fur to make a bed before giving birth, birds also use feathers to form a soft layer in the completed nest. People could learn a valuable lesson watching birds recycle the scraps they find that humans have carelessly discarded.

These smaller birds are not to be confused with raptors or those who work by helping to dispose of road kill. What we might observe with disdain or sadness, others view as a means of survival.

Some days a large shadow momentarily will block my light and I will catch a glimpse of a hawk as it swoops low to strike a pigeon in mid air. If the hunt is successful all that will remain is a halo of feathers on the ground. The pigeon will be hit with such force that it will be dead before the hunter flies away with its prey clutched tightly in razor sharp talons. Nature gives and she takes away. With help she provides equally.

Whenever we are going somewhere I've noticed there is now a considerable amount of road kill laying everywhere. Crows fed regularly on these carcasses at one time, but their number has diminished in our vicinity. If humans don't dispose of this health hazard in the making, another disease will find a way to thrive on this petri dish of accidental death.

I know only too well how the manmade toxins enter and start the replication of damaged cells that causes numerous illnesses. The incurable illnesses that have thrived in my body for decades were a result of the environment in the rural Appalachians where I was raised. The coal mines that pockmarked the hills where we lived polluted our only source of drinking water. It undeniably affected our health in numerous irreparable ways. It turned out to be the most beautiful poison that one could ever imagine.

I'm immune suppressed because of being on three different types of chemotherapy. I refused to take the second year of IV chemo despite my rheumatologist's displeasure. My body. My choice. To him it was worth the destruction of other parts of my body. I chose to take pills for the suppression of my immune system. They keep errant cells from multiplying. The medicines I take numerous times a day allow me to live a semi-normal life until a crisis occurs.

There are two things that I credit with my willpower to live. They are my partner of almost 28 years, and a deep abiding love of nature and all it entails. If I were to experience the loss of either, it would be cause to forsake my fight in this world that I worship beyond all else. If others would develop this same love for their surroundings it would add a third reason that would benefit all of us.

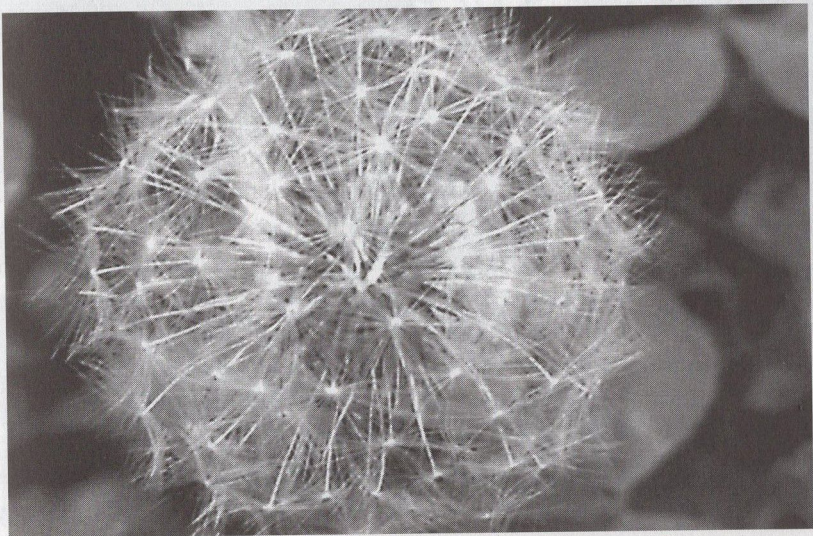
Uncumber**Waking**

*Her hands build wooden homes in
concert with her struggle. Frightened by
cancer's invasion, we place bluebird
boxes on the edge of the garden near the
low bending apple tree.*

*We wait. Arrival is quick, lightening
above a drought-burdened land.
Hearts beat faster. Hope rises. The
flash is the blue of dreams where
water and sky spark like turquoise
gems in sunlight. One glimpse, the
iridescent experience remains.*

*Poets evoke sight behind the eye,
an image to stir a leap of joy.
My lover wakes. I turn to touch
her face, whisper to her even in
winter, "Yes, my dear, we will
see the blue today."*

2001



Lynn Brown

EARTH MASSAGE

Some of my fondest early memories stem from camping out in my backyard in Detroit under the pear tree. I managed to save the dollar my mom gave me every week to buy a sleeping bag and went to campfire summer camp for two seasons. I adored camp because of the activities and the sense of physical freedom that nature provided. The last two years of high school I went to a camp in the Lookout Mountains where I lived in the oldest campers cabin and discovered my first heavy crushes on camp counselors. I also fell in love with archery, canoeing and wood. Everything about living in this rustic environment turned me on and nourished my inner and outer growth. I returned for two years as a counselor and loved every minute.

Later, when my family moved to Florida, life revealed to me that Nature's luxury is heady: the waters of Miami, the sinkholes and willows of Tallahassee, the mountains of Tennessee, and the Michigan lakes where I had a few family summers left me with memories of pleasure and satiation that only physical activity in nature gives so freely. All through my life nature has called me to a delightful kind of playfulness. There is nothing so pleasurable as the shock of warm ocean water, playing like a dolphin in the intense waves and trying to hold one's own. I've always trusted that my senses and the ocean would work together.

I had lived around so much greenery in Florida that I never missed growing things until years later when my heart and body felt a strong need to work in the earth. When I moved to San Francisco the parks and headlands were my refuge. A generous bounty of greenery belongs to us urban dwellers. The open spaces and deep forests feel like shields to protect me from becoming callused to the beauty of living beings; I bring myself to these places of natural wonder for the purpose of renewal and healing—even when I lack awareness of my own pain. The last thirty-five years I have planted gardens somewhere every year. I learned how to work the earth planting a huge lot with dwarf fruit trees and small terraces of sunflowers. Another time I helped terrace land in Oregon for bamboo. Living in the Mission I saw dozens of empty fenced-in lots and envisioned preparing the earth and creating crops to give away, but the owners' permission never came through.

When I don't have the luxury of my own yard, I offer to make gardens for other people. This effort of turning and digging in the earth fits my

body and mind perfectly. I have never left the labors of gardening exhausted in spirit. Although the preparation involves muscle and motion, the planting, maintenance and harvest need tender nurturing, patience and care. There is so much goodness to learn and absorb doing the work of gardening that my child is always engaged, even at sixty years of age.

Gardening in the earth has given me a deep respect and appreciation for creation, growth and the processes of decay. It has allowed me to reflect in a very direct way on the energy that creates our food and helps to maintain balance of our physical sphere. I've learned to dance with this experience and acknowledge how the seeds I plant and watch grow are returned in great abundance for the work I do. Gardening gives me an immediate feeling of gratitude.

I used to resent being called an "earth mother" in my twenties, as I had not identified myself as a woman or lesbian — and definitely not as a mother. Now it is a grace and blessing because the earth and gardening have been a place of sanctuary for my body and soul. Bliss is this connection.

Harvesting the fresh flowers, herbs and food from a garden we have shaped ourselves is deeply rewarding and a special treat for the senses. Best of all, a gift to share with others.

So, make your gardens everywhere. Not all gardens will be outside. Some will be in the hearths, the hearts and the soft sounds spoken by those of us growing to meet our earth, making peace with the elements that we return to as surely as those first cries of greeting drew breath into our lungs.



Photo by Judith K. Witherow and Sue Lenaerts

Cheryl J. Moore

Aeroplane Dream

*I was reading a beautiful book, which made me dream
and the light was a yellow biplane flying over a river.
She is Tiger Moth seeking the wind and I want to
fly her slowly away.*

I want to make love to her in drifting beds

or let her make love to me all the night in the dark of sheets.

*I am writing a poem and she says, "Sometimes I am overwhelmed by you"
and she takes off and soars a mile high. I can hardly say it.*

*She is a beautiful aeroplane with a blue-yellow paint job and
I've been thinking of her all day. Does she think of me?*

I am the blackbird on a lawn.

The wind shines and lifts me as I expand wings of gold.

I turn into the air, above telephone lines,

above the limbs of boisterous trees.

I fly like Tiger Moth, lightly poised in buoyant sky.

*She is a blackbird's kin, animate machine, and she is powered bird
with eyes that survey the distant fields, the hills of stone.*

*Propeller horizon, Tiger Moth is a woman's soaring heart
above a blackbird that beckons and banks.*

*She is crafted Tiger Moth in the peace of loving to fly
and I am blackbird in the comfort of high spider wind.*

Bethroot Gwynn

Landed

We sometimes joke about being dinosaurs. Or we ruminate about the Shakers, and wonder if we too are a "utopian" community that will eventually die out for lack of heirs. We are lesbians who went back to the land around 30 years ago, and – despite our relative invisibility to those who chronicle recent feminist history – some of us are still here. Still splitting firewood. Still putting seeds in the ground, growing fruits and vegetables. Still pausing in the middle of chores to marvel at the tumble of white clouds in a blue sky, or to stare respectfully into big dragonfly eyes – all green and gold she is, stretched out alongside green gold rhododendron leaves.

We still sing together, many of us. Still help each other build houses, or work on structures we created that by now need repair. Still gather for potlucks, concerts, readings, rituals. Still look around the circle at mostly white-skinned women. Still quarrel in our twosomes, threesomes, land groups. Still ruffle each other's feathers with insensitive remarks that stir class differences. Still.

The night is so Still. The quiet so profound – I can hear the occasional crisp leaf land in the brush, hear a sweet pea pod snap open. Bugs fiddle a distant chorus of legs. If I listen long enough, a deer will crunch crunch through dry forest; an owl will hoo hoo. Night sky is so available, arching deep dark over trees, ridges, creatures, me. Lavish with stars, clouds of light float a milky way. There is a song we sing, we lesbians:

*"There is a sacred one inside
All the stars and all the galaxies
Run through Her hands like beads."*

I moved to the woods to live in sacred space. At the time, I was part of a social movement, lesbians creating women's land. The connections were so clear: loving women, loving the Earth. Living close to the Mother, learning from Her natural processes, tending Her body hands-on. We would go deep with Nature, with each other – inventing a new sub-culture away from the patriarchal mainstream. "*I, quietly, by the thousands/ Step into a shrine of my own making/ I, and the multitudes of women who have slipped silently away from the man's ceremonies.*"² What would we become, what would we discover, creating our own world in the lap of the Goddess?

Well, we did not discover utopia. Disappointments, conflicts, poverty, isolation, backlash pressured our fledgling communities, dwindled our numbers. Land-based living is hard work, and Mother Nature – for all Her generosity – is a rigorous teacher. She can insist, no matter what I have planned for a given day, that the long road be ditched during a pouring rain, that the long waterline be repaired after an animal's bite-through. She is a tough lover.

Her wasps sting, her bears sometimes claim the apples, her rabbits munch on vegetables, her snowfall downs trees. I bow to what I cannot control.

And, on the other hand of discovery, what an amazement it is to control so much. To be responsible for the water system that supplies my house, to make the fires that keep it warm, to have made the house with the help of many women – in the first place. There is no Authority here, other than the mighty elemental powers, other than lesbian ingenuity.

The challenges of country life hone our relationships with one another toward resilience, forbearance, over the long haul. We are committed to the land; She is the ground for our connections, and She holds us steadfastly, whatever the variable weather of our partnerships/friendships/loverships. Some of us have close-in land companions. Some of us choose more distance. Meadow and forest give us room to breathe on our own – as well, give us wonders to share together. “Science lesson!” my land partner will call to me, or I to her, pointing out some astonishing quirk of the natural world.

Over these decades, living up close with the waxing and waning, the light turning dark turning light, the seed becoming flower becoming fruit becoming seed, we land lesbians have become women who dig and decorate a grave. Who place the body of our sister into the fiery furnace. Who bury beloved ashes in a garden plot, or scatter precious ashes on the boundaries of the land. We are blessed to be stewards of these lands where we can give women final honor, final rest. And I have no doubt that the Mother of all mysteries participates with us. Once, it happened this way:

*“We ached and cried, rejoiced for the gift
of this pure life.*

*There were no shortages of miracle:
hardened hearts among us softened,
number synchrony framed the day.*

*And then She Herself showed up at ceremony,
Goddess on Her belly,*

Snakewoman

*actual, six feet long and swollen with Her meal
gliding through green grass toward our assembly
creeping underneath the circular platform
bisecting the circle*

as is Her wont – to cut through.³

We make ceremony, and more. Lesbian creativity has flourished among us, inspired by the quiet, the beauty, the adventure of pioneering women’s space away from the densities of urban life. From these hills have come paintings, poems, essays, pottery, drawings, photographs, fiction, memoir, plays, magazines, books, songs. Women have journeyed to these hills for workshops on country skills, meditation, massage, lesbian sexuality, Tai Chi, Personal

Theater, sacred dance. Women come to lesbian land for spiritual sustenance, for community rituals and personal retreats. They are nourished by an exquisite sense of safety in women-only surrounds, in the sanctuary Nature offers. Many women honor the sheer existence of women's lands as crucial for themselves, for the planet, whether or not they personally ever visit or spend time on the lands. Our cultural impact – the fruit of our work — has reached wide in the lesbian world and belies our small population.

Small, and aging. Puzzled about posterity. In our heydays – the 1970s and 80s, the early 90s – there were many more women wending their way up our gravelly roads.

A few intrepid young women have found us and joined our extended clan. A few young feminist scholars have studied us. But these days, lesbian land seems to be a well-kept secret. Many young dykes are astonished to learn that women's lands exist, and are sometimes hardly able to fathom the concept, attached as they are to queer self-definition, more self-aware as sexually deviant than woman-identified. Lesbian lands did have some measure of notoriety in the heydays. We have been lampooned as dogmatic, as humorless fanatics, as earth muffins and bliss bunnies. Struggles among country women doing the difficult work of building community have received more press than our warmhearted circles, our celebrative songs, our luscious gardens. Not to mention – Yea, let us mention, let us proclaim – the green trees, the dust, the moss, the waving grasses, the rain clouds, the silence that enfolds us.

*I write from the hills of Southern Oregon, which shelter over a dozen women-serving lands. Lesbian land communities exist elsewhere as well: in Arkansas, Kentucky, New Mexico, Maine, Ohio, Vermont, and other parts of the US; in Australia, New Zealand, Britain. The connections are so clear: loving women, loving the Earth.*⁴

(Footnotes)

¹ Lesbian Circle Song, Sufi origins

² from "Temple Poem" by Bethroot Gwynn, 1982/2003. Excerpted in WeMoon '05.

³ from "She Took Chris, Then Julie" by Bethroot Gwynn, 1998. Excerpted in WeMoon '03.

⁴ For information about lesbian lands, see:

- *Shewolf's Directory of Winmin's Lands* (POB 1515, Melrose, FL 32666)

- MAIZE, Country Lesbian Magazine (wildflower@baldwin-telecom.net)

- www.alicinfo.com (Association of Lesbian Intentional Communities) barbarad30@yahoo.com

(So. Oregon lesbian lands)

- Oregon Women's Land Trust, POB 1692, Roseburg, OR 97470

- Tee Corinne, *The Little Houses on Women's Lands*, Pearlchild, 2002

- Hawk Madrone, *Weeding at Dawn: A Lesbian Country Life*, Harrington Park Press, 2000

- LaVerne Gagehabib and Barbara Summerhawk, *Circles of Power: Shifting Dynamics in a Lesbian-Centered Community*, New Victoria Press, 2000

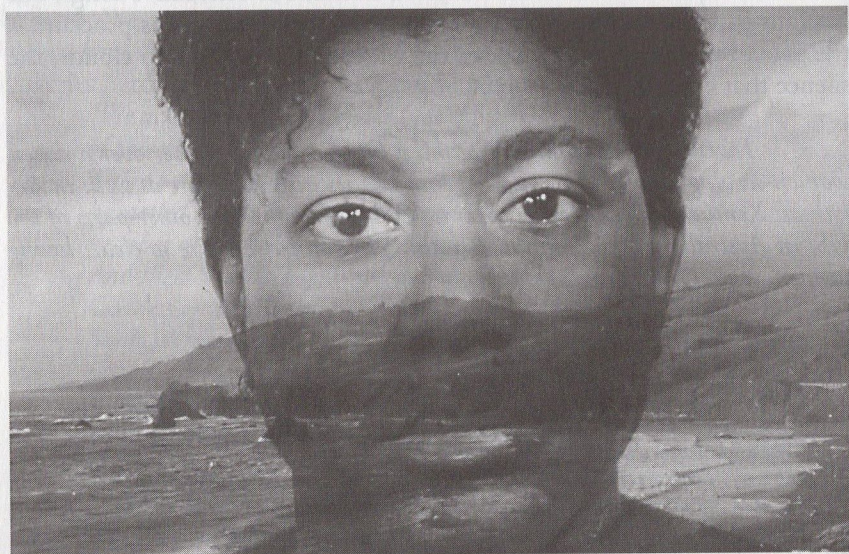
- Pelican Lee, *OWL Farm Stories*, POB 304, Ribera NM, 87560, 2002

- *offourbacks* magazine, Lesbian Land Articles, March/April and May/June, 2003.

H. Lenn Keller

Marginal in Nature

These three photographs are from a series of self-portraits. They explore my subjective experience as an African American woman living in Sonoma County, California, and my personal relationship with the natural landscape there. In the photographs, I'm attempting to convey my subjective sense of vulnerability and alienation — of in the social sense, “being out of place” in this environment. In doing so, I am also attempting to call attention to the rare and almost nonexistent imaging of the experience of being black within the natural American landscape as an ironic anomaly in contemporary American culture, where blacks are stereotypically associated with urban areas.

