

Readers' Comments

"**Sinister Wisdom** is a wonderful resource for short fiction, poetry, essays, artwork, and photography. I highly recommend this eclectic journal as a place to get short work, poems, art, or photos published. They do a great job, and it's nice to have a lesbian journal back in business." -Lori L. Lake, Minnesota

"A delight to hold as well as to read...truly reflects what lesbians are thinking and doing." -Henrietta Bensussen, California

"What a delight to find the issues of **Sinister Wisdom** in my mailbox—understatement. There could be no better gift. The journal is diverse, inspiring, and oh-so-dykely." -Jae Haggard, New Mexico

Lesbians and Activism

Excerpt from an Interview with Rhonda Simmons, Vancouver, Canada

Some people would say I have many strikes against me. I am woman, I am a Lesbian, I am Black, I am a fat Dyke, I have a mental illness, I am a survivor, and I'm poor. But I see all of those strikes as opportunities. For me, not only to lead by example, but to talk about my experiences that have been full of adversity. I have used all those experiences for my highest good. I have what I want. And what I have is being able to communicate through my art of who I am and how I go through the world. Which ultimately connects in some way with whoever is seeing/experiencing my art. I've learned from my experiences and transformed them into opportunities for social change. Every time I do a piece in terms of political action, I am given an opportunity to learn more about the issue. This allows me to constantly reframe my perspective.

Excerpt from "*Activism from a Lesbian Feminist Perspective*" by Jean Taylor, Melbourne, Australia

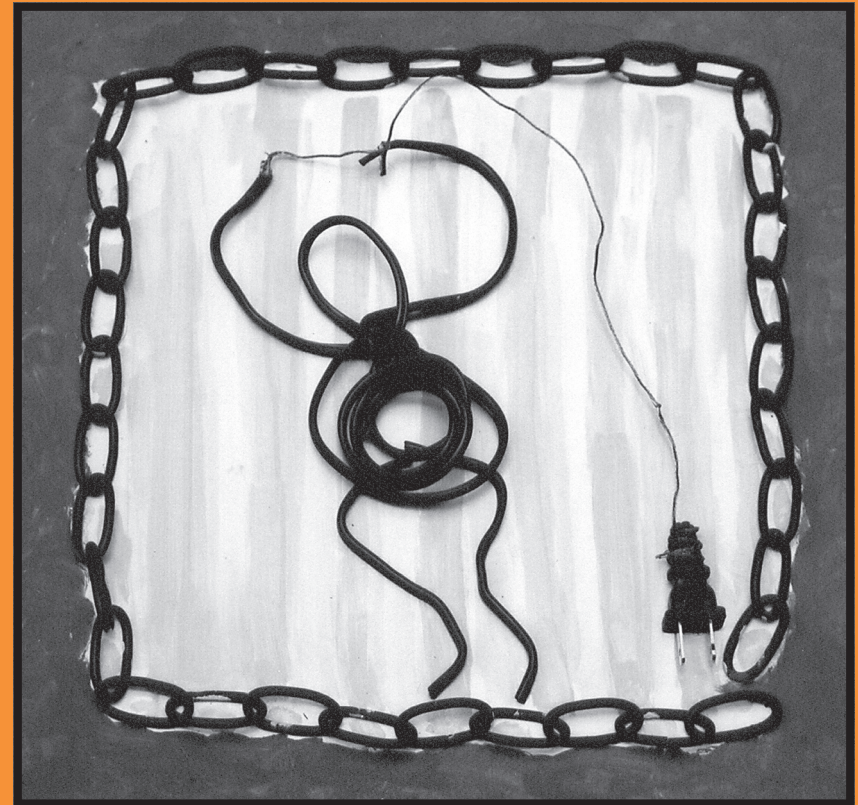
Whereas writing is my breath (I breathe therefore I write) lesbian activism has been and still is my life's blood. I count myself extremely fortunate that over these past 30 plus years I have had the opportunity not only to participate in one of the most vibrant and politically necessary revolutionary movements of our time but the Women's Liberation Movement has enabled me to instigate changes so I can live my life as a radical lesbian feminist in ways that suit my best interests.

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Sinister Wisdom 66

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66



Winter 2005-2006

Lesbians and Activism

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Board of Directors: Judith K. Witherow, Rose Provenzano, Joan Nestle, Susan Levinkind, Fran Day

Coordinator: Susan Levinkind

Proofreaders: Fran Day and Sandy Tate

Web Design: Sue Lenaerts

Mailing Crew for #65: Linda Bacci, Fran Day, Carolyn De Tierra, Roxanna Fiamma, jody jewdyke, Barbara Link, Moire Martin, Luna, Lilith Rogers, Jan Shade, Stacey Shade, and Sandy Tate.

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Harriet Ellenberger (aka Desmoines)

And Catherine Nicholson (1976-1981)

Michelle Cliff and Adrienne Rich (1981-1983)

Michaele Uccella (1983-1984)

Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz (1983-1987)

Elana Dykewomon (1987-1994)

Caryatis Cardea (1991-1994)

Akiba Onada-Sikwoia (1995-1997)

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

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Submission Guidelines

Submissions and correspondence for SW #67 and #69/70 should be sent to fran@sonic.net or mailed to SW c/o Fran Day, POB 1180, Sebastopol, CA 95473-1180. Submissions for SW #68 should be sent to Guest Editors Judith Witherow and Sue Lenaerts..See page 5 for details. Please read the submission guidelines below before sending material.

Everything else should be sent to Sinister Wisdom, POB 3252, Berkeley, CA 94703. Check our website at www.sinisterwisdom.org.

Submission Guidelines: Please read carefully.

Submissions may be in any style or form, or combination of forms. Maximum submission: five poems, two short stories or essays, or one longer piece of up to 2,500 words. We prefer that you send your work by email in Word. If sent by mail, submissions must be mailed flat (not folded) with your name and address on each page. We prefer you type your work but short legible handwritten pieces will be considered; tapes accepted from print-impaired women. All work must be on white paper. Please proofread your work carefully; do not send changes after the deadline. A self-addressed stamped business-sized envelope must be enclosed. If you want acknowledgement of receipt, enclose a separate self-addressed stamped postcard. GRAPHIC ARTISTS should send B&W photos or drawings (duplicates) of their work(no slides.) Images sent electronically must have a resolution of 300dpi for photos and art, and 600dpi for line drawings. TIFF's and PDF's are preferred. Include a short biographical sketch written exactly as you want it printed. Selection may take up to nine months.

We publish only Lesbians' work. We are particularly interested in work that reflects the diversity of our experiences: as Lesbians of color, ethnic Lesbians, Jewish, Arab, old, young, working class, poverty class, disabled, and fat Lesbians. We welcome experimental work. We will not print anything that is oppressive or demeaning to Lesbians or women, or that perpetuates stereotypes. We do intend to keep an open and critical dialogue on all the issues that affect our lives, joy, and survival. Please contact us if you have a new theme you would like to see explored.