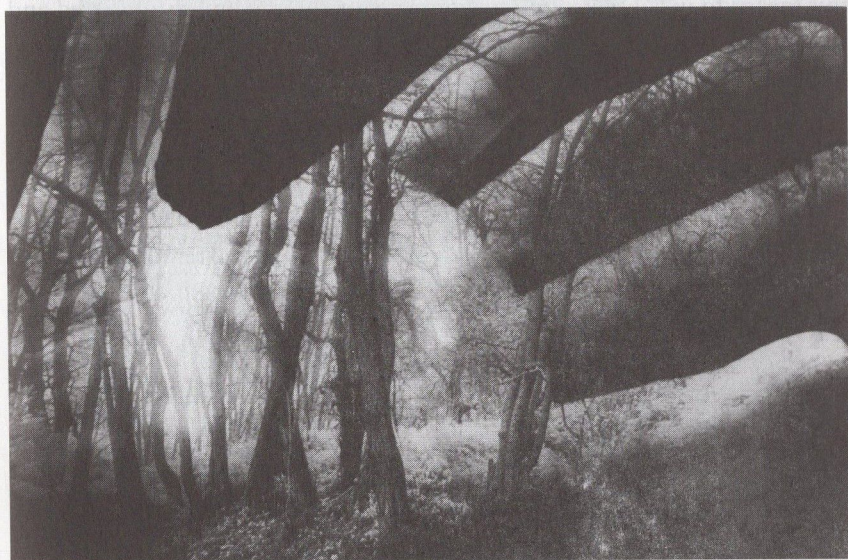


“Self-Portrait #5” © H. Lenn Keller



"Tree Hugger" © H. Lenn Keller

"Nature in Hand" © H. Lenn Keller



Marjory Nelson

The Tree Outside My Window

A year ago, I moved from five spacious rooms into a small apartment in a senior residence for “affordable housing.” What drew me here was that my dearest friend/ partner lives three doors away, while another old dyke moved in a week after me. What was painful was saying good-bye to a garden that had nourished me for twenty-five years. Although my new home is surrounded by planter boxes filled with lantana, jasmine, lilies of the Nile, and small trees for which I’m thankful, they’re not the same.

The first morning as I sat here on my bed drinking tea, I noticed that I could see one of little trees right outside my window. This particular tree was the only one on the property that wasn’t surrounded by any flowers. When I mentioned to some of the residents the possibility of planting a little garden around the tree, they said that they’d tried setting in a few seedlings, but the gardeners who arrive weekly to take care of all the plantings had torn them out. This was distressing to say the least. And challenging.

Would the tree be harmed by the different schedule of watering that small flowers and plants would require? One of the trees in a planter nearby had in fact just died, though no one seemed to know why. What if we began slowly, planting around the edges, giving the tree time to adjust to the changes, but with enough plants to make it clear to the gardeners how much this meant to us? I talked to the women who’d seemed most interested and to the manager, but when I tried to talk with the gardeners, we had a hard time communicating because we speak different languages. Nevertheless, we decided to proceed. We planted pansies, alysum, geraniums, and some succulents. One resident hunted out pieces of wood and bark to create a little fence around our flowers. We all talked to the tree.

When the gardeners returned, I was waiting for them. I said and gestured, “No! Don’t touch!” which they seemed to understand. After a few months, I gradually added more plants—petunias, poppies, marigolds, lobelia—until the space was filled.

Now I sit on my bed looking out at the tree and beautiful flowers. I watch residents walk by who stop to admire and smell the blooms, touch them, talk about them. I’ve expanded the garden into pots along the back walk. I notice that my attention toward each plant is more focused than when I had a huge backyard. I think about them separately, and worry over them like my babies. Residents visit that garden, too. The flowers give joy

to so many people, while they and the tree are thriving from all the attention. Flocks of songbirds visit and an occasional hummingbird. It's a happy spot where people connect with nature and nature responds.

Not only does my garden grow, but the waiting list here is ripening with lesbian friends. We are creating an urban housing community without having to raise millions of dollars. The old lesbian Readers' Group has already moved to our community room, while the old dyke circle that always met at my other apartment still fits in my new living room. It's a place where I can settle in to live out the rest of my life.

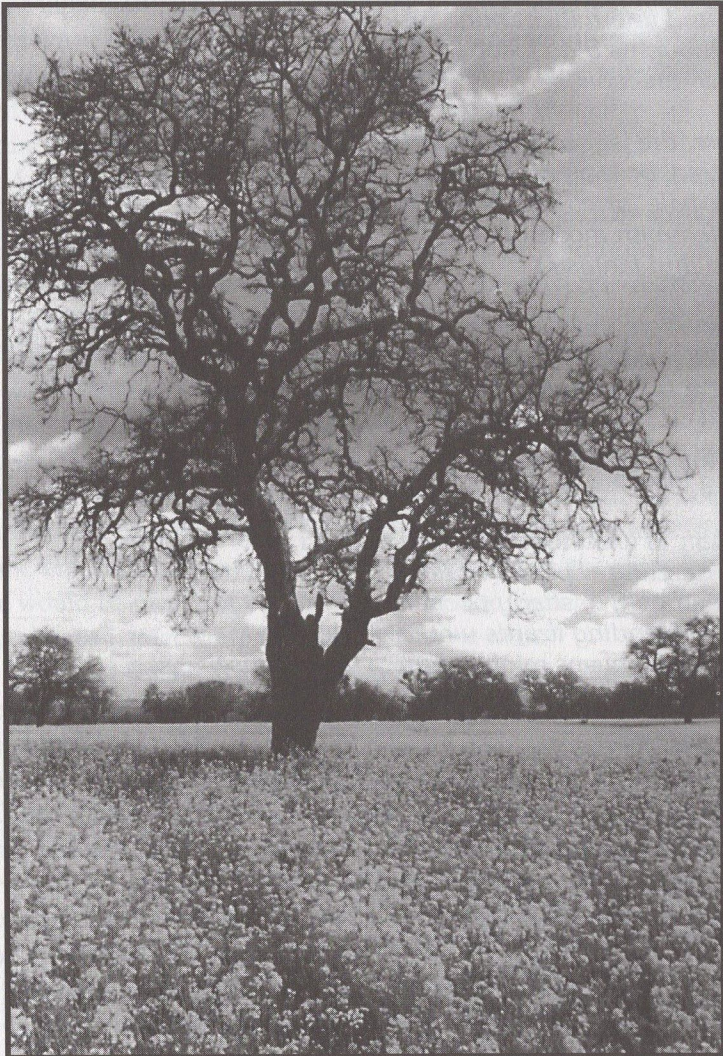


Photo by Dean Brittingham

Ann Tweedy

climate

*was sunshine the miracle
or was it the rain
depending on what had been missing
any happiness could have spoken*

*one day the grey brushstrokes simply
opened. outside there was intermittent
sun and intermittent rain. inside
my thoughts didn't stop running
in her direction*

*before, the jagged ground, once water-
covered, bore an earthquake glamour.
now, pale furred leaves filled the cracks
crested with modest flowers
mainland fantasy*

*somewhere there's a sandy island
with a few palm trees if i could
subsist on coconuts only
lizards would talk to me
i'd earn their willingness
using insects and plant matter*

*though in weather that single-minded
and dazzling plants could
flourish only in shady pockets
and befriending lizards would go slowly.
still my problems might begin to make sense
inside a cage of brightness*

*eventually i think i'd mourn
the monotony of coconuts the reluctance
of lizards who have better things
to do than befriend a love-starved human,
but right now in seattle's dark winter rain*

*i'm dreaming of their thick pleated
skin of black blinking
eyes with no flash of recognition
i'm imagining an end to stubborn expectation
to the ego's striving to fit in*

Hawk Madrone

SOUL FOOD

One afternoon at December's end, Muphin, my little dog companion, and I finally went for a walk here at Fly Away Home, our forty acres of Womensland, my sanctuary. I thought to start out by accomplishing a chore, so carried my full poop bucket from my porch, up past the trailer, and down the path about a hundred yards through the forest to empty it in the Poogoda Privy. Muphin assumed we'd be returning to the house from there, was delighted when I, having completed the job, turned left instead of right and proceeded on down the path past the composting bins, where the Privy's stored accumulation "cooks" with kitchen waste and grass clippings, making a future nourishing brew for my many flower beds.

Muphin quickly took the lead. It was a gorgeous day, the sky clear and cheerfully blue. I had my camera along, so enjoyed a leisurely stroll, on the lookout for photogenic splashes of light, the bright warm sun dancing on the dried leaves and empty seed heads of this past year's wildflowers, or glinting off the strands of spiders' webs.

Then, after we did return to the house with the bucket and I washed it out, we headed out the lane to the stable, where the horse-power is parked, and on down Rhoda Road, the mile-and-a-quarter-long gravel challenge between our home on the hill and the county road. Just past the gatehouse, the little cabin at the edge of our property, we entered into the neighbor's square mile of partially logged forest. Muphin was so happy to be going for a walk, especially not my usual aerobic work-out on the road. This time there would be plenty of opportunity for her to explore, check out odors along the road, leave samples of her own as we went.

I was not feeling as light-hearted as the radiant weather should have prompted. It had been so long since Muphin and I had taken a long walk here on the land, not since we came home early in the month from the exhausting book-signing tour that had taken us to cities up the Interstate. And since then there had been so many people in and out of my life, my home. The days alone had been rare, and most of them were when I was down with a head cold. Now, feeling physically fine, walking in the sun, greeted by demure winter colors lit up by sunshine, I found I was less joyful than I had immediate cause to be.

I had been worrying about what all this touring business, all this being-in-a-spotlight might be costing me. If the limelight shined too much on me,

might my friends back away? In my sudden busy-ness with the mind-overloading details of schedules and arrangements, my pulling on women to attend readings, my asking, even, for contributions for travel expenses, was I perhaps stepping on sensitive toes, requesting generosity and kindness I was neglecting to match? Was that some disgruntlement I sensed from one friend I'd asked a favor of? Another seemed piqued when I failed to meet an expectation; and I worry that I hurt yet someone else's feelings by being so self-absorbed with this project. My soul, perhaps overly sensitive, felt rather empty, hungry for some assurances of love.

While I felt lonely, I was at the same time so very grateful to be alone. I figured my listless mood was also in part from being out of the practice of solitude, and from not having given my usual attention to the fully-satisfying company that Muphin can be. So every time I felt a wave of that soulless, chest-numbing loneliness threaten, I looked at Muphin, watched her compact sixteen-pound Lhasa Apso-mix body being so perfectly at home in this place where the territory is hers, where the odors of other dogs are known quantities, unlike the heavily scented sidewalks and public parks of the cities we had visited. I watched the beauty of her tawny fluffy coat as she pranced down the road, the symmetry of her movement, her paws lifting, then touching the ground, effortlessly. I admired the muscular shimmering of her streamlined torso, no excess weight pulling on her sprain-prone back. Concentrating on her presence, her goodness and beauty, made me smile, edged me toward contentment.

"I love you, Muphin," I gentled to her, as I often do, "I love you." She listens when I greet her so, knows when I am needing to feel love in me, knows when I am so moved by the precious gift she is. We ambled on past a log landing, empty now of the firewood a friend and I hauled away last August. We sauntered along the stand of manzanita, past the huge slash pile I like to think of as a compost heap, past where the culvert crosses beneath our road, carrying a steady seep from recent rains.

Sometimes I waited for Muphin when she had research to do in the brush; sometimes she waited for me when a fuzzy seed pod on the road's shoulder, or a sunlit red leaf down the bank, merited a camera's portrait.

Muphin knows my habit: usually when we reach the big madrone at the curve in the road, three quarters of a mile down, I turn around. And, knowing this, she stops about fifty feet before the curve and waits for my turning. Here I stretch my arms and say hello to the big tree whose huge trunk spirals high above the firs and cedars, her main branches — as thick as my own body — all angling out in long laterals on one side. I marvel at the

counterbalance the trunk makes with the branches, the trunk insisting on uprightiness, the branches pulling toward the earth.

But this time I did not stop, though I did admire the madrone as I passed. I had the mailbox down on the county road in mind, and South Myrtle Creek beyond that. Muphin knew my intent in a flash, in seconds had galloped past and ahead of me again. So on we went, down the long bottommost, and steepest, section of our road, to the gate, where Muphin fell in beside me and willingly stopped at the edge of the road, then crossed it in tandem with me at my spoken signal. The big metal box held newspaper advertising and catalogues, a bill, some letters, a packet of photographs back from the processing company. I left it all there and continued on down the partially-overgrown logging track to the creek. Oh!, Muphin was so excited! Such pleasure for her in this familiar exploration. She bounded down the bank, scurried over the mound of earth left by a bulldozer, wove her way through the brittle short brush, walked unimpeded beneath a log lying from bank to bank across the track, placed there to prevent motor traffic. Big enough to require my walking around it, the barrier was high enough to allow Muphin to walk beneath it, as though it were not even there.

We rested a short while at the creek, watched the water wash the shore, the sandy edges buried now by the tumbling current of Winter. I listened to the boisterous play of water on trees and brush fallen into the creek, on rocks marbled with sunlight streaming through the bare branches of alders and vine maples. My seat was merely my left foot folded beneath my rump against the wet soil, not an arrangement for long meditation. Muphin was eager to be off again, so we returned to the mailbox, where I stuffed the post in the large inner pockets of my down vest. We performed another exercise in "stop" and "come,0" and headed up the hill again.

I had told myself I could take as long as I liked climbing back up that steep section, could stop and admire whatever beckoned. There was the light shining golden on the lichen of an otherwise barren tree, the bright crimson red of a madrone twig, the free-flowing run-off in the ditch we labored so hard to clear in October. Where the forest was thin from the neighbor's logging, I had a window open to vistas of the high ridges to the east, with the face of Deadman's Bluff receiving its share of the afternoon warmth.

Taking it slowly, letting each step be as intentional as a mindful breath, I welcomed the demand of the hill, the opportunity for my heart to beat a louder, stronger rhythm. Up and up we walked, and I imagined Muphin's little heart getting a good work-out too, her leg muscles glad for the neces-

sity. We rounded the curve, passed the cemeteried pieces of appliances dumped down the east bank long before my time, walked into and out of shade and sunlight on flatter sections of the road. I hardly noticed the steepness of what we call the “second steep section,” or the “rocky hill,” intent as I was on keeping my pace suitable to my comfort and my photographer’s interest. Muphin preceded me all the way, sometimes as much as a dozen or so yards ahead, then running back to tease me, and on ahead again. At thirteen, she is fit, and beautiful, and so happy to be in this life with me.

At the gatehouse, I veered off the road onto the path to the knoll, but turned around to study the north wall of the cabin, still in the remodeling process. There is yet so much to do there, the new interior walls not yet painted, the kitchen still an idea rather than an accomplishment, but the outer north wall looks lovely, with its two new windows, and the old boards of the siding shorn of their rotting ends. The moisture of the season had transformed the dull grey into a rich dark pewter. I was standing in the sun, about ten feet from the corner window, which became a mirror for my spotlight reflection. I liked what I saw, in fact, I loved what I saw. Sunlight glinted off my west-facing cheek, drew a line down the bridge of my nose, demarcating light and shadow. The blue and purple, red, maroon, and black of my clothing were backgrounded by the evergreens, and the royal blue of the hovering sky.

“I love you, Madrone,” I said aloud, several times. “I love you, Madrone. I love you, Madrone.”

The mood of the walk’s beginning had disappeared. My body had been reminded of who I essentially am; my soul had feasted on the forest, Muphin, sunlight ... and was full.

Muphin waited for me on the knoll.

Jess McVey

Mutants

Mutants are my new work: as a warning, as an education. My concern is for what we are doing to our earth, our home.

Toads appearing in South Central Canada; North Central United States, and upper New York state are badly mutated — no eyes, three eyes, an eye in the wrong place — the same for legs and other organs. The causes are not known as yet. There are many more examples of new mutants from around the world.

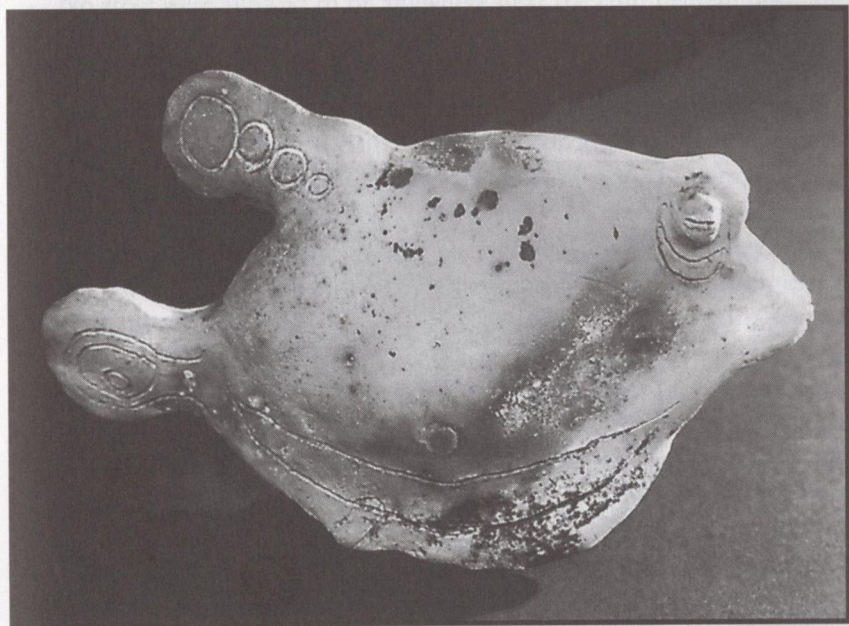


Photo by Judy Reed

Sculpture by Jess McVey.