Sinister Wisdom, Inc. is a 501 (c) (3) non-profit organization. We provide free subscriptions to women in prison and psychiatric institutions (20% of our mailing list), as well as reduced price subscriptions for Lesbians with limited/fixed incomes.

A Journal by and for Lesbians

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Notes for a Magazine

“For positive social change to occur we must imagine a reality that differs from what already exists.... Activism is the courage to act consciously on our ideas, to exert power in resistance to ideological pressure—to risk leaving home.”

Gloria Anzaldúa, *This Bridge We Call Home: Radical Visions for Transformation*. Routledge, 2002, p. 5.

Many of us once believed that activism meant demonstrations, picket lines, protests, street theater, sit-ins and public hearings. Now we realize that activism also includes protest songs, political art, resistance writings, radical teaching, private rebellions and much more. Some of us can no longer walk in the streets but we can write articles and poetry, give speeches, compose music, create art, and/or inspire others.

Some of us actively resist by using a very anti-academic voice in our writings, embracing the most unofficial language we can find. In Julia Penelope’s words, *“we are unlearning the lies of the fathers’ tongues.”* As activists, we at *Sinister Wisdom* are committed to providing a forum for diverse Lesbian voices by printing writing (and art) that is often not published by mainstream presses. We know that there are many ways to write; we will not force patriarchal language rules on our contributors. We believe that each writer knows best how she wants to write about her experiences and ideas. We are committed to publishing writing that is readable and interesting to all of us in all our beautiful diversity.

Some Lesbians have decided to separate from patriarchy, to detach, to refuse to put energy into challenging systems from within. They choose to be actively engaged in building a Lesbian world, devoting their love, energy, and thought into creating new ways of being. Sonia Johnson writes, *“I dream of women’s world, I remember it, I invent it. I love it and long for it and live in the memory of it as much as I am able. Caring profoundly about femaleness, I am loyal only to women, respecting and honoring us, awed by the power that is ours exclusively. All my thought and attention and energy is for women, and I rejoice constantly that I am one. Female is my species and my home”* (p.16).

We need all of us doing whatever works for us, following our own hearts and dreams. Kim River and jody jewdyke write, *“We deeply value all the forms of activism of all the Dykes who have worked and continue to work to change the world. We value the many things Dykes have done, and are doing to create and sustain Lesbian culture and community.”* (p.53).

Hungry for a better world, Lesbians are (and have been) actively involved in every movement for social change, peace and justice, and global awareness. We refuse to collaborate in our own oppression, the oppression of others, and the destruction of the earth. The contributors to this issue of *Sinister Wisdom* passionately write (and create art) about their fierce determination to make a difference.

We call upon all Lesbians of courage: we have important work to do. We know that we must never let us our oppressors define us. We reject destructive behaviors, foundations, philosophies, practices, and values; we separate ourselves from heteropatriarchal thinking and institutions and dedicate our lives to creating earth-loving, life-loving ways of being. We consciously dream of and work toward a peaceful world of equality, harmony, abundance, and safety.

“We are ready for change. Let us link hands and hearts, together find a path through the dark woods, step through the doorways between worlds, leaving huellas (footprints) for others to follow, build bridges, cross them with grace, and claim these puentes (bridges) our “home....” Gloria Anzaldúa, *This Bridge We Call Home*, p. 576.

Fran Day, Sebastopol, California



Banner commissioned by the lesbian action group, Lesbians Rising in Resistance, Champaign-Urbana, IL, c. 1984. 4' x 8', cotton. Banner by Moire Martin. Photo by Senecarol.

Upcoming Issues: Call for Submissions

See submission guidelines on the inside back cover.
Please help spread the word about these themes.

#67 Lesbians and Work

Forthcoming Spring 2006

Editor: Fran Day

#68 Death, Grief, and Surviving

Deadline: March 1, 2006

Guest Editors: Judith Witherow and Sue Lenaerts

If there is an event that touches our life so profoundly as the death of a loved one, the imagination has yet to fathom what it could possibly be. We all pay an emotional price whether it is the loss of someone we've admired greatly, the beloved partner of short or long duration, a family member, a cherished pet—or—the mental and physical pain of watching your own life slip away leaving you powerless to stop the loss of self—or—the daily toll on caregivers or Hospice workers. And sometimes, as Lesbians, we carry an extra burden when our relationships are not valued equally by others in society. As overwhelming as this subject is we need you to share your most intimate, and painful thoughts in dealing with the issue of loss. Our hope is that discussing what has or hasn't worked for you will ease the suffering of others. Non-fiction, poetry and artwork that details what can only be shared by those who have experienced this trauma. Correspondence and submissions for #68 only should be sent to: Twin Spirits Publishing, PO Box 1237, Clinton, MD 20735. Email to Judith at judith@jkwitherow.com or Sue at sue_lenaerts@hotmail.com

#69/70 Sinister Wisdom's 30th Anniversary Celebration Double-Issue

Deadline: August 1, 2006

Editor: Fran Day

Reflections, Reminiscences and Remembrances.

Reflections on thirty years of *Sinister Wisdom* and the lesbian feminist movement. Remembrances of experiences that shaped your life as a Lesbian feminist. Tributes to Lesbians (living and deceased) who touched your life and changed your thinking.

Details at www.sinisterwisdom.org or fran@sonic.net

#71 Call for Guest Editor(s). Contact Fran Day at fran@sonic.net

Audre Lorde

I See Protest as a Genuine Means...

“I see protest as a genuine means of encouraging someone to feel the inconsistencies, the horror of the lives we are living. Social protest is saying that we do not have to live this way. If we feel deeply, and we encourage ourselves and others to feel deeply, we will find the germ of our answers to bring about change. Because once we recognize what it is we are feeling, once we recognize we can feel deeply, love deeply, can feel joy, then we will demand that all parts of our lives produce that kind of joy. And when they do not, we will ask, “Why don’t they?” And it is the asking that will lead us inevitably toward change.

So the question of social protest and art is inseparable for me. I can’t say it is an either-or proposition. Art for art’s sake doesn’t really exist for me. What I saw was wrong, and I had to speak up. I loved poetry, and I loved words. But what was beautiful had to serve the purpose of changing my life, or I would have died. If I cannot air this pain and alter it, I will surely die of it. That’s the beginning of social protest.”

From *Black Women Writers at Work*. Edited by Claudia Tate. Continuum Publishing, 1983. p. 108.