Mary Meriam

True Nature

*I have a constant ache for Mother Earth,
So burned, depleted, burdened, pierced, and razed,
By those who lack the sense to know her worth.
The activists seem weak, a little dazed,
And can't protect her water, soil, and air
From ghastly, greedy, guzzling, global glitches
Of corporation rapist-billionaires.
It hurts to think of landfills, oceans, ditches,
Replenished constantly with toxic trash
And city-dwellers sick from cars and smoke;
To know that even boatloads full of cash,
With good intentions, sink like a bad joke.
Then how can we begin to do our part?
The answer lies in purity of heart.*

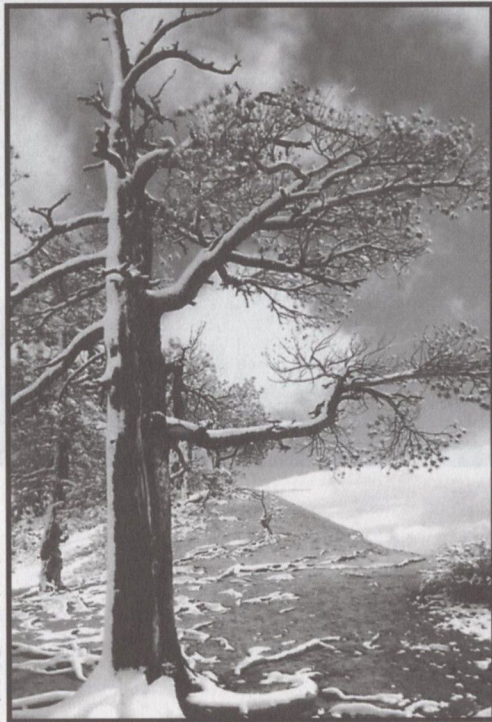


Photo by Dean Brittingham

Jennifer White

Tree

I walked in circles and circles, for years I walked only in circles. Such is the life when your freedom is taken away. I wasn't crazy, or mentally challenged. I was locked up for a mistake, a lapse in judgment, a moment of desperation that cost me over half a decade. I could take it though, I could walk away better rather than worse as they expected. At least this is what I told myself. I walked in circles in more ways than one. Every single day was the same, that was like a circle of time. The one I'm really speaking of right now however is the circle, aka the "Track," which was so small you had to walk around it seven times to add up to a mile. It was the only area outdoors to which I was allowed access for a very long time.

No trees were allowed to be anywhere near the confinement area, and certainly no animals. Any trees that had the nerve to try and sprout up, or grow within 100 feet of the perimeter, were promptly cut down.

During my captivity I missed so much of LIFE, just everyday things, like being able to hold my girlfriend's hand, or kiss her without fear of consequences, that I didn't realize just how much I missed nature.

After my imprisonment ended, and I was a free woman once again (as free as you can be in this country) I walked around looking at everything as though the whole world were new. Freedom of movement, and simple self-determination, were such phenomenal concepts to me. Everything seemed so surreal. I will never forget the way that I felt when I walked up to a large gorgeous tree for the first time in so many years. I could feel its strength, and its warmth, almost as if it were projecting these attributes outward. I felt invited, almost obligated, to sit at its base and just spend some time relishing its existence. My mind formed pictures of it's roots reaching down through the Earth, connecting to other root branches of other trees, and how that connected to another, until the whole world was connected by branches, and the soil that held it all together. I was awed by my own small role in the connectedness of the world as I sat there with my tree breathing the oxygen it produced, and being reminded just how much life and nature are so inexorably intertwined. I was so refreshed and uplifted by that experience. To this day I am completely awed by not only large beautiful trees, but by oceans, fields, rivers, mountains, and the amazing cornucopia of animals with whom we share our small planet.

Jeanne Neath

Ancient Awareness

“At this point I feel like those in the dominant culture cannot even imagine indigenous thinking. Every action they make is different from every action indigenous people make.”

Linda Hogan, *Listening to the Land*, (D. Jensen, editor) p. 128

“People such as Matoaka, Wahunsenacawa, Uttamatamakin, Openchencanough, and other great figures of the time lived in a state of consciousness that is profoundly unlike the one we moderns think of as normal. I think they were almost always in an ‘altered’ state of consciousness. Their day-to-day practices provide strong evidence of this. This is not to say they would have been identified as geniuses on modern IQ tests; nor were they psychotic. They were operating on all cylinders, using a great deal more of their brain capacity than moderns use, and thus were aware of ‘facts’ that moderns don’t consciously register.”

Paula Gunn Allen, *Pocahontas*, p. 22

“In a changed world we are in need of an ancient way of being.”

Linda Hogan, *Intimate Nature: The Bond Between Women and Animals*, p. 15

What is this “ancient way of being” that Paula Gunn Allen and Linda Hogan write about? For those lesbians attempting to live our lives in the midst of the modern western patriarchal civilization that is destroying the earth and earth-based cultures, an ongoing awareness and consciousness that connects to nature is far from everyday experience. Being physically dependent on a society that takes what it wants from nature prevents the interdependence with nature that people living in other, less destructive societies have had. When “purified” water comes from a tap, food comes from a supermarket or coop, and heat mysteriously emits from a furnace, humans look to jobs or social services to provide for their needs, and awareness of nature and our basic physical interconnection with nature are broken. No other human society has so dominated and attempted to destroy nature as this one. No other human society has so separated its participants from nature and an awareness of nature.

“Successful” living in the dominant society depends on an ability to close oneself off from both external input and inner feelings. The level of noise, odor, and activity in modern cities is overwhelming unless you screen out much of the input. While women are more in touch with our emotions

than men, fully feeling each daily insult or atrocity – smelly air, continual noise, road kills, plants struggling for survival in sidewalk cracks, homeless people, news of war – is probably beyond human capability. Almost all jobs require a willingness to either dominate others or be dominated by others, probably both, and either role requires cut off feelings.

Living in a culture based in domination – of women, outsiders, people of color, animals, nature – shapes each individual living in that culture, and limits awareness, consciousness, capability, and life experience. Hierarchical social structures erode genuine feelings of self-love, replacing them with comparison-based self worth; “I have value because I am better than her, because I have accomplished X, Y or Z.” What hierarchy begins, violence and abuse completes, making it a lifetime struggle for many members of patriarchal society to find feelings of self value outside of the artificial value they may achieve by fitting themselves into the dominant culture.

Carolyn Merchant has described the ecological revolutions¹ that took place in New England between 1600 and 1860, as the human society there changed from predominantly Native American to Pre-Industrial to Industrial. Human relationships to nature, consciousness and social structures changed drastically as means of making a living switched from gathering/hunting/horticulture to subsistence farming to capitalist. Most readers are all too familiar with the consciousness Merchant associates with the capitalist ecological revolution: disembodied intellect, analytical consciousness, domination of mental over sensory, dualistic thinking, including a split between subject and object, mind and body. These are all qualities of consciousness that feminists have criticized extensively, identifying them as characteristic of patriarchy.

Merchant describes the Native American consciousness that predominated in New England prior to the 17th century as based in animism, the view of all of nature as alive, conscious, and full of spirit. Instead of a world filled with human subjects and natural objects, everything was an equal face-to-face subject. Humans were not considered superior to animals or distinct from them. According to Merchant, much of consciousness was based in imitation (mimesis) and so hunters imitated their prey, being, thinking, and behaving like the animals they hunted. Sensory experience was of primary importance and all of the senses were highly trained and acute. Because the cultures’ traditions were passed on orally, hearing and speaking were far more important than for colonial Europeans.

Merchant’s descriptions of Native American consciousness in the past fit well with descriptions made by Native American women (and men) today. While much ancient knowledge has been lost to Native Americans due to the invasion by Europeans and continuing domination by European

Americans, many members of Native American cultures are still much closer to a lived knowledge of ancient ways than are members of the dominant culture, whose ancestors lost the ancient ways in the much more distant past. Although many anthropologists and other scholars have studied societies that live in close connection to the earth, most of these scholars come from the dominant society and usually lack this lived knowledge of the ancient ways. Let's listen for a moment to the voices of several Native American writers who tell us about an "ancient way of being" from their perspectives as inhabitants of two worlds, that of the dominant culture and their own Native cultures. Linda Hogan (Chickasaw) writes about nature as alive and communicating with those who will listen:

"There is a way that nature speaks, that land speaks. Most of the time we are simply not patient enough, quiet enough, to pay attention to the story, to be attentive..." (*Listening to the Land*, D. Jensen, editor, p. 124)

Lame Deer (Lakota) comments on the difference in sensory awareness between whites and Native Americans:

"The white man sees so little, he must see with only one eye. We see a lot that you no longer notice. You could notice if you wanted to, but you are usually too busy." (P. G. Allen, *The Sacred Hoop*, p. 69)

Leslie Marmon Silko (Laguna Pueblo) and Linda Hogan explain the importance of animals to basic survival and discuss the high status of animals:

"So little lies between you and the sky. So little lies between you and the earth. One look and you know that simply to survive is a great triumph, that every possible resource is needed, every possible ally – even the most humble insect or reptile. You realize you will be speaking with all of them if you intend to last out the year." (Leslie Marmon Silko, *Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit*, p. 41)

"Ceremonies, too, have often been taught by the animals, in vision and in waking consciousness. It seems we have always found our way across unknown lands, physical and spiritual, with the assistance of the animals. Our cultures are shaped around them and we are judged by the way in which we treat them. For us, the animals are understood to be our equals. They are still our teachers. They are our helpers and healers." (Linda Hogan, *Intimate Nature: The Bond Between Women and Animals*, p. 10)

Pamela Colorado (Oneida) describes differences in thinking between the dominant and Native American cultures:

"Our ancestors always knew about linear thought, but it was linear thought contained in a circle of light." (*At The Crossroads*, Issue #1, p. 12)

“As native people, we learn to train our minds from the time we are children, to be centered where we are, grounded in reality, and see all the signs that are around us.” (*Ibid*, p. 12)

Jeannette Armstrong (Okanagan) explains the deep connection to land and nature felt by her people:

“We also refer to the land and our bodies with the same root syllable. This means that the flesh which is our body is pieces of the land come to us through the things which the land is. The soil, the water, the air, and all other life-forms contributed parts to be our flesh. We are our land/place. Not to know and to celebrate this is to be without language and without land. It is to be displaced. (*Ecopsychology: Restoring the Earth, Healing the Mind*, T. Roszak et al., editors, p. 323)

The “ancient ways of being” are not peculiar to Native American cultures, but, in all probability, were once the *only* ways of being found on the Earth. Certainly, these ancient ways continue among indigenous peoples across the Earth, to the extent their cultures have survived the onslaught of modern western patriarchy. Like the Native American writers above, indigenous peoples throughout the Earth are speaking now about the problems with the dominant culture, from the perspective of their ancient ways.

The critiques of the dominant culture from indigenous peoples are a far cry from the racist perspectives of early anthropologists. Those anthropologists were struck by the many differences in consciousness and awareness between their own culture and that of the indigenous societies they encountered in the many areas of the world that had come under the grasp of Europe. In the early decades of the twentieth century, Levy-Bruhl wrote a series of books on “primitive mentality” in which he promoted the idea that “primitive” people have different thought processes than modern people and that these different thought processes result in different views of reality (i.e. animistic vs. mechanistic). At the time Levy-Bruhl was developing his ideas, overt scientific racism was commonplace and his notions fit in well with earlier scientific theories claiming, for example, larger skull sizes and supposedly greater intelligence for the “white” race.

Later scholars, such as Eric Havelock, extended the idea of an evolving consciousness to ancient Greece, of particular importance here because ancient Greek culture is often considered a major source of western civilization. Havelock theorized that sometime between the life of Homer and that of Plato, a shift from a “participatory” consciousness to an analytic consciousness took place. Havelock’s work thus provides a record of the loss of “ancient ways of being” thousands of years ago in Greece. According to

Havelock, Plato's writings reveal that he was very displeased about the societal power held by public poetry recitations that drew audiences into a mimesis or active emotional identification of the self with the performer. Plato argued that rational thought processes, including control of the instincts and a distinct separation of subject and object, should replace mimesis. The writings of Levy-Bruhl, Havelock and a number of other western scholars (and of Plato) were based in a belief in social evolution: they assumed that "modern" consciousness was more evolved and superior to earlier ways of being and thinking.

Considering that "modern" consciousness is in effect a patriarchal consciousness with its disembodied intellect and separation of subject and object, mind and body, it is tempting to say we've had a reverse evolution, though that would be a pretty linear way of looking at things. Given that the consciousness of the dominant society perpetuates that society, might it not be desirable to change consciousness and our way of being? In talking about changing consciousness, I don't mean simply changing the content of our thought to, for example, become less prejudiced (though this is certainly desirable), but rather to move to a consciousness more like that of the Native American and other indigenous societies whose members lived and, to the extent now possible, live in a benign interdependence with the earth. Please note that I am in no way advocating stealing, borrowing, or adapting the spiritual traditions or practices of any indigenous peoples. Instead I am suggesting the possibility of abandoning or tempering patriarchal consciousness and moving toward a consciousness that makes it possible to directly experience one's own spiritual connection to the earth. Perhaps out of these personal spiritual experiences of nature, lesbians, including those of us who do not have access to satisfying spiritual traditions, can begin developing our own authentic spiritual traditions.

The consciousness of the dominant patriarchal society is created by patriarchal society and in turn creates that society. As Audre Lorde, an African American lesbian feminist poet and writer told us in the 1970s, "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house."² What does it mean for lesbians and other feminists to work as hard as we work to transform patriarchy, but to do this work using the mind, the consciousness of the society we want so much to change? Let's consider the alternatives.

For tens of thousands of years every human on earth, *all* of our ancestors, lived in gathering and hunting economies. Attentiveness to the surrounding natural world was critical for survival. Heavy use of all the senses provided extensive and intimate knowledge of plants, animals, landscape, wind and weather and minute changes in any aspects of the environment. The existence of dangerous predators must have made immersion into self-

absorbed endless chains of thought (sound familiar?) a life threatening action in many circumstances. Attentiveness, without mind chatter, sounds to me like a form of meditation. Is it possible that, for at least a goodly portion of each day, our gathering and hunting ancestors lived in some form of a functioning meditative state?

What are the effects of long-term intense attentiveness? I have found that when I listen to the sounds of nature for a long time and watch her with unfocused, peripheral vision that sometimes I feel a strong presence in the plants or even the air around me. I can easily understand from this experience that people experiencing nature in a similar way would not objectify the plants, rocks, and air around them, but rather consider them as equal subjects and develop important relationships to them. In a certain state of being the presence of natural entities is so strong one could not possibly objectify them. As Linda Hogan says, "At night, in the cornfield, when there is no more mask of daylight, you hear the plants talking among themselves. The wind passes through. It's all there, the language, the voices of wind, dove, corn, stones. The language of life won't be silenced." (Linda Hogan, *Dwellings*, p. 62)

Is it possible for lesbians living in the dominant, patriarchal culture to move toward the consciousness and ways of being of our ancestors? If so, how do we do this? Consciousness, perceptions of reality, and ways of being tend to correspond to economic, political and other aspects of culture. However, lesbians can *choose* to alter our consciousness and way of being, to at least some extent. The exact consciousness and reality of gathering and hunting cultures may not be fully accessible to someone living in the dominant, patriarchal society. But, it is certainly possible to move away from patriarchal consciousness and reality and toward a way of being similar to that of people living lives fully connected with nature and source. It may be that a new form of consciousness will develop, closely related to the ancient ways of being, yet different because our lives have to be different in a world where patriarchy still rules and where there are billions of people relying on agriculture to provide food.

When I began working on this section of this article, I had a strong impulse to leave my computer and go outside to work. As I stepped outside, a red tailed hawk was circling above my house, calling loudly "keer, keer, keer". I heard the call, but didn't look up right away thinking I was hearing a blue jay doing an imitation of a hawk, which is a more common event where I live here in the Ozarks. A person living in a society more closely connected to nature would not have made this mistake. However, at least I noticed the loud bird call right away and eventually, when I realized how fast the location of the call was changing, I looked up to see if I might be hearing a hawk. If I hadn't

been a bit preoccupied with my writing, I might not have made a mistake at all. Twenty years ago I probably would not have even heard the bird call because I'd have been so caught up in my own chain of thought. This change in my awareness is not an accident, but rather is the result of a good deal of effort, enjoyable, but still a persistent effort on my part.³

Awareness of nature is, I believe, critical to leaving behind patriarchal consciousness and moving toward an "ancient way of being." Most people in the dominant culture spend much of their time thoroughly absorbed in their own thoughts. While this mind chatter goes on (and on and on), they are not aware of the wind tickling their skin, the neighbor's cat stalking the cardinal who is raising an alarm call that can be heard over the next block, the cloud that just passed in front of the sun, or the scent of the pesticide coming off the parkway they are about to walk across. How do you turn off the mind chatter? It won't just turn off like a faucet, no matter how determined you might be. A better strategy is to start paying attention to the sensations you feel, the sights, sounds, and smells that are constantly changing around you. You can do this anywhere. If you take the time to go outside frequently, sit still and pay attention you can begin to experience and become part of the patterns of the wild (and not so wild) landscape, animals and plants around you. As for any meditation, when you notice yourself thinking about the work you didn't finish or the bills you didn't pay, just return to noticing what you see, hear, feel, taste, and smell. It will help to slow down or prevent thinking if you look up, not down, and keep your eyes wide and unfocused. You'll find yourself seeing a lot more movement around you. Nature will begin to come to life.

When you go back inside, some good nature field guides can help put that thinking mind to good use! I read somewhere recently that most people in the U.S. cannot name even 5 or 10 native trees or plants. I often wonder how many of the people who practice pagan spiritualities or who talk about being "connected to the earth" know the medicinal properties and survival uses (or even the names) of the trees and plants around their houses. Extensive knowledge of plant and animal life was a survival requirement for our ancestors, necessary for finding food and medicines, and for making fire or essential tools such as nets or rope. Awareness and knowledge of nature go hand in hand, both in the past and in the present.

Many lesbians (and other people) have had very special, usually brief, one-time or occasional experiences of nature, a nature they've described as brilliantly alive, sparkling, dancing, vibrant....For example, Sonia Johnson once described an experience she'd had:

"I suddenly realized that through that opening window I was not merely looking at but was caught up in and participating with a

breathtaking world. Now, a dozen years later, I remember best the woods that were ablaze with a green so intense that like a leafy wildfire it sprang through my eyes into my body and burned along every nerve and bone and muscle until I felt as if I *were* its green-hot glow. Totally part of that dazzling world for a few seconds, I felt released from time." (*Wildfire*, p. 213-215)

These brief experiences are often life changing. Sonia Johnson said, about her experience, "Who would choose to suffer in patriarchy if they understood that right at hand, all around us where we stand, a wondrous world *already exists* for us to step into and make our own." I know that my own such experiences have pulled me toward exploring this "ancient way of being," trying to find a way to live where, like the ancestors, I am often or always surrounded by a nature that is so brilliant and so blazing with life that I am in awe. I am hopeful that lesbians, feminists, and others will be similarly drawn to this new/old consciousness and way of being. Together, in a consciousness that is not the "master's", we can become much more effective in our ability to work together for our Earth, our sisters, and ourselves.