Photo of Audre Lorde
by Tee A. Corinne

zana

...and ain't i an activist?

i was out with my new lover and some of her friends when someone got the idea to squeeze glue into the coin slots of porn paper racks. we all wanted to do it, but i realized i couldn't. having recently developed rheumatoid arthritis, i was just learning how much activity my swollen knee would put up with. on foot as we were, i was already near my limit. i knew i couldn't go traipsing around looking for newspaper racks, and certainly would not be able to run if we were spotted.

i parted company from the others, feeling sad and useless. my fun evening had ended as i sat on a bench waiting for a bus.

this was in san francisco in 1978. i was 31. i didn't know that my days of activism, as i would have defined it, were over.

in the next few years, i did participate in various actions when i could find friends to push my wheelchair. as a newly-out lesbian, i was thrilled to be part of pride marches - a new thing then. i handed out peace leaflets at an arms plant, counter-demonstrated against anti-abortionists picketing a clinic, protested u.s. intervention in latin america with others on a street corner.

though the wheelchair made these activities possible, i was also beginning to realize the extent of my chemical sensitivity. a severe reaction to an arthritis drug had put me in the hospital with liver damage. though i'd discontinued the drug (and all drugs), toxins that i'd previously been able to tolerate started to make me sick. i couldn't be around traffic fumes, tobacco smoke or perfume. public actions on the streets meant headaches, difficulty breathing, brain fog, and extreme fatigue for hours or even days afterward. now this is known as multiple chemical sensitivity (MCS), and there are support groups and plenty of people who recognize that that's what their illness pattern is. but for several years i only knew one other woman with similar symptoms, and we didn't have a name for it. i just thought the drug reaction had made my "allergies" worse. and, as with the arthritis, i still pushed my limits and thought (or hoped) they were temporary.

when i was finally able to get on permanent disability, i faced the fact that indeed it might be permanent. the upside was that i no longer had to live in a city, where jobs were easy to find. i'd always wanted to live in the country. i was reading *country women* magazine and *womanspirit*, put out by dykes in a small town in oregon. a bulletin board notice at the artemis café told me of a group of bay area wimin who wanted to live in a land community. i called! after some meetings to get acquainted and find out

what we all wanted, some of us traveled to check out wimin already on land in northern california and southern oregon. four of us eventually settled in oregon, and i had found my new activist calling.

now i know some dykes think of us landdykes as privileged escapists. maybe a few of us are. but in my experience, making community together is real hard work. i've lived on land with many wimin who were dedicated, as i am, to building an alternative to patriarchy. many were living frugally on small government checks, or by working low-paying jobs. in community we come face-to-face with all our differences, while trying to live according to principles that we were not taught as children. communities i've lived in made decisions by consensus - a lengthy, often frustrating process. we welcomed visiting wimin, sometimes a gratifying experience and sometimes resulting in big problems (like when a visitor took it upon herself to turn on the orchard watering system without asking for instruction, completely messing it up.) we attempted fairness, contributing to the mortgage payment by sliding scale, or by donations. some of us got newly politicized around race, class, age, disability; we aimed our anger at our landsisters cause that's who we were with every day. we longed for "family" and "sisterhood" with unrealistic expectations. our dreams had to be tempered with reality - or we had to leave.

after 14 years in communities, i left. ageing had combined with disability to reduce my energy levels greatly. i once was able to attend weekly land meetings, laugh (and cry) with landsisters, take part in group work projects, and still find energy for some writing and drawing. during menopause, i became desperate for quiet time to focus on my own changes, and was terribly stressed by the *eventfulness* of living in a group. a little garden work plus my own housework was all i could manage. in order to handle community correspondence and fundraising, i gave up my own creative work and much of my personal correspondence.

when my lover and i were able to move to a place of our own, the move itself was exhausting. during the eleven years that i've lived here - first with her and now alone - my activities have mostly consisted of daily maintenance. i drive to town for groceries twice a month, only get to social events if someone else picks me up, try to keep up with house and yard work.

it's harder than ever to think of myself as an activist. though i've been trying to establish a new community, there's been little interest, and i'm drained from the effort. am i in any way an activist if i'm no longer a community organizer? in the 80s, providing articles and graphics to many feminist publications was political work i could take pride in. today i'm

writing this in longhand; a friend has offered to type it. once in awhile i'm able to send out drawings i did years ago, but usually even the paperwork is too much. am i still an activist?

a friend who's more disabled than i am considers herself an activist. she talks about endless wrangling with social service workers to get the kind of housing, attendant hours, and medications she needs. these struggles may appear to be just something she does for herself, but actually they pave the way for others to get what they need. she is, in fact, educating the social workers, and while some may be resistant, hopefully seeds have been planted in their consciousness.

another friend has set up a number of groups that meet via conference calls. this addresses her own need since she can't leave her home, but it also has been a great boon to me and others less severely reactive to the toxins out in the world. when my old friend raven died last year, i was able to "go" to a memorial service held by conference call. i've also attended the annual landdyke gathering this way, and a group discussing lesbian spirituality.

all of us with MCS are constantly serving as educators. although we're more sensitive to toxic chemicals than most people, those toxins do affect everyone on some level. it's no surprise to me that the american life expectancy is declining, while cancer and other immune disorders are burgeoning. if i tell someone i can't be around her because her clothes reek of fabric softener, i hope she also considers what it's doing to her own health to breathe that stuff on clothes and bedding 24/7, and how all these chemicals are poisoning the planet.

so, i'm reclaiming my identity as an activist. i think of connie panzarino, a dyke who could only move her head and one finger. she wrote *the me in the mirror*, which educated me and others less disabled or able-bodied. i've always feared having to rely on assistants for basic needs like feeding and toileting. she took some of the mystery - and fear - out of that. i still hope to retain more independence, but she let me see that just as my wheelchair is a useful tool, her assistants were tools that enabled her to survive and do valuable work.

i never met connie, but i do know other severely disabled lesbians who have responded to their limitations creatively. aside from the work they do, these wimin are wise and beautiful spirits whose presence enriches the world. and maybe developing ourselves to be good people is a quieter form of activism.

every one of us will experience some degree of disability, if death doesn't get us first. i'm grateful for the work of other disabled dykes to create a larger space for us in the lesbian community, and i trust my own work also contributes to that.

Rose Marcario

Interview: Vera Martin: A Lifetime of Activism



Photo of Vera Martin by C.J.

Vera Martin has been a life long civil rights activist, union organizer and activist in the lesbian community. She is one of the founding members of Old Lesbians Organizing for Change (OLOC), a national organization for lesbians age 60 and over. OLOC's mission was conceived of in a meeting which took place in 1989 coordinated by Ann Ramsey. Its mission was to confront ageism wherever it could be found through activism, educational programs, dialogue and holding gatherings and discussion groups on a regional and national level.

Vera lives in what she describes as a "lesbian park" in Arizona, but this spring I caught up with her in Los Angeles to talk about OLOC and activism. When I scheduled my meeting I asked Vera how I would know her when I saw her. "I'm 82 years old," she said. Upon meeting Vera I could see she is the embodiment of activism against age discrimination. Her vibrancy and intensity, her direct and unapologetic manner, obliterated all of my stereotypes of what it means to be in your 80th decade. Our dynamic discussion ranged from racism, to

lesbian rights, politics, activism, to mothers and daughters. When we parted I felt I had been in the company of a very special being and that in some significant way, our meeting had changed and inspired me.