"To be common people, humble people, how freeing that is. How much it offers us, placing us back in the participatory relationship with the world. It offers us the animal underpinnings of our minds and bodies, and it is those we must rely on to bring us back to our humanity and compassion, to restore ourselves to our place." (Linda Hogan, *Intimate Nature: The Bond Between Women and Animals*, p. 19)

Footnotes:

1. *Ecological Revolutions: Nature, Gender and Science in New England* by Carolyn Merchant. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989.
2. "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House," *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, edited by Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, 1981. Persephone Press, Watertown MA.
3. A number of books, people and organizations have helped me learn ways to move toward "an ancient way of being." These include:
 - a. Native American women authors quoted in the article as well as the writings of Barbara Mann, Paula Underwood, and Marilou Awiakta.
 - b. Wilderness Awareness School (see www.wildernessawareness.org)
 - c. The books of Tom Brown, Jr. and his school, The Tracker, Inc. (see www.trackerschool.com)
 - d. *The Wild Within and Tracking and the Art of Seeing* by Paul Rezendes.



Marjorie Gayle

Seascapes and Other Enchantments

Driving home from the airport, I had to pull off the highway a few times when tears blurred my vision. By the time I'd turned off the main highway and drove through the familiar embrace of the tunnel of trees, my sobbing, at least, had quieted. The soothing cover of foliage momentarily eased my grief and I was able to continue the next few miles home more quietly. I slowed down when the beautiful ocean became visible just before our apartment. Knowing I would dive into that water as soon as I shed my clothes, gave me a lift.

Then I turned into the parking lot and was hit with a barrage of sudden hysterics. The emotions struck before the thoughts became clear. I would never again drive into the lot and feel that pleasure when I saw Anna's parked car. When I opened our front door, there would be no galloping nymph throwing herself into my arms, filling my heart with the joy of knowing I was loved. Time passed as I sat in my car composing myself until I could get up the stairs and into the apartment.

Once inside I threw off my clothes and grabbed my snorkeling gear and towel. Since moving back to the islands I'd taken to wearing a swim suit in lieu of underwear. This allowed me to jump into the ocean any time I had a break in my day. It also was a great relief to my back as the cut of the one piece suit enabled my large, heavy breasts to be supported without pain.

I hurried down the stairs and onto the small beach. Dropping the towel, I sought out the small break in the rocks, timing the waves with the secret formula that allowed me to enter the water smoothly. Pulling on my mask and fins I submerged my face, knowing it would be hours before I would reluctantly pull it up again. The company I sought beneath the surface was more beautiful and more comforting than any I could even imagine on land right now.

Immediately I was amidst colorful fish of all sizes. The coral came in a montage of shapes and colors. It was incredible to follow the sea spirits through the inviting mazes. I always felt so free, gliding through the clear waters, visiting my underwater friends. My heaviness was gone, both emotionally and figuratively. As a round woman, I could float indefinitely. I allowed the currents to quietly guide me wherever they might. I knew that eventually I would surface and be surprised to find myself somewhere I'd never been before.

During this soothing exploration, I couldn't help but have fleeting thoughts of Anna. I remembered that she'd assured me that she loved to swim when we were first exploring our new relationship and the move to Hawaii. Once she joined me, she opted not to go snorkeling or even swim in the ocean. So this became my private sanctuary.

This afternoon I gently drifted to an unfamiliar place. The water was deeper and I had to dive down more often to be closer to the beautiful lava and coral formations and the fish that fed among them. I had bobbed back to the top, gazing at the vast underwater landscape when my eyes tried to make sense of something new. With a start, feelings of fear and excitement washed over me. I was looking down on a colossal, giant sea turtle looking up at me. Fright sent my adrenalin coursing through my body.

Since I began snorkeling years before, I recognized that when I encountered a creature that some thought ominous, like a shark, my fear quickly dissipated with my awe at the majesty of the gift with which I was blessed. I felt privileged that I had no fear with these critters. Now, this new fear that surprised me when I saw the giant turtle, needed to be quickly reasoned away so I could get on with the excitement and joy. My first thought was, "You know they are herbivores, you ninny."

I was glad this fear was quickly put to rest. Now, as I looked down through the enchanting waters I realized that there were seven of these camouflaged giants looking up at me. I estimated their sizes to be about eight feet in diameter. I'd been anxious to see the larger versions of my childhood pets since I'd started snorkeling, but they had eluded me until now. And I had no idea that they would be this large.

I recognized that these turtles seemed wary of me and I was torn between respecting their privacy and staying to watch them. I was selfishly rude and stayed to watch. I didn't know how long I'd been floating there before the first one gracefully began to swim up to the surface a few yards from where I floated. As she ascended, she mysteriously diminished in size. By the time she was even with me, stretching her neck above the surface for a breath of air, I figured she was probably five feet in diameter, at most. Apparently, the depth of the water distorts size that much. Who knew?

I stayed with the turtles until the light began to fade, then reluctantly swam back to my path and walked out of the water. I sat on my towel and looked back at the sea. It was beautiful to watch the larger waves break beyond the reef. The dwindling light painted different pictures as I watched. I thought about the people who could enjoy this scene and have no idea of the beauty, color and diversity that lies beneath the surface. On this evening

I realized what a metaphor this was for Anna and others who don't look beyond the surface, never knowing the miracles that are so available.

I could never understand how tourists could visit Hawaii and never even want to experience the underwater beauty that is so abundant. Now I felt sad for them all, especially Anna. There is so much depth and pleasure lost because of fear. I thought of Anna at the airport as we waited for her flight to be called for boarding. She was as sad as I was that she was leaving, yet too ashamed of what the surrounding strangers would think when I reached for her hand. So our last minutes together were without the loving touch that might have brought us some comfort.

As weeks passed, when I was not in the ocean, I ruminated about Anna. Or, more accurately, I mentally beat myself up for having gotten involved with her when I knew better. She was a rebound relationship for me, which I didn't realize at the time because I had been single for nine months. Worse, she was rebounding from a heterosexual marriage, never having been with a woman before. Knowing this, I built strong boundaries, then struggled with them. I denied my hurtful loneliness, disguising it with the more romantic belief that I was irresistibly in love.

My strong attraction to Anna was so powerful that it played a major part in my decision to leave California and move to Hawaii. I couldn't trust myself to do the healthy thing and just be clear with Anna, and with myself, that we couldn't be lovers. I needed to get as far away from this temptation as I could.

Unfortunately, the other reason I decided I had to move back to Hawaii was that I had to get a job with health insurance and I knew that could happen immediately in Hawaii. I felt fine physically, but the doctor I worked with noticed my dilated pupil and insisted that I have an MRI. The results were inconclusive but Dr. Dave was sure I had either a brain tumor or an aneurysm. He wanted me to have more extensive, and expensive, tests. Consequently, Anna's reasoning for going with me was that I might be dying and it would be foolish of us not to be together for whatever time I had left. And I didn't consistently say, "no".

The ocean spirits brought me many wonderful gifts during the lonely years after Anna left. I felt accepted by the family of turtles who always napped by day in the spot where we first met. I visited them often, just hovering above them. In a short time, each of them became comfortable enough with me to surface for breath just inches from where I floated. I felt an ethereal communication with them. I also thought that some of their comfort with me was because I was also a round creature. Being in the

ocean, I could just be. My mind quieted with the silence of the sea. It seemed to be a divine message that my self-absorbed, self-flagellation was overdone in the greater scheme of things.

At Christmas, I was given my first glimpse of an octopus. She was wonderful! She took one look at me and slipped under a rock. I bobbed to the surface in hopes that she might come out again, and she did! I slowly swam closer. She changed her colors in hopes of blending in with the rocks and squeezed into a crack in the coral. This was the best Christmas gift I'd ever received.

The following Thanksgiving, swimming with a friend, we thought we saw a huge turtle gliding past. When we turned to follow her and saw that she wasn't a turtle, we crashed into each other in our excitement. She was a large Manta Ray! I'd never, ever expected to see a Ray in this part of the bay! This beauty had a wing span of six feet. With such grace and power, she flew softly just under the surface. This was a true Thanksgiving for both me and my friend.

Each December, the Humpback whales came to "my" bay to have their babies and to mate. They seemed to frolic and celebrate their homecoming by throwing themselves completely out of the water, raising their immense tails to slap them on the surface, and waving their huge, arm like flippers as if to greet all who might be watching. I was so thrilled to see them that I tried to make a beeline to them and get as close in proximity as I could. That's when I discovered that this small bay was shaped like a giant bowl beneath the surface. I found reef walls of coral and lava rock blocking any underwater path I tried to make to get closer to these incredible Humpbacks. I thoroughly enjoyed watching them from the beach and from my third floor lanai, but irresistibly I hoped to get an underwater visit with them, especially when their babies were born and joined their pod in play.

Every day for two years I tried to find a break in the wall, to no avail. One day, as I started swimming back to the beach after another search for the path, a smaller sea turtle swam in front of me then turned and looked back at me. I accepted the invitation and followed her. I had come to know how fast the turtles could swim when I watched some tourists try to catch them, so I was thrilled when this one kept looking back at me and slowing down if she got too far ahead of me. Twice I thought I'd lost her only to find her swimming back to me moments later to be sure I wouldn't lose her. (I get to interpret her moves however I want. It's my story.) Finally, after swimming as fast as I could, I saw her glide through an opening in the reef wall! This gift moved me so much I had to stop, surface, and remove my face mask to wipe off my tears of joy. I looked around for landmarks so I'd re-

member how to return to this pass. Even though this was summer and my Humpback friends were in Alaska, I had to be sure I could find this again when they returned. The sight of this new underwater landscape on the "Whale" side of the reef revealed incredible sea creatures and coral that I'd never seen before. This alone was well worth the wait.

In September, Hurricane Iniki came and ravaged my island home. For months after, my snorkeling waters were so littered with broken glass and other debris, I could not enter them. My condo was condemned so I had to tie up loose ends at work and return to California before the whales returned to the island. Even though I did not get a chance to use my friend's path and get closer to the Humpbacks, I felt comfort in knowing they would be back.

The hurricane had turned the tunnel of trees into the corridor of twigs but my human friends tell me both sides have reached and touched each other again. All might not be as it has been, but trusting in nature brings me relief from my grief. My memory of this and all my visions of the sea spirits are still available to me whenever I want, just by closing my eyes.

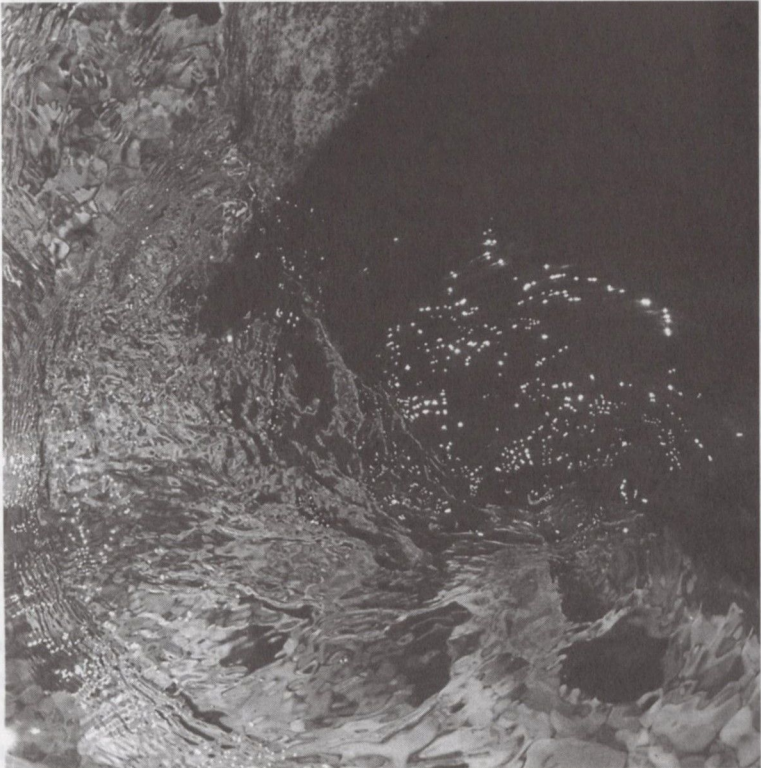


Photo by Morgan Greenwald

Unity Durieux

Night-Storm

Through the cracked seawall the sea
shuffles, thunder drifts over the bay,
distant under sheet lightning, storm
clearing its throat: another wave hisses
into the breach and concrete, bluish-white
in the glare of surf lamp, mutters out.
No reason, yet, for alarm. Thermos

uncapped, I offer the sky steam; the
battered seawall slumps but holds. I'm grateful,
what's a wall against the sea? The storm
rumbles home, decibels of eradication for
someone else; the fragrance of mint mitts
my hands, retrieving the flashlight from
an herb bed between dune windrows & sea oats.

I cup my face, inhale sand, speak salt
and murmur pumice: what was I afraid
of losing? Worst-case scenario, the tide broaches
us to death, timbers rattling like shellacked skeletons
atop a raft of waterlogged books; I tried living where
churches & gas stations erupt from cornfields,
pews, cyclones & insomnia—I'd rather die

from sea, float with a brigade of fallen leaves,
love in abeyance until I live again: real love,
not the stale unguent for boredom. Driftwood
torpedoes the wall, a rhythmic thumping; I will dry
them, cure them, burn them—in time I'll mortar
the breach and, nearly naked, hoist pail & trowel
to hot concrete, grateful for everything done.

Dianna Grayer

Nature's High

I was one of those people who had a difficult time allowing myself to enjoy nature. I often experienced nature by going to the beach, camping or going on a hike, which was nice, but they were just outings. I felt it was a waste of time and that I could be doing something more worthwhile. My time was valuable and I thought I should be spending it constructively like paying bills, cleaning house, organizing, or food shopping. Even watching TV was better because I could avoid bugs and the extreme weather conditions. I soon realized I was stuck in the rat race of stress and busyness with no time to relax and enjoy myself.

When I started therapy, I began to have dreams, and visual images about nature and in them were my power animals, turtles and eagles. Things changed as visions and metaphors of nature were constantly present for me in the process. I wrote a poem based on a vision I had about me as a turtle laying on the warm sand and my therapist being there trying to lure me out. Her coaxing felt comforting, as I needed to feel loved and special.

Early in my therapy I used the metaphor of the turtle to describe how I felt. The turtle shell was my protection and when I felt afraid and unsure, I could retreat into my protective space. Even though the shell was my protection, it also kept me isolated from others. So, my work in therapy was to let go of my shell and learn to trust myself with others. I had to face the world, and in order for that to happen, I needed to face me. For awhile the turtle symbol became my power animal. Power animals come from the Native American culture as they are connected spiritually to the earth and are cherished and honored as integral parts of life.

As I began to develop and learn about myself, I became stronger and no longer needed the protection of turtle power. Amazingly, I transitioned and inherited the strength, grace and wisdom of eagle power. My transition was seamless, like magic! I felt I had gained some special powers and that I was unstoppable in reaching my goals and was capable of anything and everything. I had a special connection with the Great Spirit. Everything in my life and within myself was very close to being perfect. As I read more and more about eagle power it was clear what I was feeling. I felt as if I was soaring. I had a natural high on life every time I ventured out in nature and especially by surrounding myself with anything symbolizing an eagle.

I collect eagle paraphernalia; greeting cards, pictures, figurines, statues, and toys. What's important though, is that I must be moved by it; the eagle must touch me deeply and spiritually. Usually at first glance I know the eagle paraphernalia will be important to me if I get chills and a heightened sense of self. I will then use the symbolism for inspiration, strength, courage, confidence and grounding.

Another vision and metaphor I used when I needed to be soothed was drawing pictures of me lying on the beach under a palm tree. Sometimes I would add a sketch of my therapist lying beside me. She added the nurturance that I yearned for from my mother. Whether I was with my drawing or alone without drawing, I always had the nurturance of mother earth to help me learn to console myself.

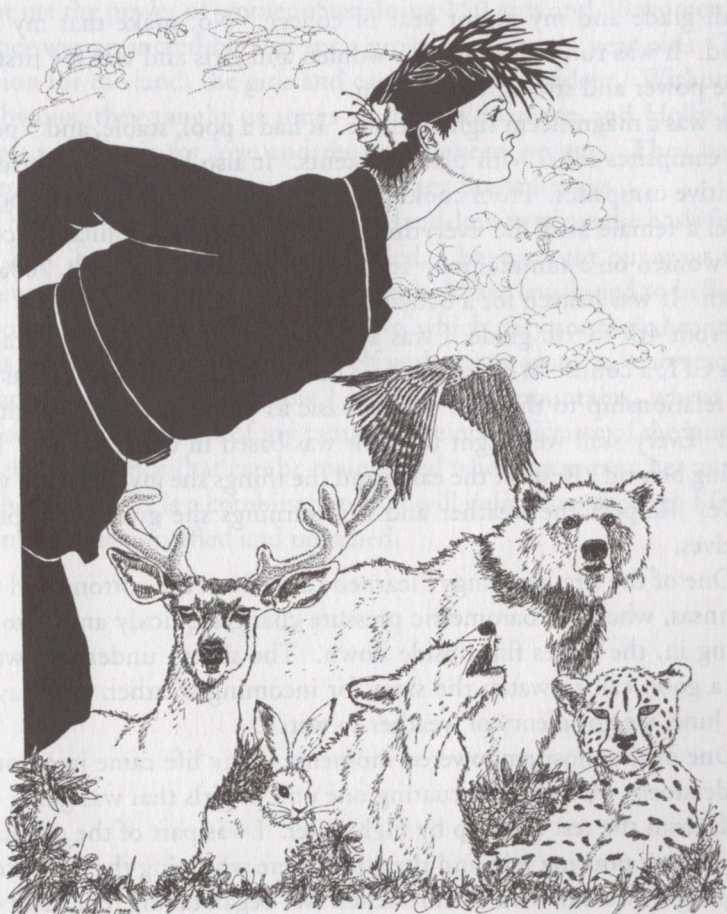
As I grew and matured on my journey toward healing, I realized nature was worth my time and that I had to make the effort to get out and explore nature's bounty and so I did! My visions gave me messages that I understood. Nature was a place to go and be energized. Whenever I'm in its beauty it gives me fuel to move, space to clear my head, and freedom to connect with myself, something I cherish.