Rose: *Where did you grow up?*

Vera: In Louisiana with the Jim Crow laws of the south, but I came to California in 1939. I had just fallen off the turnip truck. I got married at eighteen and had two children. I believed California was a kind of paradise where I could be and do whatever I wanted. I couldn't have been more wrong about that. Racism was just as rampant as it was in the south, except in the south, you knew the laws, you knew where you stood. So it was culture shock for me on many levels.

Rose: *Did you have a traditional heterosexual marriage?*

Vera: I think it was. It was crappy!

Rose: *Did you leave your marriage because you were coming out as a lesbian?*

Vera: No, I outgrew him; I couldn't do the scam anymore. He was having a lot of affairs. I just didn't want to deal with it. After we separated it was a tough 2 – 3 years, some nights I would go into the closet and sit in there and cry, but I had been a rebel since I could remember. I knew I was going to survive.

Rose: *When did you come out as a lesbian?*

Vera: I was fifty.

Rose: *Tell me about how OLOC was formed.*

Vera: In late 1985 or early 1986 a few lesbians 60 and over were sitting around in someone's living room in San Francisco thinking how great it would be to get as many lesbians 60 and over together for a celebration. As a result in 1987 about 200 lesbians 60 and over gathered in Los Angeles at California State Dominguez for the first celebration. A book written by Barbara Macdonald and Cynthia Rich was really the catalyst for the celebration. Barbara was the keynote speaker. In 1989 a second celebration was held at San Francisco State with around 200 lesbians 60 and over in attendance. At that celebration a list of 60 names were gathered by Shevy Healy for an ad hoc committee in order to create an organization to keep us in touch on a more regular basis. The first ad hoc committee meeting was held in San Diego, CA in November 1989. At that time we came up with a name for the organization and the mission statement. I had to learn never to go to the bathroom during a meeting because when I came back I was the National Coordinator. We came up with our mission: to educate about ageism and to eradicate it wherever it was.

We did some things some people might think were childish. Like with greeting cards, they are disastrous. Cards that say things like “If you were a lizard, you’d be a belt by now,” and then you open them and they say “Happy Birthday!” We couldn’t destroy them, so we hid them in the back of the card rack so that no one could find them or buy them. So many women were used to being denigrated in this way. They had become accustomed to these kinds of terrible societal messages of what it means to be beyond your child bearing years. We would go to LGBT and other conferences and hang these greeting cards up with clothes pins and start a dialogue about ageism. We were very successful in getting women to feel better about themselves and to view what they have to offer in a new context. We did a lot of outreach to small towns and rural areas because many of these women felt they were the only ones.

Rose: *Now OLOC is fifteen years old.*

Vera: Yes, the struggle against ageism (and racism, all the “isms”) will be with us for a long time to come. We can’t let our guard down, we can’t become passive. We have to persevere.

Rose: *I read in a speech you gave, you said the biggest mistake of the last century was integration, what did you mean by that?*

Vera: Because it was a joke, it was on paper it wasn’t integration at all.

Rose: *What would you have done differently?*

Vera: Personally, I would have attacked housing patterns. So they couldn’t have gotten all the Blacks in one neighborhood, all the Asians, and the Hispanics. I would have tried to do something to hold the line on property. Instead of busing the kids twenty miles, I would have insisted the educators improve the schools where the children were.

Rose: *What about now?*

Vera: The social atmosphere now is worse than I’ve ever seen it in my lifetime and I grew up in Louisiana.

Rose: *Do you mean the Bush administration, the religious fundamentalists?*

Vera: Yes and the division between the races is scary.

Rose: *I’m forty years old so when I came out in Los Angeles as a lesbian it was no big deal to be gay, in fact, it was considered cool. The things that your generation fought for weren’t really in my frame of reference. I feel like I’m just starting to understand these struggles in a larger context. What is the future of activism?*

Vera: I just hope that our community recognizes it’s not productive to be Republicans right now. Look at the Log Cabin Republicans; I spend time

talking to some of them, but I don't see them accomplishing anything positive for us. We need to really put pressure on the Democrats representing us, starting with the school boards, and the city councils. We have to start on the local level and make sure we have people who understand us, who respect us and who accept us. My fervent wish is that somebody keeps the young people together, keeps them in an organizing pattern and keeps them aware of how hard and how long the privileges that are in place right now took to get here. They need to understand how many people were killed, maimed, and fired, and destroyed in order to get those privileges and to keep them. Because the privileges that were so hard fought for can slip through their fingers like sand, it's happening right now. We just can't let that happen, and we need young people to understand that and to organize, to communicate, to use their talents and their skills to move the agenda forward and to achieve.

A few months after my interview with Vera, I found myself at the local grocery store looking through greeting cards and thinking of her. I found the ageist cards she had talked about, and with Vera in my heart and mind I began to hide the offending cards out of sight of buyers.

For information regarding Old Lesbians Organizing for Change visit www.oloc.org. For historical information regarding OLOC, contact Vera Martin at Oldvera183@aol.com.

Cheryl J. Moore

Writing and Activism

Every poem I write is an act of defiance to the status quo, and the act of writing is an act of power. Writing poetry is activism in a fundamental sense. *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* defines activism as “a theory or practice based on militant action.” I write a lesbian consciousness separate from established society, founded on love and sexuality between women. When I write of love I write of a radical belief in women-identified-women.

I am not a theorist, I'm a poet writing my art and expression of lesbian experience. Writing is a discipline of imagination. Writing is risk-taking and discovery. I risk ideas and emotions in my poems, not knowing what to say until words flow in my mind. I make up poems out of feeling. An ideal is the rule of my words as I create a lesbian world. Love is the ideal.

I believe in lesbian love to the depth of my soul and I write what I want with a woman. I write for the act of writing and to be heard. This is my activism. I want to affirm and celebrate lesbian consciousness, to show all its ways and to speak of its joy and pain

Out of my solitary art I validate life, reality and imagination. I wish I could write every day. My only happiness is when I am absorbed in writing. Though I see how the world is, I dream of the ideal. Lesbian consciousness is my last resort to write about.

Writing has a spiritual aspect and the power to impact hearts and minds with integrity and honor. The activism of my writing strives to express that spirit and power that moves me.

Sonia Johnson

Up Off My Knees

You would think that, shot from the canons of the Mormon church into the thick of ERA politics 25 years ago, I might at first have been a little disoriented. But not so. I recognized almost at once that everything as far as I could see was also the Mormon church—Congress, state legislatures, the National Organization for Women, the media—and so I was right at home.

But not thinking my clearest yet, at least on one point.

Around this time, I received hundreds of letters from church women of various denominations. Many said the same thing: “I believe I can be more effective for change inside the church than outside it.” I knew absolutely that this was not true, and so replied to all of them: “You can’t change the church—inside or outside it. But by leaving you can begin to free yourself of its misogyny. If you do leave, do it noisily enough to wake your sisters.”

Having said this dozens of times, I myself proceeded to try to change the system from within. I passed out flyers, prepared and signed petitions, worked on telephone trees, got out the vote, went door to door, marched in parades. Lobbied, that is, in all the ways activists lobby. I know lobbying can help pass a law and seem to ameliorate our condition. But I came to understand also that, for me at least, any success, no matter how small, was too costly. It could keep my attention riveted on the men. It could con me into thinking it was worthwhile to kneel before them. In short, it could lull me into believing in and giving my fidelity to patriarchy again.

Just as the miniscule successes won by this gargantuan lobbying effort were beginning to frustrate me to the core, I awoke to the realization that I was behaving just like the church women I had admonished. This shocked me to a halt. I acknowledged to myself that, ultimately, I had no interest in changing men’s system—or, to borrow Audre Lorde’s metaphor, in merely redecorating the master’s house. I wanted a whole new house, an entirely different world. And as Lorde so brilliantly warned us, we can’t dismantle the master’s house using the master’s tools.

So with like-minded friends I turned to civil disobedience. Over the next 18 months we organized and participated in 26 actions: chained ourselves to the porch of the Republican National Headquarters and, later, to the White House fence; went over that same well-guarded fence with our version of the 39 theses to tack to the front door; stopped traffic on Pennsyl-

vania Avenue in many different ways; burned Reagan's speeches and other drivels in oil drums in front of the White House.

We were arrested, and arrested, and arrested. Spent nights in jail. Pleaded *nolo contendere* time and time again, got ourselves in serious trouble with NOW leaders. We had a wonderful time, but in the midst of it all I had another very sobering realization: civil disobedience is very much a part of the system. On our knees before men just as in all other forms of supplication, we do obeisance to the old world. On our knees, we cannot even dream of a new world.

Still, I organized a group of us to fast in the Illinois State Capitol in 1982. Not because I believed this would move Illinois legislators one iota toward ratification, but because I knew newspapers across the country would carry the story of eight women who cared enough about women's lives to risk their own. I knew by then that our messages to ourselves and other women had always been all that mattered.

That's why I ran for President.

After that, knowing we could no more change this world (meaning men) than we could change the Mormon church (meaning men), I took back my powerful woman's energy, got permanently up off my knees, and turned my back on men and their system forever.

Now my everyday subversion is simple. First, but not most important, I refuse to give men my attention. I refuse to listen to them, argue with them, flatter them, try to teach them, give them the benefit of a doubt. I refuse to care about them. I refuse to believe anything they say. I refuse to believe they have power when all they have is control through violence and lies. I refuse to participate in their system any more than I absolutely must to keep out of their hands. I refuse to believe I am a member of their species. I refuse to forgive them.

Not focusing on men and the embodiment of their essence we call patriarchy has, after all these years, become automatic. Every day of my life, however, I actively engage in an even more dangerous treason, one central to my life. I dream of women's world, I remember it, I invent it. I love it and long for it and live in the memory of it as much as I am able. Caring profoundly about femaleness, I am loyal only to women, respecting and honoring us, awed by the power that is ours exclusively. All my thought and attention and energy is for women, and I rejoice constantly that I am one. Female is my species and my home.

I am grateful for the activism—particularly the civilly-disobedient variety—of my early feminist life. It didn't change the men or their system, but it changed those of us who did it. It brought us together in power. It replaced

our despair with hope. It informed us of how much we would sacrifice for our own and one another's lives. I know it left me with deep respect for myself and my own judgment. Through it I learned how courageous I was, how unshakeable my faith in women, how unalterable my devotion.

That was enough.

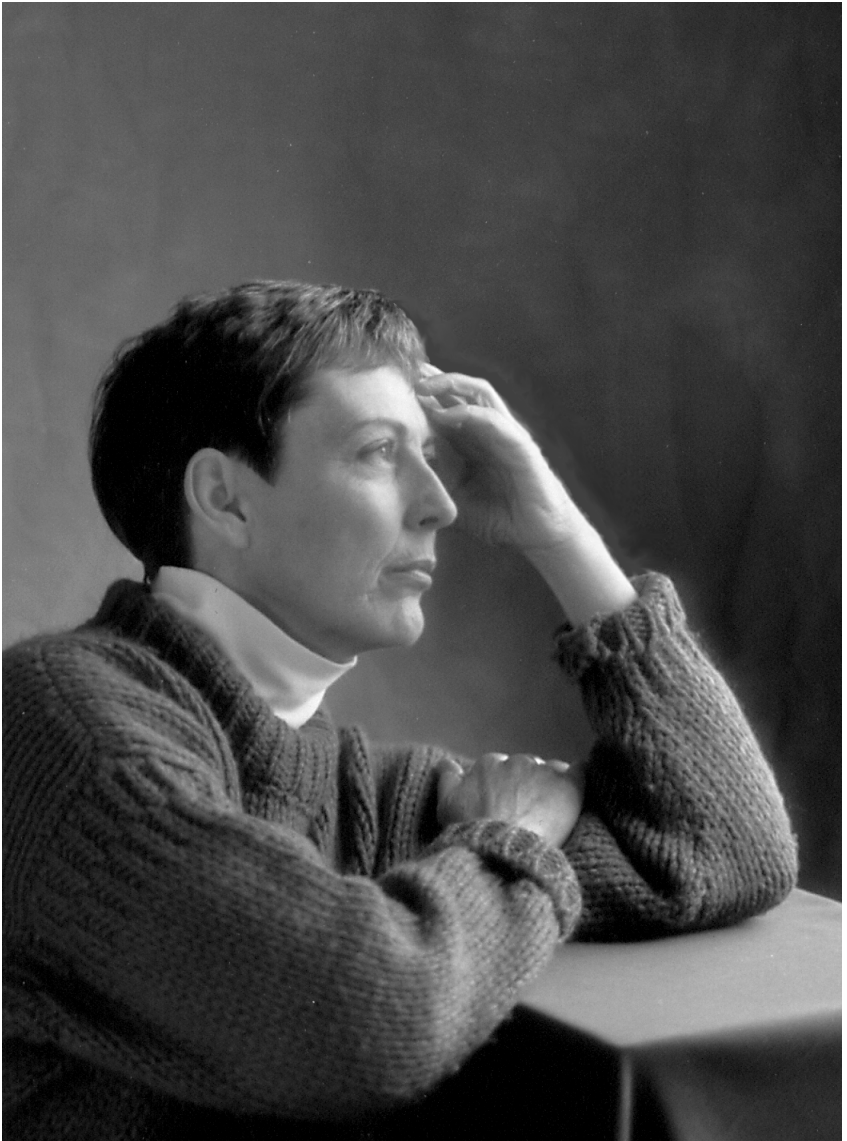


Photo of Sonia Johnson by Pat Stroud

Tanya Brannan

Activism: Doing What's In Front of You

I was born to be an activist – plopped down in the Jim Crow South, surrounded by fanatical racial hatred and senseless oppression in a culture where real women wore white gloves and always did as they were told. To top it off, I was given a Russian name at the height of the anti-Communist furor. How else do you respond to all that?