It's amazing how my attitude changed and how my appreciation for nature grew deeply. The beach was not just the beach anymore, it was a spiritual place where I felt grounded and connected to myself, the earth, and the Divine. Green trees and rolling hills became more than what I saw at first glance. They were a sanctuary of peace, calm and healing, welcoming all to enjoy the many nourishments and medicinal powers they held.

I've learned over the years to appreciate nature and to use it for healing, comfort, and peace. I'm happy about my growth and I'm at my best when I'm absorbing the richness and bounty of nature. Whenever I'm in doubt or feeling low or off kilter I know exactly what I need. And without fail, I am rejuvenated and high on life again when I surround myself in nature. I sit quietly and listen to the sounds of the birds singing, the wind blowing, the waves cracking, the stream running, the trees dancing, and the crickets serenading in the night. I admire the beauty, especially in the springtime when the hills are a stunning green, the skies are a brilliant blue, and the vivacious flowers a mix of the rainbow. I feel the sunrays upon my body feeding me energy and I feel the touch of the trees, vegetables and fruit, the smooth driftwood, and the many textures of sand. It's amazing and mind-boggling to have such beauty at our reach. The picturesque views and sights are breathtaking displays of Mother Nature's gift to us.

Being surrounded by nature is a natural high. When I'm there I'm easily transformed to being high on life. Having access to nature's gifts is perfect and so very healing. I call it nature's medicine. It has the power to heal and lift the spirit and it is refreshing and rejuvenating to the soul and spirit. It makes me feel grounded and instantly calms and soothes the busyness that fills my head and the fear that blocks my heart.

I feel blessed to hold this knowledge and as eagle power guides me, I feel connected to the Great Spirit in unexplainable ways. It's an unexplainable knowing and I cherish my experiences with that knowing and accept how that knowing assists me in living a peaceful existence. When I look up into the sky and I'm surrounded by nature's beauty, I imagine myself as an eagle soaring freely above, connected to the Divine. This is definitely a high. When I'm there, I'm free.



Artwork by Sudie Rakusin

Ona Marae

My Heartland

My name is Ona Marae and I am a fat, disabled lesbian living in Denver, Colorado. I write to supplement my poverty level income and to express the magnificence and power I find in women in my life.

I remember standing at the highest point on the flag ring, morning after morning, evening after evening, summer after summer, memorizing the horizon and the land spread out before me. I knew there would come a time when my memories would be all I had. It was a Girl Scout camp in the Flint Hills of Kansas. Nestled in a canyon between three working cattle ranches, it was my home away from home every summer between fourth grade and my junior year of college. No, make that my home period. It was run by women for women and girls and was my first taste of the power and strength of women.

It was a magnificent sight and site. It had a pool, stable, and 5 permanent campsites filled with platform tents. It also hosted a multitude of primitive campsites. From cooking for 250 girls to running the pool and stable, a female staff did everything. They were predominantly college aged women on a summer job. In a staff of approximately 30, 70% were lesbian. It was heaven for a babydyke.

From 4th to 9th grade, I was a camper. In 10th and 11th grades, I was a CIT, a counselor-in-training. Then, for three summers, I was staff. Our relationship to the land was as basic as our relationships with each other. Every skill we taught the girls was based in conservation. Leave nothing behind. Respect the earth and the things she gives us with which to live. Respect the weather and the warnings she gives us to protect ourselves.

One of the first warnings I learned came from the cottonwood trees. In Kansas, when the barometric pressure changes quickly and a storm is moving in, the leaves flip upside down. The silvery undersides waving were a good call to watch the skies for incoming weather. In May and early June, we got plenty of weather to watch.

One of the most empowered moments in my life came in a horrible thunderstorm. We were evacuating one unit of girls that was going to be cut off from the rest of camp by high water. I was part of the evacuation team. It was pouring rain and the winds were whipping the trees around us. The girls were in their storm shelter. We began taking them 100 yards

away to the footbridge that would take them to another unit. One of the 12-year-olds fell in the mud and sprained her ankle.

Nearly as big as I was, I was not sure what to do with her. The director shouted in my ear, "Take her across the bridge and up the cliff steps." "How?" I asked, shouting also. "I don't care, carry her if you have to," was her response.

Hoisting the girl on my back, I slid in the mud. On the bridge, water was already splashing up on us. I crawled up the slippery cliff steps on hands and feet. I got there in time to put her in the pickup and send her off before I had to join the other girls. Had it not been for the unwavering belief of the director, I never would have been able to carry a girl that large that far.

Besides teaching me to love the land and camping, the woman staff taught me the power of women. Sustaining 150 girls and 30 women for a summer was an incredible feat for a group of 18 to 21 year olds. Their affection for the land, the girls and each other was evident. Without being obvious, they taught us songs by Cris Williamson and Holly Near, giving us the basis for love and respect between women. They had no men to turn to for the heavy tasks, and they needed none.

This mixture of woman-power and land-love gave me the basis for my adult life. Even after becoming disabled, I have sought out ways to go camping, ways to reconnect with the land. I have continued to believe in the power of women to do anything to which they set their hearts and minds. I continue to surround myself with strong women, who teach me that anything is possible. Now I live near the mountains, where I see horizons that remind me of my camp, of the magnificence of the land and the delicate balance that can be maintained when we respect her and live with her gently. It is a combination that will deliver me through life, not unharmed, but unruffled and untamed.

Gail Dunlap

Notes From the Nanny State*

*"The Nanny State": The Bush administration's derisive term for an ecofeminist earth.

MOTHER NATURE IS A LESBIAN
THIS WAS A SAYING IN THE LAST CENTURY.
COINED BY MY FRIEND, MARTHA WHEELOCK
WHEN MY SPIRIT WAS FAILING THIS TRUTH CAME OUT
OF HER LIPS.
MOTHER NATURE IS A LESBIAN.
YES, INDEED.

NATURE: MY PASSION AND MY HEART, MY OUTSIDE AND MY INSIDE...in the dictionary so many meanings for Nature, external and internal, above, below and mostly all around.

As a child, what hurt the most was the moral accusation that being a Lesbian was unnatural. I was a farm girl and precociously queer, in love with all things natural, my Mother and my GrandMothers, all female creatures, bird, beast, flower and little fish. I was seeing female affection all around me in cows and chickens, peach trees and cherries, kittens and puppies, boweevils and salamanders, seagulls and slugs. In the sunshine and the rain, in the thunder and the rainbow, I experienced the various faces of our beautiful Mother Earth...my Mother who fed me and warmed me, from whom I was never separated, by whom I was never abandoned, who asked for nothing, who always gave and gave and gave and forgave me. And so the miracles started happening.

In the last quarter of the last century there was heightened environmental consciousness, a kind of Earth renaissance. Until 2000 we had laws to protect the air and water, the forests and the delicate wildernesses. Land was set aside for conservation. The Animal Rights movement grew and their message was heard even about the suffering of farm animals. But now these safeguards are eroding. The Superfund is bankrupt. The Endangered Species Act in peril.

Wiseheart, where I live, is part of the RESISTANCE.

In 1985 my father died and after family war, I ended up with Wiseheart

(already named, I just added an e), an old, hilly farm shaped like a triangle with the topsoil gone, mostly hard pan and clay with weeds in the fescue and old buildings falling down on the edge of a rich piece of oak forest and a winding creek all along the hypotenuse. There were a couple of ponds full of minnows and water bugs: spring peepers and bullfrogs sang seasonally. We adopted a wild American mustang to live by the stream. Lots of insects like butterflies and bees, dragonflies and damselflies and lightning bugs as well as their biting sisters, the fleas, ticks, chiggers and mosquitoes discovered us and enjoyed our bodies while underground civilizations of termites slowly absorbed our architecture and brought us back to dust.

There were also staggering amounts of trash and debris, human made and left behind from which I could make things (is it art?) when I wasn't too tired from cleaning it up. When fatigue overtook me, I began to stop and think about what I was doing, what I was doing next, what I could do for the Earth. I realized that Earth has ART right in the middle of the word. I began to rearrange rather than throw away. After all, nothing can really be thrown away, it will just be hauled, expensively, somewhere else. Now there was creative possibility in the weathered trash. I was hearing Her voice regularly as I had various times before, at crisis times and especially as a child before the manmade world intruded.

There were out dykes in Ohio too, who were sober and supportive, Martha and Ruth, Sarah and Amy, Lisa and Sally who hauled me lovingly to 12 step meetings. A day at a time I got clean and sober, my mind was clearing and my body gaining strength.

An amazon named Cristina lent me the money to buy an adjoining farmhouse that we could fix up and live in. With the help of our New York sisters, Lynn and Lainie and Kamado we moved to Ohio and started to live back down the lane in the bush with the owls hooting every night. Then the plants started whispering to us. We bought field guides to the wildflowers and the herbs. We began to identify what lived around us. Weeds had names! and uses! I got a mower to make paths and discovered that the deer and coyotes used them more often that we did. We approached the Department of Agriculture (Goddess bless the Conservation Reserve Program) and developed a wetland in an abused, eroded gully. This spring there were white egrets visiting along with the ducks and the geese and the herons who come and go. The beavers built a lodge there last fall. We planted pine trees, getting them free and no strings attached from Meade Paper Co...another coup, another act of ecotage! Prairie seeds

for the great warm season grasses from Pheasants Forever at a reduced price with extra forbes (read flowers) for a thirteen acre prairie and best of all, a grant from Vassar College to restore an old log cabin where I can read and love and do my art. All these gifts coming to me in my 50s, crone time, after decades of addiction, dalliance, decadence, and despair. Now I drink herb tea and if I smoked it would be colt's foot from my long time partner's (43 years) magical gardens. Charoula has become a certified herbalist since we moved here and makes tinctures and grows perennial everything in abundance. Our main yearly crops are asparagus, hot peppers, peaches, garlic, basil and the summer vegetables.

With a wheelbarrow full of tomatoes, beans, squash, eggplant and brussel sprouts I can't feel like a failure any more. Charoula and I work together (and apart), our bonds are strong as oak tree roots and as colourful as those of the mulberry. Last spring I grafted two heirloom apple trees for the orchard. We will watch them grow as we grow older still, now 64 and 66 and in need of stronger bodies. Our vision is womyn on this land studying and serving and loving Nature in all her ways, all our ways... growing food —agriculture as a liberal art—making art from what is found here, resting and dancing and healing and transforming.

THE EARTH BELONGS TO WOMYN
 THE EARTH IS OUR MOTHER
 MOTHER NATURE IS A LESBIAN
 LET US OWN UP TO HER
 AS SOON AS POSSIBLE
 IF NOT RIGHT NOW!

The gravity, Her pull, is strong in the midwest. I have surrendered to Her. I have returned to Her.

“Living with the natural world in a way that allows continual ‘blessing’ remains our most complicated task” says Sierra Club journalist, Bob Schildgen. This is not a problem at Wiseheart. But I can feel the rumblings and the strikes outside this fragile sanctuary, the guns and the explosions, renewed attacks from the patriarchy, from Monsanto, from the fundamentalists who would destroy what is natural, from those corporations who make food political.

Yesterday a fawn is dismembered at the gate of Wiseheart. I stop my car to look. Delicate limbs at crazy angles, the spew of green gut, ears untouched as woodland lilies all splayed out on the asphalt. Fresh blood,

thick as mud, glistening in the sun. I search like Isis for the parts, collect them at the side of the road. Never find one of her eyes which must have been literally blown from her skull by the blast.

Of course it must have been a gravel truck, oversized, speeding, a monster on this countryroad, racing from the local quarry with 22 tons of limestone creekbank on its back...How much bigger can these trucks get? How much deeper can this Earth be mined? How much longer can this mindless greed go on?

I dream of magical powers. To reassemble this broken body, tucking the insides back inside, healing the torn flesh, putting an orb of moonlight in the empty socket and standing aside while the gleaming baby walks back into the cornfield to find her hidden mother. But this is not my art. Over my shoulder a shy buzzard sits on the rim of the silo...an ancient profile on a tower, a shadow from Catal Hulyuk...and after I am gone this bird will discreetly swoop and feed...Nature takes care of it all, She will recycle, She always does and the fawn will circle the sky and rest in a tree this night.

Because of the fawn, I answer the call of Sinister Wisdom Nature Issue. Thank you for the chance to speak, to urge you to answer, even to visit us at Wiseheart, Charoula, New Moon (mustang), Stella and Ruby (hens), Psyche and Lillith (stray dogs from Greece) and Speck (stray dog from Ohio) Kali and her cat daughter, Suecoe and Botox, their eunuch and all the unnamed critters and a beautiful black feline I sometimes see and me, Gail Dunlap.

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Roxanna N. Fiamma

Greetings From the Turkeys in Sebastopol (Solstice Letter 2001)

Here we are on Fran and Roxanna's roof. Two of us are looking through the window at Roxanna who is waving and yelling at us. I think she wants us to stop pecking at the window — little does she know we are pecking our reflections.

My sister decided to fly to the top of the dome to get a better view and to find more goodies to eat. All seven of us were on the roof, but two were busy at the window.

Phaedra is looking at us, she's an okay dog. She doesn't chase us — just looks— even when Roxanna wants us to stop eating the bird seed she puts out for the little ones.

We often hang out under the Monterey Pine tree, especially when it is hot or raining. Then we play. We love to play Statues. We stand very still, then we can't wait and jump up and we all go every which way, jumping, flying, running, hopping. Another favorite game is Chase Around the Tree. Sometimes three or four of us chase each other around a tree — we have rules, though. We must stay an equal distance away and we never even tag each other. Such fun we have!

We love our life on the land. We've been here since March. We were able to eat as soon as we hatched and follow our Moms' lead. While we roam our land, we always make little noises to let each other know we are okay. If one of us finds something especially good to eat, she runs from the others. We really don't like to share.

Around sunset, we all fly up into tall trees for the night. Our two moms (you see, we are two families of turkeys) fly up first, then the runt (white turkey—she's really not white but she has the most white on her feathers), then the rest of us go up. There's a fence between us and the trees. Some of us have a hard time remembering to fly up to a post, then over the fence up to the tall trees. We just keep walking back and forth and yelping for help. We finally get over and up to our roost. Then at sunrise we fly all the way down onto the land; we like to see who can glide the longest.

We know that the Lesbians here really like to watch us. We hear them call each other to the window with "Turkey Movies!" They also want to wish you all a HAPPY and PEACEFUL SOLSTICE and may next year bring you joy and contentment.



Yonnette Fleming aka Reign

Earth Mother

As woman, I connect to Earth as Mother. My physical body was created in the likeness of Earth. My inner waters are connected to the rivers and oceans, My inner fires of creativity burns like molten lava. My moon cycles are considered mysterious by many. I am reminded monthly that all mysteries are revealed through observing and working with the cycles of the Moon.

The geographical descriptions of Earth, the hills and plains, oceans, rivers, trees, wide open deserts, her cycles, the sweet musky fragrance or deep salty blues of ocean waters are all feminine symbols to me. As caretaker feminine, Earth is provider not only to the beasts of the forests, but to the forest themselves and all others who inhabit her body. The mountains rest gratefully on her shoulders as seeds germinate within her abdomen. Her sturdy strength holds together the family forest keeping trees firmly rooted in the severest of rains and storms.

My work as daughter of the Earth is to reclaim and recover lost aspects of the feminine. I seek to bring women together in ritual with the intention to heal our relationship with Earth as well as to envision and recover our "lost traditions and spirituality."

Working from a place of non-dogmatic spirituality we are reminded about the importance of our "relations" plant, rock and animal. This deepens our sense of connection with life and strengthens our ability to respond to world problems. Every seminar/ritual therefore becomes an opportunity to facilitate cosmic transformation through the developed awareness of Earth as the rich Mother that she is, providing her children with many treasures as opposed to doing what the prevalent patriarchal consciousness indicates: shifting the ownership from earth, despoiling, as it were, the Earth of her possessions and transferring them to man.

Susan Griffin

FOREST

The Way We Stand

The poor little working-girl who had found strength to gather up the fragments of her life and build herself a shelter with them seemed to Lily to have reached the central truth of existence.

Edith Wharton, *The House of Mirth*

The bank was dense with magnolia and loblolly bay, sweet gum and gray-barked ash. This was a secret, lovely place.

Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings, *The Yearling*

The way we stand, you can see how we have grown up this way together, out of the same soil, with the same rains, leaning in the same way toward the sun. See how we lean together in the same direction. How the dead limbs of one of us rest in the branches of another. How those branches have grown around the limbs. How the two are inseparable. And if you look you can see the different ways we have taken this place into us. Magnolia, loblolly bay, sweet gum, Southern bayberry, Pacific bayberry; wherever we grow there are many of us; Monterey pine, sugar pine, white-bark pine, four-leaf pine, single-leaf pine, bristle-cone pine, foxtail pine, Torrey pine, Western red pine, Jeffrey pine, bishop pine. And we are various, and amazing in our variety, and our differences multiply, so that edge after edge of the endlessness of possibility is exposed. You know we have grown this way for years. And to no purpose you can understand. Yet what you fail to know we know, and the knowing is in us, how we have grown this way, why these years were not one of them heedless, why we are shaped the way we are, not all straight to your purpose, but to ours. And how we are each purpose, how each cell, how light and soil are in us, how we are in the soil, how we are in the air, how we are both infinitesimal and great and how we are infinitely without any purpose you can see, in the way we stand, each alone, yet none of us separable, none of us beautiful when separate but all exquisite as we stand, each moment heeded in this cycle, no detail unlovely.

Reprinted with permission from the author from *Woman and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her*. Sierra Club Books, 2000.

Susan Griffin

Forest

*I wake feeling green grown over me
And the death of a friend in my dreams.
The dead one and I
float in the water.
Around her are all the flowers
I meant to give her,
as shame comes up a liquid
out of her mouth
and I hold her pleading
this is alright, oh
let yourself be comforted,
let yourself be.*

*I wake thick with memory and the paintings of trees.
The dead one, and the one who mourns her mother,
and the one whose
distance I mourn, stay with me,
and this story, recently told: that one twin brother
breaks a knee, and the other breaks another bone,
and the one breaks his hand.*

*Because her mother had died,
we touched the edge of hands, blessed, we
gave her a green heart, a blue heart
to circle her throat, her bone, we
made a hole in the earth and ringed
a tree in her mother's name.*

*Because of distance, I wrote letters
forsaking my old friend, I imagined
both of us free.*

*This is what we saw happen:
Two boys made mirrors
of each other's bodies
fell apart like petals
then broke bones to show
the world something
had happened.*

Waking I heard the painter
 painting the trees
 said
 nothing is dead
 not even a
 corpse.

And I remembered myself
 a small girl
 who talked to her dog
 whose tears streamed slowly down her cheeks
 as she whispered into the curling fur
 how she had a centre
 a brown ache like the cave
 in the trunk of a tree.

When I dream of the dead
 I ask the air now as
 silence waits in my ears
 do the dead hear?

Because daily I long to
 make a green arc back
 across distance. I imagine
 a pain beyond touching.

Painting the forest
 the painter said
 should you sit down
 the great, dry, green sea
would sweep over and engulf you.

Awake now, I feel part
 of the forest
 sunken deep
 in the green not
 drowning not dead
 but alive with the dead and
 the distant a cave
 in the centre filled with
 weeping and singing the old cry
 of longing, the old cry of loss
 come home.

Cynthia Rich

Roots in the Sand

The sand of the Anza-Borrego is good soil for two dykes who are growing old. Here the act of surviving is a celebration, a kind of joyful defiance. Like our aging, like our lesbianism, the desert doesn't cater to men's desires, and so is defined as lacking, as barren and even unnatural. The word "desert" itself is a stigma, like "old bag" or "dried-up lezzie." Men don't see our abundance, our passion, our beauty, our ingenuity.

Like an aging dyke, the desert thrives by stripping off what's unessential, merely display for others. Maybe we feel shame when we first turn away from the hetero voices that say, "You're too pale without your makeup," or the youth-worship that insists, "You look ghastly with your scalp showing through your hair." But those seeming losses gather excitement and erotic power from their insistence on truth, from inventing new definitions.

Away from the plastic, glass and asphalt world of San Diego, the process of aging shows more clearly as an affirmation of life rather than as a "failing." The creosote bushes that cover the desert have a history far older than the giant redwoods. I can't read the lines on the face of Whale Mountain or the swirls of rose, grey, orange, green on the boulders of the canyons, but they too talk of geological time.

More: this is a country where, to our eye at least, differences of age or even between the living and the dead are muted. Young or old, the quail, rabbit, roadrunner, coyote, kitfox, beetle, mourning dove, antelope, squirrel, bobcat, raven, cricket, lizard choose grey or greyish brown or black to please themselves and others. Their earthy colors are signals of survival, endurance. A bush next to our trailer looks like a mass of dead twigs, but close up we can see dozens of mauve flowers. You have to have lived the seasons through to know which smoke tree or hedgehog cactus is old or dead and which is just resting between the rains.

And then—as if out of that tenacity, just as the new barrel cactus pushes forth from the body of the old or dying one—come the remarkable bloomings.

I'm much more tuned in here than I used to be back east to the fact that spring isn't a date, it's a mix of conditions. After a rain at any time of year, the ocotillo sprouts green leaves along its grey stalks and even

sends out its huge Chinese-red blossoms to the end of its branches, so that when you look across the desert you see red fingers waving at you. And while it's true that back east some springs are more heady than others, this is the first place I've lived where, if things aren't right, spring decides flat out not to come.

But when winter rains have been heavy enough, spring on the desert is a wonder. You can't see most of it from the window of a car; you can't begin to take the measure of it in a day snatched from city life. Every half-acre has its own blossoming shrubs and flowers unfolding at different times, mixing in ways different from those of its neighbors. It goes on for three or four months and you can walk every day and still see flowers you never saw before.

It is flashy and bold—the golden brittle bush covering the mountains, the purple verbena mixed with dandelions spreading out across the desert floor, the brilliant reds and pinks of beaver tail and hedgehog cactus, the intense purple blues of smoke trees and indigo bushes aswarm with bees, the great gold tassels of the fifteen-foot-tall agave that look like asparagus growing almost as fast as you can watch, the scarlet chuparosa bushes named for the hummingbirds that are drawn by the color and stay for the sweetness. There are hillsides of blue and purple lupine and desert poppies and bright rosy purple monkey flowers. But that's just the beginning, for there's more to discover more slowly: the white desertlily which may have five crystalline blossoms open on one stalk; the pale pink and lavender primroses and bottle brushes; the rarer purple fivespot with five scarlet dots in its cup; the tiny white tidy-tips that mass themselves between the rocks; the tall pale bushes of the desert lavender where birds love to build their nests; and the creamy ghost flowers with their purple dotted throats, which are so hard to find until you see one and realize they are everywhere.

Baba Copper came to visit in springtime and later sent us a jeweler's glass that used to be one of the sacred objects she kept for her meditations. It brings me another world of amazement, as if I could dive down like a fish to explore coral reefs. Instead, I reenter the desert through the eyes of a bee or butterfly. The least showy flowers, or ones no larger than a pinhead, undergo the most powerful change. Spanish needles, whose tiny flowers look like pale dry clumps of grass, inflate into huge lavender starflowers with great deep purple stamens.

In spring, of course, the migrating birds spend weeks with us, joining our quail and mourning doves and our pair of ravens. Rosy-breasted

finches and yellow tanagers and orioles perch between the thorns of the ocotillo, and sometimes we are startled to see a pair of stark white egrets standing in the roadway or hear the cry of a night heron.

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The flowering of the desert in spring unfolds with that mix of the inevitable and unexpected, promise and surprise, that marks all creativity. It is wildly beautiful, but short-lived. It is not the desert's message.

We watch the petals, purple and red and gold, dry in the washes and the ants collect them into downy soft mounds at the entrance of their homes. The winds drive the seeds into the sand. Thousands of bees siphon up the nectar and hoard it in caves at the entrance to Moonlight Canyon, where it hangs like heavy bags through the winter. Without that economy, those connections, the spring would be one more gaudy show. After all, in cities, each mall is springtime, abloom yearlong with the throbbing of colors, surprising us with patterns that change almost daily, promising endlessly renewed life. And still it disappoints, consuming our lives instead of offering us provision.

We learn the desert message with relief and wonder. We know it from our aging, too, from watching seasons of change in our bodies, in our lives, but it's a lesson not of age but of life.

The animals know it. When we lived through our first season of rains, we were surprised to see that even in mid-August they don't rush to the new pools to grab abundance while it is there. They know that, in desert time, those pools last only a moment and that life is about the dailiness of survival, not the sudden excess. So deeply do they know this that the roadrunner turns the rock for the bugs beneath, but does not satiate herself with all she finds there; the rabbit nibbles on the saltbush and loves its tender new sprigs, but leaves enough behind; the coyote lives off the rabbit population but eats mesquite pods rather than pursue the last rabbit.

In the same way, we take in the abundant beauty that comes with spring, but learn to space ourselves with the deep, daily joys of the dry seasons.

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In the summer the light and the heat are one, and become almost a noise as they gather intensity. Even the shade of a dry bush matters.

I am surprised that everything on the desert makes a difference. A few drops of winter rain, barely heard on our roof, turn the air sharp

with the resinous smell of the creosote. A single cloud spreads a tremendous moving shadow across the mountain and the desert floor.

After all the ways I have been discounted or discounted myself—as a child, as a woman, as a lesbian, as a Jew, and now moving towards old—I find myself healing from the desert's measure of life.

Eva, in her red sweater, as she walks along the path to the mailboxes, and the raven calling from a utility pole against the sky stand out on this uncluttered scene with an odd equality. A family of quail marches, not through a field of grass, but across white sand, and the legs of the tiniest fledgling are distinct in their frail strength.

None of us here need signs like: "I may be a welfare mother, but I am somebody." "I may be old, but I am somebody." "I may be disabled, but I am somebody." Here everything is something, and every one of us is somebody.



I see an ad in a magazine for cassette tapes to relax by. A spring meadow, the ocean—so that's where technology has brought us. I laugh and say I'm going to market a tape called Desert Morning, and it will be absolutely silent.

I thought I'd been to silent places before, and I guess I have if it comes to that—but usually some brushing of trees or lakewater blurs the edge. The morning after a blizzard in the country perhaps—but that silence is more an absence, a suppression of energies. Desert silence is a presence, with a throbbing energy, a sweet passion of its own. It excites the same spot in the cortex as music, and it changes your body in the same way. I spend time listening to it as I would music, coming from a world where it is rarer than music.

Once music was in response to silence, complementing it, a counterpoint to it. Now it is in response to noise, growing louder as every year that noise is harder to drown.

Here we are hundreds of miles from a commercial airport, and except for a navy plane every couple of days, there's no sound of airplanes. I realize for the first time how that faraway hum is now a part of what we call silence in our suburbs and countrysides. Sometimes, sitting in our deck chairs on the sand, Barbara and I look up to see a tiny plane headed for the San Diego airport, but it's so distant we wouldn't have known it was there without tilting our heads.



On many days, when I wash my hair, it dries before I can pass a comb through it. After a walk, we drink three glasses of water, barely stopping to breathe. In such a world, the tasteless water from our faucet surprises us with its sweetness. The sulphurous springs of the Indian pool are more an acquired taste, though people say they're more curative. Sometimes in the evenings the desert women will climb the hill to fill our bottles with the clear, sharp-smelling water, as women have all over the world for thousands of years.

Our water is plentiful, at least in balance with those of us who use it. Odd to think that here, in the midst of more than a million acres of desert, these springs flow lavishly, even in summer, while in Boston and San Francisco they argue about how to keep the water trickling through their taps.

≈

During lovemaking, I'm a laugher. The pleasure washes through me and its excess spills out—luckily, so I don't come too soon. I laugh too when Barbara looks at me squarely across our dinette table and says that she loves me. These are not the same laughs as when friends visit and we laugh together about Ronald Reagan or the contradictions in the lesbian community.

Until I put down roots here, I never felt the laughter bubble from my diaphragm just looking out the window at a mountain golden in the morning light, just knowing myself alive and connected to a world that generously includes me.

Laughing, I feel purged of the desolation of my childhood in family, of the loneliness I pursued into my marriage because it was familiar.

Joy, not simple contentment, is a revolutionary act. It tells us what power, what rights live in our cells, and it insists that we not settle for less.

Reprinted with permission from the author from *Desert Years: Undreaming the American Dream*, Spinsters Ink, 1989.

Ruth RainbowWriter

I Am the Earth

You are my water in my lakes and rivers and oceans. Your waves rush against my shores, upon my beaches and rocky cliffs. You run through me, down my banks and encircle my islands. I tremble from within and your waves bring you in. You flood me and cover my skin with your wet body. You are my whitewater rapids, my still waters running deep...deep in my caves beneath my surface.

You are the air surrounding me; over my surface, my oceans and mountains. You give life to my being, my trees, my living things. You flow through my existence, springing movement of my leaves, my grasses, my waters.

You are my fire; burning desire. You do not singe my skin with your touch, but consume me in all my being when you are near. Your heat rushes through my forests, over my deserts; bringing forth new growth when you are through.



Photo by Morgan Gwenwald

zana

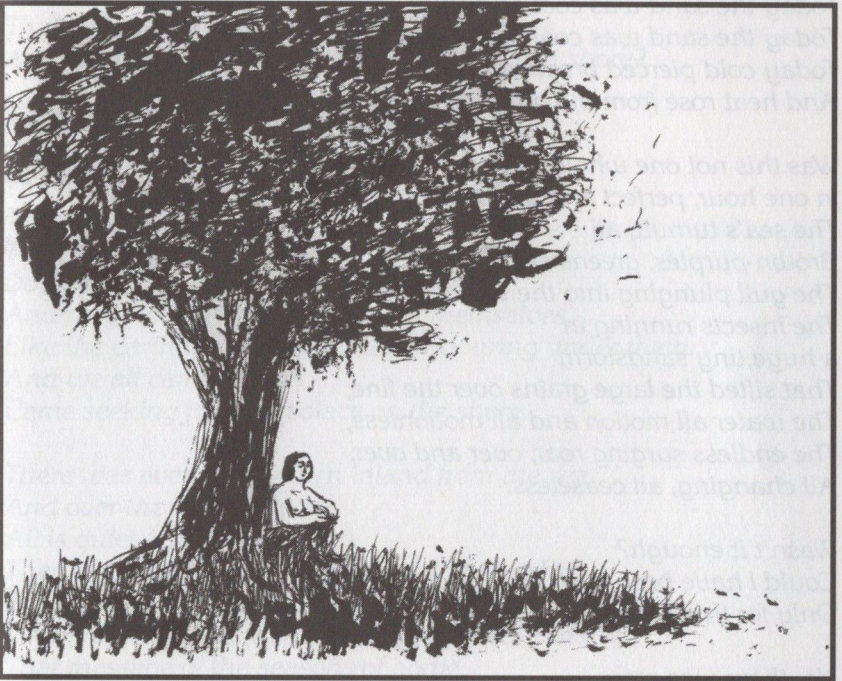
Silence and Solitude

the silence deepens with time. with time unbroken. my solitude becomes fuller, richer, grows deeper the more i feed it time and silence. i haven't reached a point of satiation. i keep wanting more, deeper. exploring. exploring this new uncharted ground: where i can go if i have all the freedom i need to go there. and for once disability isn't a big factor. i can go there, go deeper, in a small space and with small amounts of energy. exploring this two-acre plot of land, exploring it mostly by sitting on the ground, interacting with tiny new plants and small stones, insects, lizards, rabbits, birds exploring my inner terrain, revisiting half a century of consciousness on this planet.. these are my journeys.

the sky is a new panorama every day and my inner world changes subtly when i go back to past events with current insights. occasionally i spend time with other humans and notice how i'm stretching to relate in new ways. the fruit of many solitary ponderings on relationships, and life in general. how humans treat each other and how we relate to the beings around us. "beings" including rocks, clouds—all things have life in them as i slow down, immerse myself in long silences, in days that find their own rhythm and pattern and carry me with them.

these places i'm going to i could not experience in the spaces between working a job, or maintaining a busy social life, or being with a lover. each of those things requires too much energy in itself. each of them holds the opportunity to develop other sorts of depth and understanding. but they are valued and sought after in our society as solitude is not.

i've been thirsting for solitude all my life without giving full credence to that. now i'm drinking so deeply—it seems endlessly—at its well. i look up at the sky after a morning of sitting on the ground planting cholla joints, and feel bliss suffusing my being. i am so incredibly content and joyful to be alive, to be physically able to be outdoors and do this work/play. finally i make myself get up, go inside, eat something. i eat in silence, looking out the window, seeing the aloe i planted, now a firework of orange bloom. i turn the phone ringer off and take my siesta, sometimes sleeping, sometimes just drifting and dreaming in half-sleep, savoring the softness of my bed and the smoothness of my bare body, digesting my food and the thoughts and experiences of the morning. thinking ahead to what i'd like to do in the afternoon.



Artwork by zana

Alix Greenwood

The Shore

Pt. Reyes, California—May 10th, 2003

Today I walked barefoot upon the shore,
Saw gulls fly into the wind
And light shine through the wave.

Today the sand was cool and silky,
Today the sand was coarse and warm,
Today cold pierced breast and bone
And heat rose from the ground.

Was this not one whole life?
In one hour, perfect and various?
The sea's tumult, all
Brown-purples, greens and blues,
The gull plunging into the white foaming crest,
The insects running in
a huge, tiny sandstorm
That sifted the large grains over the fine;
The water all motion and all motionless,
The endless surging roar, over and over,
All changing, all ceaseless.

Wasn't it enough?
Could I have been born
Only for this hour?

No, there was more.
There was memory twenty years ago,
Young, unformed, confused,
I walked this very ocean,
Stared long at the colours of this sea,
Wrote them to my parents.
Now here I am,
In the same, changed, body
She, so different from me,
Was I; I must be tender of her
More than she was of me;
We've hurt each other so much.
But I made it back to the shore.

And there was the excruciating simultaneousness of life
 Sandstorms in Iraq, deadly armour
 Grinding through the desert I saw in Newsweek.
 Evil tangible, visible, rending, shredding,
 Shattering, sending a million screams and deaths and ashes
 Into this air I breathe by this sea;
 Like a tarot card, the wicked skull grins,
 And its other face is all bland lies;
 It mouths the happy fantasies
 That comfort the guilty conquerors -
 And what am I doing, walking on this stolen shore?

And there was all the mess of the moment -
 These people, come to worship
 The living sea, the vital air, the sun's fire,
 To tread ecstatic on the ground-up stones -
 They are all coated with scented petroleum,
 Downwind they reek of sickly poisons,
 And they keep producing more of themselves,
 Like the earth isn't groaning and labouring under them.
 And we all came in cars -
 Came seeking joy and solace on the shore.

There was even more - turn inland from the sea,
 And over-the grassy dunes
 All is quiet and still and hot;
 Then three geese fly honking over the marsh;
 Everyone pauses to watch;
 I think of the geese flying over my northern islands,
 That message of the seasons of home,
 The wild call of winter,
 The myriad subtle brown beauties of moors and bogs.

Every moment expands infinitely,
 World upon world within.
 It's more than enough, it's almost unbearable,
 Such lavish gifts and scorching pain.
 I have to sit in my car and eat and read a detective novel.
 Too much happiness, too much grief
 Ravel and tire me I'm overwhelmed.

*To hold all, all in the moment,
To hold it steady and see it clear;
To hold myself, myself in the moment,
Part but not lost, feeling but not drowning,
Constant but not numb,
Grateful but not cringing,
Alert but not seared -
I have no answers
But here I name it, and try to name it whole.*

This was just an hour, an hour by the shore.