Like many of us, I spent my childhood and adolescence surviving my family and burning to get out. Moving to San Francisco in 1974, I worked awhile at the San Francisco Women's Centers (wrote the first grant proposal for what would become the Women's Building), but was driven out by the lesbian/straight split in a women's movement that was already imploding. But I *got* feminism. Deeply.

The Counter-cultural Imperative

I moved to the Haight Ashbury in its renaissance and was drawn into community organizing. My friend, Howie Leifer, started the Haight Street Puppet Theater, and together we did puppet shows on the issues confronting a neighborhood in the throes of gentrification.

The puppets were of Haight Street people everyone knew. There was a Howie puppet, the neighborhood artist; Duke, the archetypal hippie; and Dave Galaxy, the ultimate flash rock-and-roller who sang straight from the heart. There was a Tanya puppet, who was first displayed while I was on the road. (When I returned, people I'd never seen would walk up to me and say, "Oh, you're the *puppet*, aren't you?!") And there was Bill the Cop, with a visage suspiciously porcine, always trying to bust everybody for the crime of being free.

The shows were all about the changing neighborhood and organizing to preserve our counter-cultural institutions. They were about the Haight Ashbury Free Clinic and the community Thanksgiving dinner; free meals in the Panhandle and the increasingly intense police presence as they "cleaned up the neighborhood" for the yuppies. Each show sparked immediate community action, and it seemed whatever we could dream, we could make happen. We even got rid of Bill the Cop!

My favorite show was written in two days after a *San Francisco Chronicle* headline screamed, "Mindless Thugs Terrorize the Haight!" The "mindless thugs" were, of course, our anarchist friends who'd started a campaign of throwing bricks through the windows of the new yuppie establishments on

the Street, which were one-by-one replacing the food co-op, the Psalms Café, and other community necessities. The bricks were wrapped in a manifesto saying the merchants were welcome to be there if they served the needs of the community, but if they were just there to suck off us, GET OUT!

We had a puppet show scheduled at the Sacred Grounds Café that Thursday night. We threw out the old script, wrote a new one about the Mindless Thugs, and invited everyone from the anarchist bookstore down the street. (They accepted enthusiastically, saying, “And if we really like it we’ll bomb the coffeehouse!”) The place was packed.

Organizing With the Best

After eight years in the City, I longed for green. I spent a summer on the Russian River and never left. Ronald Reagan was president, and the U.S. was poised to invade Nicaragua. El Salvador’s civil war exploded. America began to feel a lot like the Vietnam war coming at you in slow motion. And I met Judi Bari.

One of the great gifts of my life is that I’ve had the opportunity to work with genius. The Haight Street Puppet Theater taught me the disarming power of humor and a lightness that lets you blast through with the truth when defenses are down.

Judi Bari taught me to organize. And to strategize. (“You always strike at their weakest point.”) And to keep a mailing list. And to speak in public. And to do graphic design and layout. And, most importantly, to hone humor and ridicule to the sharpest edge, and then know exactly where to aim it.

Joyce Higgins and Judi had started the local Pledge of Resistance group – a pledge to resist a U.S. invasion of Nicaragua, either legally or through nonviolent civil disobedience. There was already a Central America group in town – I call it the “Five White Men” – and the women took the idea there. But the men turned it down, so they parallel-organized, starting a separate group that soon grew to more than 1,500 women and men (*including* the “Five White Men”), all willing to put their bodies in the way of the war machine.

Judi and I spent a lot of the next years sitting at her kitchen table on deadline, laying out flyers, planning demonstrations, producing newsletters, talking Marx and Mao and anti-war rioting . . . and singing . . . always laughing and singing.

El Salvador

By 1986, I wanted to do something more direct than solidarity organizing. I went to El Salvador for the first street demonstration since 1979, when the Salvadoran army had opened fire on demonstrators on the steps of the National Cathedral and the popular movement had been driven under-

ground. Because of the international presence – 84 of us from around the world – the Salvadorans were able to stage a huge May Day march and survive. Tens of thousands of us marched through downtown San Salvador, the streets filled with soldiers and riot squads. The Salvadoran movement was out of the shadows and into the streets. I was hooked.

I moved to Guatemala and worked in and out of El Salvador for the next four years. The U.S. was pouring millions of dollars a day into bombing the tiny country into submission, and I worked as an international presence with the unions and the mothers of the disappeared, with women's organizations, and with campesinos displaced by the war. Day after day I held in my hands the photographs of the tortured bodies of women's sons and daughters – bodies cast by the Death Squads along the roadside like garbage, but precious . . . oh, so precious.

I sat in some of the very first meetings of the Salvadoran women's movement, envious of how much more radical they were, with guns pointed at their heads, than women here in the land of milk and honey.

I attended the first-ever International Women's Day celebration in a small village, a six-hour bus ride into the mountains of Guatemala. This was a village of widows, the men wiped out by the Rios Montt regime in the early 1980s. The widows' determination to organize themselves collectively so they could survive had placed them at the top of the army's "subversives" list. Still, the euphoria of being a part of an international women's movement outweighed their fear of the armed soldiers posted on every street corner, and hundreds of women walked for days to join the worldwide call for women's liberation.

Living in a country at war is a great teacher. It taught me courage.

Culture Shock

I never thought I would leave Central America. But on May 24, 1990, a bomb went off under the driver's seat of Judi Bari's car. At about the time I had moved south to Central America, Judi had moved north to Mendocino County and, doing what was in front of her, organized to stop the clear-cutting of the last of Northern California's old-growth redwoods.

As she hovered near death, her pelvis shattered by the bomb, and shackled to her hospital bed, I watched as my best friend was smeared as an "eco-terrorist" on CNN. I soon returned to the U.S. and got involved in the two areas of activism that have filled my life from then to now – two prongs in the struggle to hold law enforcement accountable to the communities they supposedly serve.

Taking on the FBI

I began working with Judi Bari on her civil rights lawsuit against the

FBI for their conduct in the bombing “investigation.” The case was a 12-year struggle to get the evidence of egregious “secret police” activity before a jury. Though we could never prove the FBI had put the bomb in her car, we *could* prove that they were on the scene in 20 minutes, and within hours had briefed the Oakland police about their “terrorist-type” investigation into Judi and Earth First!

We could also prove they lied about the placement of the bomb, lied about the nails wrapped around the bomb for shrapnel effect, never looked for the bomber, and had conducted an FBI bomb school on Louisiana-Pacific’s timberland less than a month before the bombing, where they blew up cars with pipe bombs and practiced investigating.

And we could prove that they had used the bombing as an excuse to conduct a smear campaign and widespread surveillance of the nonviolent environmental movement, in which Judi was a key figure. As we pored through the thousands of pages of FBI files, it was clear that the FBI’s COINTELPRO (Counter-Intelligence Program) that had decimated the liberation movements of the 1970s, was alive and well in the 1990s. It had to be exposed.

After twelve years of fighting toe-to-toe with the forces of evil, in 2002 a federal jury in Oakland, California was finally able to hear the case. And at the end of the six-week trial, the jury came back with a \$4.4 million verdict against the FBI and Oakland police, one of the largest awards ever in a civil rights case against the FBI.

Sadly, Judi Bari wasn’t there for the victory, dead of breast cancer in 1997.

Purple Berets: Women Defending Women

At the same time I started working on the bombing case, I also started a local women’s group called the Purple Berets. My time in Guatemala had made one thing clear: if we’re going to change the world, we have to change women’s world.

The Clarence Thomas confirmation hearings were going on, and millions of other women and I spent one very long weekend watching the entire U.S. Senate (all men) giving women the big “screw-you” on national television, as sexual harassment moved out of the closet and onto the Supreme Court.

I was struck by how much courage it took for Anita Hill, a lone black woman, to stand up to that torrent of white male hatred and oppression. How many women had the courage to do that . . . alone? And so the Purple Berets were born, with the idea of creating a visible, protective force to stand with women standing up against the patriarchy in whatever form.

We were very quickly drawn into a local rape case, dropped by the district attorney on the eve of trial. We demanded the DA re-open the investigation, saw the rapist charged (only after committing *another* sexual assault), and haunted his every courtroom appearance. Despite the fact that police and prosecutors knew Noles had been making sex slaves of immigrant women for years, this time more than 100 women were there to make sure he didn't get away with it again. In the end, he was convicted and sentenced to 38 years in prison.

Criminal Injustice

The Noles case opened our eyes to the misogyny that pervades the criminal justice system. Over the next years, as we worked case after case of violence against women, it became clear that the problem wasn't one of a lazy prosecutor here, a sexist cop there. Instead we saw a system that deep-down didn't see violence against women as a crime . . . certainly not a serious crime . . . and jumped at every opportunity to dump these cases off the back of the plate.

We also saw just how much power the criminal justice system wields over women's lives. As we frequented the welfare office during a petition campaign to demand increased prosecution of rapists and batterers, we saw the direct connection between sexist violence and women's poverty and homelessness. And for a system with so much impact on women, it was totally unaccountable to us. It was that we set out to change.

Using humor, strategic organizing, and audacious direct action, we rallied public support and women's insistence on equal access to law enforcement. By 1996, we'd spent five years becoming experts on the criminal justice system, getting a new domestic violence policy adopted by the county's police agencies, and repeatedly holding police and the district attorney up to ridicule for their complicity in violence against women.

The Murder of María Teresa Macias

And then, on April 15, 1996, María Teresa Macias was murdered by her estranged husband, Avelino, who then shot her mother, Sara, before turning the gun on himself. Knowing that domestic violence homicide rarely comes from out of nowhere, but only after repeated calls to law enforcement, we immediately began investigating Teresa's prior contacts with the Sonoma County Sheriff. What we found surprised even us.

Teresa's first contact with the sheriff came with her report of Avelino's sexual abuse of herself and her three young children. The sheriff blew it off. By this time she'd left Avelino, gone to a shelter, and gotten a restraining order. From then until her death, Teresa and others called the sheriff more than 22 times to report restraining order violations, stalking and threats to

kill. Despite a mandated arrest policy for restraining order violations, deputies never made an arrest.

Not surprisingly, Avelino took the sheriff's inaction as an official stamp of approval, and escalated his stalking and obsession, finally tracking Teresa down and murdering her. Clearly, the sheriff's hands were washed in Teresa's blood just as surely as Avelino's were.

Because of the groundwork we'd laid with five years of consciousness-raising around male violence against women, with the Macias case the community was forced to recognize that domestic violence is *always* potentially lethal. Hundreds of women demonstrated, demanded investigations, skewered the sheriff's department in the press, and helped Teresa's family to file a landmark civil rights lawsuit against Sheriff Mark Ihde for failure to provide equal protection to women.

In 2000, we won a key appellate court decision, setting the legal precedent once and for all that domestic violence victims have a constitutional right to effective law enforcement protection. And finally, six years after the lawsuit was filed, the sheriff agreed to a \$1 million settlement, literally on the courthouse steps.

The More Things Change . . .

Since Teresa's death, we've seen the formation of domestic violence teams in the major police agencies, a new district attorney and sheriff, huge increases in services for victims, a revamping of the restraining order system, and violence against women become a major issue in local political campaigns.

And still the women die. Every day we talk with women likely to be the next Teresa Macias, scorned and threatened by police as well as their batterers. We've worked with scores of women whose batterers *are* police officers, and confronted the near-insurmountable barriers they face. And we've worked with women hounded from their careers by virulent sexual harassment – women working in law enforcement, in casinos, in the so-called “progressive” public radio movement.

But because of the doors we've kicked open over the last 14 years, these women stand on firmer ground as they fight . . . not alone now, but arm-in-arm with their sisters in struggle . . . the “good fight” for women's safety and full equality.

At a time when women's rights are under attack on all fronts, and with government trying to convince us that activism is meaningless, Purple Berets is living proof that a small group of people, committed to a nonviolent, feminist revolution, can truly change the world.

It's an honor to be a part of *that* revolution.

Margaret Sloan-Hunter

Memory

*I remember a Movement, once
where we took great pleasure
in small triumphs
and challenged language
and doors being held open;
and everything mattered.
and we viewed each injustice
as political, because it
personally affected our very lives.*

*I remember a Movement, once
where CR groups were an understood
prerequisite
to being on the line and
we protested words, songs, and
images we found offensive.*