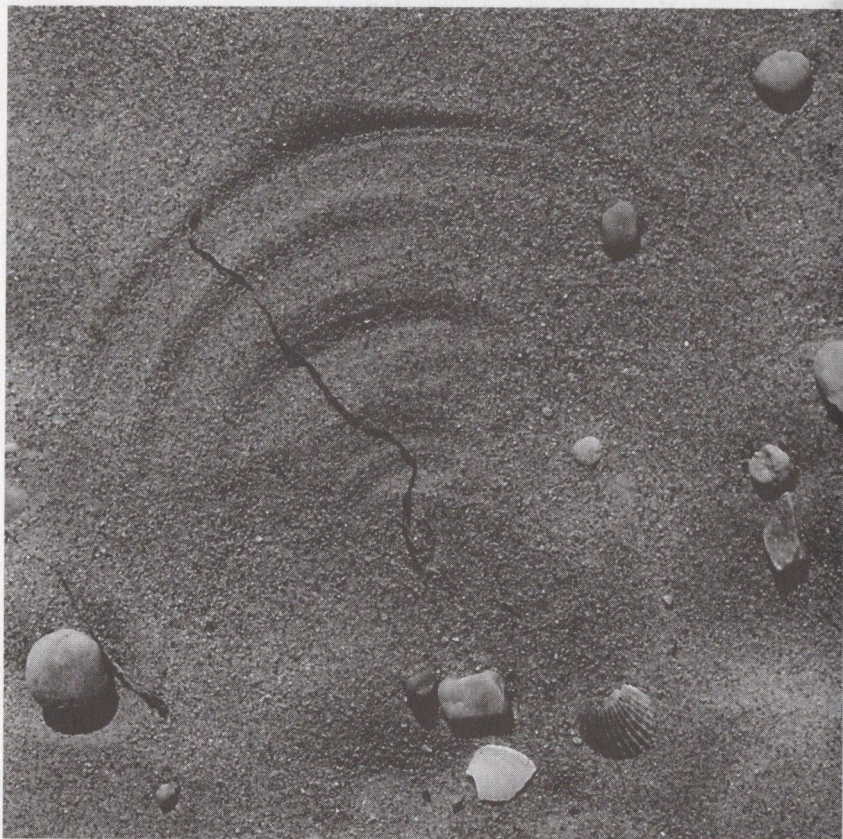


Photo by Morgan Gwenwald

Alix Greenwood

Fragment

There was one, pure, balanced, moment,
 My foot poised on the step.
 I remember the grey stone, the green grass;
 There were primroses and the rich growth of spring.

I paused, realizing.

There was a current flowing through me:

It was absolute presence.

It was - absorption. I was

Absorbed

In my task, my joyful tending
 of the garden that was creating.

I knew each plant,

Watched over them with eager care

And intimate perception.

I realized -

We sang together -

Silent harmony, a voiceless humming.

I don't know why they should care about me,

But they did.

I was in their ecstatic field

of knowing.

We were together in this work, this growing.

This was divinity.

The moment passed, but I remembered.

I was full of purposeful, instinctive love.

Then the bottom dropped out of my world

And I left them.

Other plants have overtaken them,

Or they have been eaten by sheep.

Probably some remain.

I dream about them.

I try to forget them, my heart's darlings.

I am here, a new life, a new love,

*Another world of plants, growing in a different soil.
Transplanted, I put down roots
That one day I'll have to pull up.*

*Life is everywhere, always;
But when you sink your spirit into a place, a time,
And then leave,
Does some of your spirit stay there,
And you go on diminished?
Hardy, maybe, and tougher,
Putting out branch and flower and seed,
But maybe always - a fragment less?*

Alix Greenwood

Ghosts in Our Mouths

*Three sprigs of yarrow,
Picked;
Their yellow flowers dried
To architectural definition,
Like the domes of desert towns.*

*Next to them, I lie the nest
Such tender construction,
Not quite a grave,
Not quite a corpse,
A place, maybe, of dying.*

*Cutting the citrus tree
(Under orders)
To a neat and foolish ball,
I bared three yellow mouths,
Who yelled and yelled for food -
Indiscreetly - dangerously.
Two mockingbirds waited,
Then fed and fed and fed
A few days later, I was told,
All was quiet, all gone.*

I'd like to think
 They take their chances elsewhere now.
 But most likely
 I killed those little birds,
 Made nothing of all that dedication.

I place the nest beside the yarrow,
 Picked, I think
 With that passing, acquisitive, reverence
 That made an altar of this plastic table.
 My heart twists for the skilful weaving,
 Soft licorice stems and lichened twigs,
 Some down, some dung.

The yarrow and the nest together
 Spell some message,
 Eternal, ghost-like, despoiled, indelible.
 If they're gone next time,
 Still they'll be there,
 A hidden shrine, or tomb.

If we could touch the breeze,
 Investigate the sunbeam,
 Slip inside the falling rain,
 What might we find?

So many spirits,
 Poisoned weeds and insects,
 Casual, daily murders,
 The spider slapped from her web.

What will happen as they increase?
 Will they saturate our breath,
 Our mouths fill with ghosts?
 And then, will we speak more wisely,
 Or die too, and vanish in the air?

Alix Greenwood

Into the Woods

Banks of trees rise on the hill.
 Their backs are to me.
 They are full, full,
 Like an in-breath;
 I am empty, wanting.
 Birds fly, but silently;
 The grey air soaks up sound
 With intense, withdrawing power.
 Deer run across the path,
 Just the same, no less,
 But either they or I
 Have become a dream.
 This is the face of the waning moon,
 Turning away.
 This is the tracklessness of the earth.
 This is not bright or easy,
 No promises, no clues.
 Nothing extreme, no howling gale,
 But quiet and still, still,
 Even in movement.
 I can stay here,
 Watching my loneliness,
 Hoping for the sun.
 Or I can follow,
 Not invited, nor uninvited,
 But following;
 Into the unlit woods, the colour of rain,
 The secret air, its damp and chilly tang,
 The grey and sombre splendour;
 Where things are unbeckoning, uninformative,
 Irreducibly themselves,
 And I am lost among them.

But, but: as their sap runs, so my blood;
 As their shadows fall, so mine;
 As they bend to the seasons, so even I;
 As the animals quietly inhabit this place,
 So I, once, did, long ago,
 And I, too, turned with the moon,

And I, too, died amongst leaves
 And was buried in the soil.
 Lonely, wanting, this is mine too,
 With all its difficulty and pain;
 So I'll follow, I'll follow,
 Into the woods,
 And see what company I'll find.



Zana

Henri/etta Bensussen

All Day I Watch the Sea

rolling in, flattening
withdrawing, constant
rocking, spilling
back and forth, a vast
surge of exhalations

and then at night
its clank, lurch
bang of waves
beating the supine shore
under the cold gaze
of moon and stars,
laundrywoman cranking
her overfilled washtub.

I leave my bed early
moon still hanging
in the west, the sea
a glimmering black jelly
like the sleek hide of whales.
Between dunes, across
wet, flat beach, dark, gritty, cold

down to meet the frothing
wash and swish of water
whispering in the still hour
between dawn and moonset
to know the mystery of its life

I lay myself in defeat
before its monstrous bulk to ask how love
can be a drowning, a surge, a ripping tide,
and I lost in the heaving swirl
of its expression.

Henri/etta Bensussen

Migrations

Out on the high slope of dunes
like a periscope stiff against the wind
she scans the ocean. Her eyes
ringed blue as the sea
check each trough of wave
every whitecapped fall and spindrift
thrown into a bleak sky.
She wants to catch a whale
as it migrates south to Mexico
and stare at its side-wise eye
looking back at her just before
it dives below. This dark shape.
She is dying to see it.

Numbed, waiting in the cold,
she succumbs to rhythmic cascades
of water, plunging snips of memory,
dredged up heaps of disconnection
like Valentine cards scissored
into piles of torn, drowned hearts
and the whale meanwhile slides away
silent, lost to her.

At home a white-winged dove
waits in an apple tree close
by the bird feeder she's hung there.
Far north of its range, not seen
in this county for twelve years,
still every afternoon it's there
through vagary, she supposes,
hunting some indescribable factor
unknown to either of them.

She could move farther north come spring
when the dove might fly south.
Escape the past by leaving it is her way
unlike the whales trekking
up and down the coast, dancers
looping a do-si-do, Baja, Alaska,
back again. She decides to stay
only if the dove doesn't leave.
It's like the many love affairs she's had,
balanced on the edge of commitment.

Sheila Harken Rosecrans

The Naming

It is midnight at Dolores Park;
I air on damp, cold grass
within the circle of red jasper
we've arranged for
the three-day full moon vigil.
I re-ignite the sage to smudge
fog-misted blackness
with red flickering
on water-polished ochre boulders
we hauled from that sacred bend
under the soft wind echoing oak trees
where the Eel river called
again to you.

Sharing the weight
we hauled the large stones
up a small ridge to
Hope, your truck.

You told me jasper was for courage
for your journeys.
Later you, Looks Far Woman,
Ojibway Woman,
carrier of the council message,
return to me out of the darkness
to tell me of my naming
as "Woman Who Carries Fire."

Contributors' Notes

Henri/etta Bensussen has published essays and creative non-fiction in *Camas* (writings from the 1996 Environmental Writing Institute in Montana), and other anthologies. Her poetry has been published in a variety of journals and books, including *Blue Mesa Review*; *Eclipse*; *Sephardic-American Voices* (Matza, ed.); and *Writing Our Way Out of the Dark* (Claman, ed.). She lives on the northern coast of California, home of fog, rain, and a few surviving salmon.

Dean Brittingham: Award-winning photographer Dean Brittingham is a long-time radical lesbian feminist living in Sonoma County, California and finding peace and love in the natural world.

Lynn Brown has always been a poet and lover of language, the creation of gardens, vision and touch with the intention towards friendship and healing.

Chrystos, writer and Native Rights activist, won the Audre Lorde International Poetry competition in 1994 and the Sappho Award of Distinction from the Astraea National Action Foundation in 1995. Her books are available from her at Chrystos, Box 4663, Rolling Bay, WA 98061.

Sonia Connolly resides in Oakland, California with her two cats and a large tea collection. She has been writing poetry since she was a small child, and was recently published in the poetry anthology "The Pagan's Muse," edited by Jane Raeburn. She connects with nature by tending her fragrant herb garden and walking or bicycling everywhere.

Tee A. Corinne: An artist and a writer, Tee A. Corinne grew up in the South; studied art, history, and literature (M.F.A., Pratt, 1968); and moved west in 1972. She is the author of one novel, three collections of short stories, *The Cunt Coloring Book* (1975), *Intimacies* (2001), and *Drawing as a Problem Solving Activity* (2002). Born a double Scorpio in 1943 (November 3, a birth date she shares with lesbian literary historian Jeannette H. Foster), she is currently finishing a book on lesbian art history.

Gail Ellen Dunlap: I am 66 on Wiseheart farm in south central Ohio. I have always been a Lesbian. and an artist and a naturalist. In the 50s I was a "Wolf Girl" at Vassar College; now I am a wolf woman in my personal wilderness which I never want to leave, except to go with Charoula, my long time partner, to our home in Greece. I can be reached at gaelend@bright.net.

Unity Durieux: I'm a (currently not practicing) chartered accountant (didn't know it could be so fulfilling to not do something!). I've published with *The New Orphic Review*, *Bryant Literary Review*, *Fireweed: A Feminist Quarterly*, *Indiana Review*, and the *Green Hills Literary Lantern*.

Roxanna N. Fiamma: I was born in Denver in 1943, Italian American, grew up working class. I came out as a Lesbian in the late 60s and as a Separatist in the mid-70s. I am a retired P. E. teacher; I recently started producing women's tea dances. I live in northern California where I enjoy birds, trees, ritual, and my home with my former lover Fran Day.

Yonnette Fleming (Reign) is a freelance spiritual writer and poet who contributes extensively to woman spirituality forums. Her subjects have ranged from the loss of feminine consciousness on Earth, nature based/ Goddess spirituality and women's health issues. Her writing aspires to shift and mobilize feminine consciousness.

Tina Freimuth: After twenty years of cross cultural, grassroots, violence prevention, youth work and community building experience geographically including San Francisco, Los Angeles, Boston, Northeast Washington and Great Britain, I feel at peace settling into these Southern Oregon woods. Currently, as Executive Director of an Ecofeminist nonprofit, WomanSource Rising, serving nature and women in three Southern Oregon counties, I am committed to working for our earth, our habitat.

Marjorie Gayle: Born and raised in San Francisco, it seems I was always in salt water. When I was 16 I left for Hawaii and lived with a native family. Years later I returned to raise my own children in the seaside suburbs of San Francisco. I hooked up with other liberal parents to establish an alternative school for our kids. Many of us explored feminism and some of us realized we were Lesbians and fell in love with each other. Transitioning to S.F.S.U., I found more support for my queer ways. Though I majored in creative writing, I changed to psychology for practical reasons. Initially I'd studied psychology to understand the ways my characters' minds would work. For years I've written work based non-fiction, but now that I'm differently-abled with Multiple Sclerosis and Fibromyalgia I have time to write for me.

Dianna Grayer, M.F.T., is a marriage and family therapist with a practice in Petaluma, California. She co-writes a monthly column with her partner of 26 years for *We the People*, a local newspaper that serves the LGBTI community. She has published two books: *Journaling: Getting to Know Yourself* and *Freedom is Your Human Right: Accepting and Honoring Yourself*. Soon to be published are *Journaling: Transforming Your Self-Esteem* and a book for children. She also has written a screenplay and is currently working on a novel based on the screenplay.

Alix Greenwood: I am an english lesbian, white, middle-class, 41 years old; I came out at 25. I work as an organic gardener.

Susan Griffin is a well-known writer and social thinker. Her work, *Woman and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her; Pornography and Silence*, and *A Chorus of Stones* has been influential in several movements, shaping both ecological and feminist thought.

A Chorus of Stones, nominated for a National Book Critics Circle Award, was a

finalist for a Pulitzer Prize, and won the Bay Area Book Critics Award. She has been the recipient of a MacArthur grant for Peace and International Cooperation, a NEA Fellowship, and she was awarded an Emmy for her play *Voices*. She lectures widely throughout the United States and Europe, and lives and teaches writing and the creative process privately in Berkeley, California.

Morgan Gwenwald has been documenting the women's/lgbt community for most of her life, compiling thousands of images of events, actions and people along with a pioneering portfolio of lesbian erotic imagery. Since leaving NYC and moving upstate she has returned to her exploration of fine art photography, finding joy in those deep and complex creative experiences.

Bethroot Gwynn has been living at Fly Away Home lesbian land since 1976 — growing food, tending road/waterline/buildings, creating theater, ritual, and writing. She is a special editor for the We'Moon Datebook. Her poems and essays have been published in several journals, and she self-published the chapbook *Under the Heart-Stone: Poems from a Lesbian Love Spell*. Her most recent theater work is *Women: The Longest Revolution. A Performance Documentary*.

Suzan Jantz is in the process of old-aging (with or without grace) along with her soulmate/partner/lover/girlfriend of thirteen years. Together they love and care for numerous cats, dogs, ducks, and horses in the mountains northwest of Redding, California. Suzan is a re-entry student at Cal State Chico University, majoring in English with a minor in Creative Writing. Her poems have appeared in *Watershed* and—when she was six years old—on the walls of Miss Vogeli's second-grade classroom. In 2003, she received CSU's Department of Fine Arts and Humanities Creative Writing Award for her fiction.

Undrea Jones: I am a twenty-three-year-old black lesbian woman. I am currently incarcerated at the McPherson Unit in Newport, Arkansas. I have been on this long journey since I was sixteen. I am also in a committed relationship and have been in it for almost three years. I love reading, writing, and my wife.

Sue Lenaerts: Long time partner and favorite photographer of Judith K. Witherow. Currently a computer consultant for a government contractor and publisher of *ALL THINGS WILD* by Judith K. Witherow through Twin Spirits Publishing.

H. Lenn Keller has been photographing for over two decades. She has worked in both black and white and color, and in many different genres, including documentary, editorial, fashion, landscape and portraiture. Her eclectic spirituality along with a life long predilection to look beyond the surface of things informs her work. She is currently working on a portrait series of "gender queer" people.

Hawk Madrone has been living on remote women's land in southern Oregon for almost thirty years, where she purposes to do Tai Chi as a way of life. With her

animal companions always nearby, she is a woodworker, gardener, photographer, baker, teacher, writer. Madrone's poetry and prose have been published in *Womanspirit*; *Common Lives/Lesbian Lives*; *We'Moon: Gaia Rhythms for Women*; *Maize*; *Harrington Lesbian Fiction Quarterly*; and in the anthologies *Our Lives: Lesbian Personal Writings*; *The Poetry of Sex*; *The Wild Good*; and *An Intricate Weave*. Her memoir, *Weeding at Dawn: A Lesbian Country Life*, was published by The Harrington Park/Haworth Press in 2000. Her work is forthcoming in the anthologies *Gardening at a Deeper Level* and *Small Town Gay*.

Ona Maraë: I am a 39 year old, fat, disabled lesbian living and writing in Denver, Colorado. I have written non-fiction for many years, including reporting for LIC (Lesbians in Colorado) in the early 90's and editing a newsletter for a safehouse for battered women and children. I have recently made the change to writing both non-fiction and fiction. I write to supplement my poverty level income and to express the magnificence and power I find in women in my life.

Jess McVey is an 86-year-old environmental artist, sculptor and painter living in San Francisco, California. Her work is included in *Damn Fine Art: Lesbian Artists* by Cherry Smyth. She was part of the making of the documentary video "West Coast Crones," produced and directed by Madeline Muir. McVey works to educate decision makers about using alternative energies; she encourages respect and responsibility for the Earth and Seas.

Mary Meriam was born in New Jersey in 1955. She studied 17th Century English poetry in school, and recently had her English roots stirred up by the English lesbian author, Liann Snow. Mary credits the LOVE Diet, and a new exercise program of vigorous stair-climbing, with getting her in touch with iambic pentameter. Mary's poems have been published in *Bay Windows*, *Lodestar Quarterly*, and *Harrington Lesbian Fiction Quarterly* among others. She can be reached at mmeriam@ipa.net.

Cheryl J. Moore: I began writing poetry in 1980 after being hospitalized for anxiety and I believe poetry saved my life. My manuscript is called "Waterpaths" and I have written three lesbian short stories, the second of which was published in *Sinister Wisdom* #49. Other publications include *Common Lives/Lesbian Lives*, *Sojourner*, *The River*, and *Sensations Magazine*. I haven't written enough yet about my black and lesbian consciousness.

Jeanne Neath has been a radical lesbian feminist since the 1970s. She was part of the lesbian collective that operated Spinsters Books and Webbery in Lawrence, Kansas in the 1980s and was the editor of *At The Crossroads: Feminism, Spirituality and New Paradigm Science* in the 1990s. She has more recently been one of the organizers of the Radical Lesbian Feminist Uprisings that took place in Kansas City and in the Ozarks. She lives in the Ozarks in the headwaters of the White River in a mostly lesbian-built house with her partner, Paula Mariedaughter, two rat terriers and three cats. She spends lots of time wandering through the oak-hickory forest

around her house and is fascinated with the activities of the many wild animals living their lives here at an edge of patriarchy.

Marjory Nelson is a seventy-five year old radical feminist dyke who lives in San Francisco. She's active in OLOC –Old Lesbians Organizing for Change, the History Committee of the Women's Building and a Women's Committee of the GLBT Historical Society.

Marjorie Norris is an ardent writer who belongs to two writing groups: Women of the Crooked Circle and Spiral Sirens. She was "Just Buffalo Poet-in-Residence" in 1999, and has taught creative writing at State University of Buffalo's Women's Studies Department and Chautauqua Institute, as well as participating in Feminist Women's Writing Workshop in Ithaca, New York and Southern Lesbian Writers' Conference outside Atlanta. She has been published in *Arizona Mandala Quarterly* and other national publications.

Ruth RainbowWriter: I grew up during the tumultuous 60s and 70s in Monterey, Tennessee. I have been writing since high school; my writing provides a glimpse into my heritage as a young girl growing up gay in the South.

Sudie Rakusin's love and concern for the Earth and Her creatures influences all of her choices and permeates her work. Rakusin's art has been widely reproduced in newspapers, magazines, and calendars and can be found in such books as *The Once and Future Goddess* by Elinor Gadon, *Seasons of the Witch* by Patricia Monaghan, and *Wickedary, Outercourse, and Quintessence* by Mary Daly. She lives outside Hillsborough, North Carolina, on the edge of a meadow with her Great Danes, surrounded by her gardens and a forest. View her work at www.sudierakusin.com.

Ida VSW Red watched cardinals with her grandmother in a Blue Ridge Mountain childhood, wild turkeys with her children in a Shenandoah Valley married life, and great blue herons with her lesbian lover in a San Francisco cronedom. A 71-year-old retired University of California San Francisco librarian and editor, she wrote and performed for twenty years with Mothertongue Feminist Theater Collective.

Cynthia Rich, born in 1933, is a long-time activist on issues of social justice, including environmental racism affecting Native Americans, farmworkers, and maquiladora workers. "Roots in the Sand" (excerpted from *Desert Years: Undreaming the American Dream* (Spinsters Ink, 1989), is based on the six years that she and Barbara Macdonald lived in a trailer on the Anza Borrego Desert. Rich is the co-author, with Barbara, of *Look Me in the Eye: Old Women, Aging and Ageism* (Spinsters, expanded edition 2001), and is currently seeking a home for *Mindfall*, the journal of her last years with Barbara. A member of Old Lesbians Organizing for Change (OLOC), she is co-founder of the Old Women's Project (oldwomensproject.org).

Lilith Lynn Rogers is a longtime writer, gardener, and lover of women—especially the latter. She has recently published a CD-Rom, paper-free book of her

poems and photographs (taken by herself and Sun Bell) called *Persimmons and Other Lesbian Erotica*. To order, contact her at Lilithrogers1@juno.com. She is currently performing a one-woman show about Rachel Carson.

Sheila Harken Rosecrans: A 62-year old lesbian, I recently moved to Seattle. Much of the last few years have been spent in San Francisco, Boston, Hawaii, and Los Angeles. I came out at 38 with three daughters. My volunteer experience has included MCC in Iowa, Boston, and Los Angeles (Ventura), the AIDS crisis in San Francisco, and I began the NE Iowa AIDS Foundation in the early 1980s. My poems have appeared in *Bay Windows* in Boston and quite a few times in *Common Lives*, *Lesbian Lives* before they stopped publishing.

Desirèe Seiver is a 25-year-old native of Southern Oregon. She plans to return to college in the spring of 2005 to work towards a BS in political science with a minor in women's studies. Her dream is to become an activist for the environment and women's rights.

Jan Shade is a hearty Norwegian hailing originally from Minnesota, currently living in Sonoma County, California. She is a writer, and has worked for over a decade with a local women's publication, as well as several other small monthly newspapers. She loves to read, and is passionate about Love, women, animals, and the environment. Together with her partner of 20 years she shares her life with cats, dogs, goats, geese, and fish.

Stacee Shade is a native Californian, having lived in Sonoma County for over 30 years, and coming originally from Paradise. She is passionate about her partner of 20 years and their large tribe of critters, their garden, and playing with the organic veggies that come out of it. She works with three nonprofit organizations and is involved in elder care and advocacy.

Sandy Tate is a working class, Jewish Dyke Separatist. She opened Feminist Horizons, the first Lesbian Feminist gift store in the U.S., in 1975 in Los Angeles. As a member of Old Lesbians Organizing for Change (OLOC), she continues to pierce the veil of ageism that renders old women invisible.

Barbara A. Taylor: "Each day demands that I write and that my fingers touch and feel the earth." Barbara has published prize-winning prose and poetry and is a regular at local Live Poets' evenings. Her work has appeared on lesbian writing ezines in Europe, USA and Canada, e.g. Nest of Vipers, Technodyke, Visibilities, Gayety, Dykewrite, The Write Dyke, Push, DykeDiva, Shady Lady Press and others. She is a member of Dangerously Poetic Press. In 2000 Barbara was invited to read to a small lesbian audience in Colorado and has been feature poet at several public venues in her home state in Australia. She aspires to publishing a book of poetry and is particularly interested in making audio formats of her texts to share or read with others around the globe. Samples of her work can be seen and heard on <http://batsword.tripod.com> and <http://www.realmoftheshadow.com/bataylor.htm>

Marinés Martini Teixeira was born in 1953 and raised in Belo Horizonte (BH), Minas Gerais State, Brazil. She is the first of three children raised in a midclass family. She attended the Federal University School in BH, where she became an educational technician. Since her youth she read voraciously—philosophy, history, literature—and began to write verse. Her themes were personal, emotional, ironic, and often linked to environmental issues. She has collections of short stories and poems and began writing for friends and to the ones she fell in love with. Her poems, technically written in a variety of forms including free verse and sonnets, deal with the experience of being female in a paternalist country. Near retirement, today her personal life has more interest than her work. Her intense interest in environmental issues began when she noticed a desire to preserve nature because of threatened areas and the lack of balance among peoples ecology. mmartini@gold.com.br

Kathy Scout Tomyris is a vision quest guide, independent business owner and student of writing. She lives in Santa Rosa, California. Contact her at scout@becomingsage.com.

Ann Tweedy's poetry has been published in *Clackamas Literary Review*, *Berkeley Poetry Review*, *The Drag King Anthology*, *Harrington Lesbian Fiction Quarterly*, and online in *Xcp: Streetnotes*, available at <http://www.xcp.bfn.org/summer2003.html>. She has been a featured poet in the online zine *QP: queer poetry*, which can be found at <http://www.queerpoetry.cjb.net>. Ann currently lives north of Seattle, along the Skagit River, where she works as a lawyer on environmental and natural resource issues.

Uncumber: I began writing fiction, memoir, and poetry when coming out as a Lesbian in the early 1980's. Women's Writing Workshops with Irene Zahava in Ithaca, NY and the Feminist Women's Writing Workshop based in the Finger Lakes Region of New York State have been inspiring and helpful in the past few years. I am a retired teacher of sociology. I met my partner 20 years ago and we have been together since that time. I have had work published in a couple of anthologies and a long poem in *Crone Chronicles*. I have an additional name, Lucinda Sangree.

Jennifer White: I live, work, and walk around being lesbian in Portland Oregon. I write when I feel so compelled.

Judith K. Witherow is a poet, essayist and storyteller. A Native American raised in rural Appalachian poverty, she writes about her life experiences with disability, gender, sexual orientation, race and class from a perspective influenced by her early heritage. Her work is widely published in scholastic collections, anthologies, newspapers and web and print magazines. www.jkwitherow.com

zana: i'm 57, jewish, disabled, a landdyke for 25 years. currently in search of other lesbians who want to live in community in a warm, dry climate. write to me at PMB 11200 s. sierrita mtn. rd., tucson, arizona, 85736.

Books Received

About the books received list: Most of the comments about the books are from the back covers of the books, the publishers' press releases, or quotes from other reviewers. We are seeking Lesbians who are interested in writing reviews for the next issue.

Girls with Hammers: A Novel by Cynn Chadwick. Alice Street Editions, The Haworth Press, 2004.

In the sequel to *Cat Rising*, thirty-five-year-old Lily Cameron tries to hold on to her carpentry business while grappling with a series of dramatic losses. This lovingly crafted novel portrays an independent woman's struggle to overcome obstacles and build the life she's always wanted.

Rosemary and Juliet: A Novel by Judy MacLean. Alice Street Editions, The Haworth Press, 2004.

Can two young women find happiness in each other's arms when it seems like the whole world is against them? This contemporary take on Shakespeare's classic play is about the turbulent intensity of first love and the conflict between the dueling ideologies of Christian fundamentalism and feminism. Margaret Cruikshank wrote, "This wonderful coming-of-age novel has everything—memorable characters, a great plot, suspense, drama, and humor...lyrical, political, and sexy."

Warrior Poet: A Biography of Audre Lorde by Alexis De Veaux. W. W. Norton, 2004.

This long-awaited first biography of Audre Lorde (1934-1992), the self-described "black, lesbian, feminist, mother, poet warrior," provides a complex portrait of an internationally recognized writer. Drawing upon more than sixty of Lorde's unpublished journals, the private archives of the poet's estate, and interviews with her family, friends, and lovers, De Veaux examines the cultural legacy of an extraordinarily courageous Lesbian who personified the defining civil rights struggles of the twentieth century. Audre Lorde's life (and her writings) continue to inspire countless African Americans, writers, Lesbians, first-generation immigrants, feminists, activists, outsiders, and cancer survivors. Carefully researched, this 446-page book includes sixteen pages of photographs, extensive notes, a bibliography, and an index.

NAKED IN THE PROMISED LAND

By Lillian Faderman

Reviewed by Sandy Tate

Born in 1940, Faderman unfolds her story chronologically, revealing her childhood anguish living with a mother who never forgave herself for arriving in New York from her shtetl in Europe, leaving behind siblings and extended family, never to see them again. We feel Lilly's pain in trying to calm her mother who frequently wept and wailed over the certainty that her closest family perished under the Nazi invasion of the old country.

Lilly takes acting lessons at age eleven hoping to become a star and retire her mother from the exhausting work she does in a sweatshop. They move to Los Angeles, close enough to the nearby dream of Hollywood. Entering the acting studio Lilly spies the owner and develops her first crush:

My heart shook. I'd never seen anyone so splendid-looking in the flesh, so statuesque on her high heels and long legs, her deep slim waist clenched by a broad golden belt. I stood at the door and her heavy perfume reached me. My head whirled (45).

Lilly becomes known as 'Lil'. She writes with sorrow of her mother's marriage of convenience. With no communication in the house, the close binds that Lilly and her mother once had receded like old dreams:

I'd loved her so passionately once, when we were the center of each other's world. And now she was stuck. We never walked arm-in-arm anymore the way we used to on the streets of the Bronx or East L.A. "Mother and daughter," we'd said in New York. I tried not to let myself think about it. Whenever I remembered I felt a claw in my gut... (112).

Lil grows up, modeling in sexy poses, sometimes nude, hoping to land a job as an actress. At 15, she's cutting and failing most of her classes.

She discovers the 'Open Door' and the 'If' clubs, two notorious Lesbian bars that I also discovered. At 16 she has quit school, realizes she's Lesbian, and hits a brick wall in her life. She goes to a counselor who tells her she needs to enroll in high school again, and get a college degree so she can earn a good living.

She becomes lovers with Nicky, a Lesbian her own age who is cruelly treated because of her butch appearance:

What my time with her was teaching me all over again was that I absolutely had to figure out how a female could arrange her life so the beasts couldn't turn her into carrion (189).

She has a brief, disastrous marriage to an alcoholic gay man, leaves him and enrolls at UCLA. Here, she lovingly pores over textbooks where at last she finds herself and becomes 'Lillian'. She has traveled through life almost numb with disguises; Lilly as a child, Gigi Frost as a teenage model, Lil as she grows up fast, and finally Lillian, the young adult going back to school.

Faderman describes her turmoil, agonizing alone in a family who try to make her feel guilty for not behaving as they see fit and for not understanding her. She's fought off 'coyotes' as she names the men who exploit her body as a pinup. She's endured relationships with men and women who are so flawed in character that she temporarily sinks with them as she struggles for survival. We read her graphic and honest portrait of torment, and we learn what a strong and determined will to survive can overcome.

The title, *Naked in the Promised Land* brings to life the vulnerability that Faderman experienced in the land that her mother and aunt immigrated to, the promised land that so many millions have yearned for. Faderman was literally and figuratively naked; floundering in a world that she almost drowned in, posing nude as a teenager to make enough money for acting lessons; trying to figure out how to live her life without destroying herself as she walked a dangerous path. The nude and 'come hither' photos in the book attest to the sad life she led as a teenager.

Faderman more than succeeds in school and later in life as an English college Professor. Her pride, her tenaciousness, and her clitzpah shine throughout this memoir. Brilliantly written, it is the missing piece I needed to add to my knowledge of a gifted Lesbian researcher whose books have inspired many.

The child Lilly couldn't rescue her mother, but the adult Lillian rescued herself.

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Lesbian Ethics, a journal of separatist and radical lesbian thinking, was published from 1984 -1994. There are many important, still relevant and luminous writings in her pages. Each issue had a theme, though there are several pieces in each issue not on the theme. The available issues are: Vol 2 #3 Sex, 3 #1 Magic, 3 #2 Separatism, 3 #3 Humor, 4 #1 Parthenogenesis, 4 #3 Daughter Rape, 5 #1 Our Mothers, 5 #2 Lesbian Community, 5 #3 Radical Healing.

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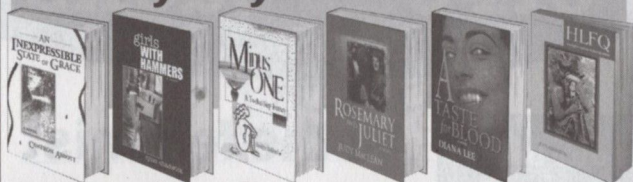
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Girls with Hammers

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A novel by Cynn Chadwick

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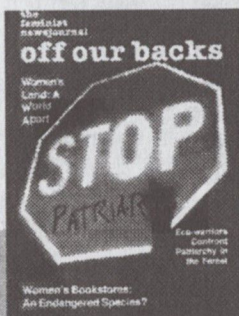
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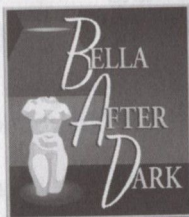
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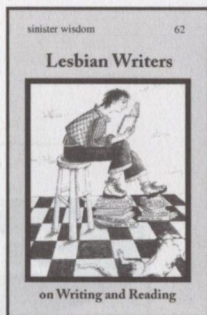
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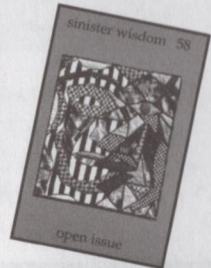
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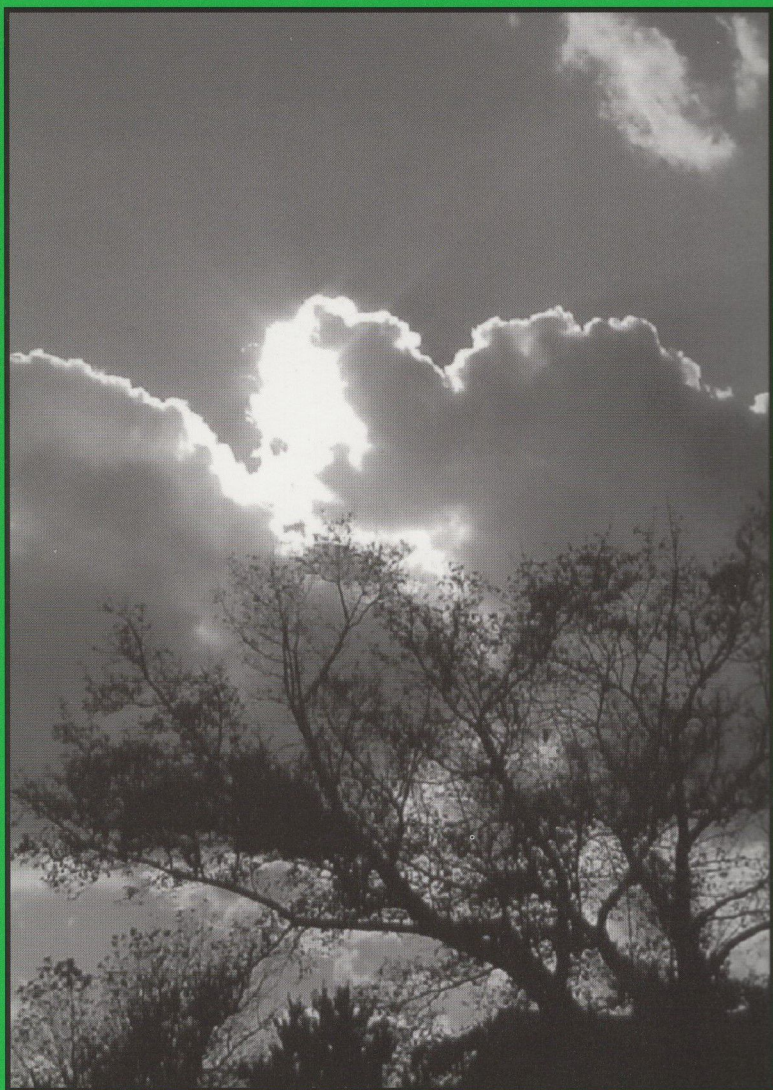
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