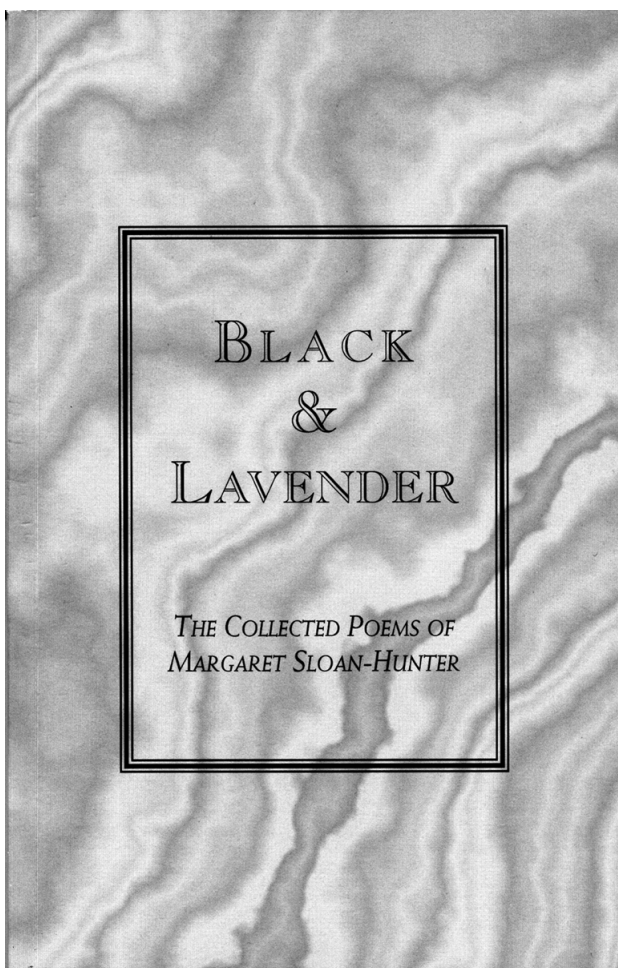
*I remember a Movement, once
where we were not afraid to say “no” to men
and keep them out of our too-small spaces
we created
in order to live.*

*I remember a Movement, once
where thousands of women
marched on August 26th
across the land
and now that day passes
with hardly a sound.*

*I remember a Movement, once
where “Feminist” needed
no adjective
and Lesbians slept with women
and were in the vanguard
of all our changes.*

*I remember a Movement, once
where Sisterhood was truly
powerful and
we would celebrate
even if the victory was lost
because we had battled—
and we had battled well.*

Reprinted from *Black and Lavender: The Collected Poems of Margaret Sloan-Hunter* (Talking Circles Press, 1995) with permission from her daughter, Kathleen Sloan.



Judith K. Witherow

Sister, Can You Spare Some Time?

The seasons are about to change, and many people will start planning the celebration of various holidays. News broadcasters will start pulling out footage of the networks' idea of activism. Once again it's time to help those less fortunate. I presume their intentions are good, but as usual, the lack of ongoing concern is bereft of planning and knowledge.

Twice a year people line up to serve a hot meal to the needy. It's my time of the year to start screaming about the ignorance of what survival truly entails. It may come as a huge surprise, but just like those who are doing this "sincere" good deed, everyone gets hungry more than twice a year!

Before I go any further I will say I'm sure that many are seriously glad to have at least two hot meals to look forward to. The reality of these events should be obvious to others, but two donated hot meals a year doesn't cut it for those less fortunate. Watching a number of mostly white people dish up Thanksgiving dinner is particularly galling to me. I take no pleasure in this event. (Columbus Day and Thanksgiving are sincerely NOT my celebrations.) If anything, I find it degrading that others think they have done something worthy of bragging rights until the next year.

Share your privilege because it's the right thing to do. The need definitely exists, but trust me when I say the help is needed 24/7—365 days a year. Poverty is rising at a rate that has not been seen in decades. Don't wait for a holiday for your activist gene to kick in. Don't wait for school to start to gather up clothes or school supplies. Don't wait for canned food drives in the winter months to share what could be given throughout the year. These needs exist year round. Make activism a way of life. If you need a special occasion you are not an activist. You fall in with the fair weather crowd who has heard about the needs that exist, but like the right-wingers you secretly harbor the thought—"Those people could do better if they tried."

I've been on both sides of this issue, and I know intimately how it feels to be the recipient of donations. I was one of "those people" folks thought giving their ragged clothing and half-spoiled food to was a worthwhile deed. Surely they would earn their wings and fly away to heaven some fine day. What can I say? Folks get their wings clipped every day.

I'm blessed with having a partner who listens to my concerns, sees that look of pain in my eyes, and without hesitation says, "What can we do?" She knows what my growing up years were like. Witnesses what poverty did to my large family and me. Knows that giving truly does help, and that it

makes me happier than being on the receiving end. The same can be said of her because she's that rare breed of a feminist of the first class.

There are many things that can be done on a regular basis that cost very little money. Money that would have been used for a single restaurant meal could be spent to pay for a Lesbian/feminist subscription as a present or as an act of kindness for a friend or acquaintance. Make a list of the names of publications with all of the pertinent information, and mail it around to everyone on your email list or address book. If the information is provided it makes it more likely that others will write out a check.

This serves a triple dip of good. It will insure the ongoing publication of the material we want to read. The same money can be used to buy a book or magazine from one of our few remaining bookstores, and it will keep writers like me busy. I've written for decades, but I'm not foolish enough to believe that words alone will take care of someone's daily needs.

Writing is one of the most effective ways of being an activist. It spreads information that might not be found elsewhere. Anyone who writes knows how much work goes into the process, and the last thing we want is for our words to be read one time and discarded. Please pass used periodicals around to others or leave them in places where someone will pick them up. (Remove your name and address for obvious reasons.)

One of the projects Sue and I do monthly is ship a box or two of books to the Women's Prison Book Project in Minnesota. We've been collecting and mailing paperback books for the past seven months. Everyone has paperback books lying around that are no longer needed. Donate them where the need truly exists. We haunt the thrift stores for books written by writers of color or in another language. (These books are in great demand by those incarcerated.) The dollar store also provides new journals and crossword puzzles to add to the collection. The cost is minimal. The return in happiness is worth more than words can express.

During the year we ask others for old cell phones. They are given to a shelter to be fixed so that only 911 can be called in an emergency. The phones are given to battered women and no service fee is charged. These phones should not be disposed of when they have the capability of saving lives or allowing women to feel safer.

Throughout the year we give food to places that fulfill the needs of others. Many organizations eagerly accept these donations that make their job easier. We also grow food to share with family and friends. Others drop off vegetables to us because they know we will get the food distributed before it spoils.

We examine our clothing on a regular basis to see if it fits or if it's no longer wanted. We recycle the clothing to "family," "friends," "shelters,"

“organizations” and lastly “thrift stores.” If it can be given to someone in need without money changing hands, that is the option of choice.

If your donated clothing is stained, torn, or has a broken zipper, etc. don't believe that it is good enough for someone who can't afford to buy something better to wear. Think about how you would feel if you needed it for work, school or elsewhere.

Women's shelters need professional clothing to be used by those they are training to enter or re-enter the workforce. If you are forced to leave your residence suddenly, or without planning, your mind is not on what type of clothing you might require. Shelters are not equipped to store large amounts of personal belongings.

We have a room upstairs filled with computer parts. If we hear that someone's computer is broken, Sue checks our inventory. Thank goodness she's a computer professional. I like to do the mechanical and loading part of programs. Well, maybe “like” isn't the word, but it speeds up the process. We're particularly interested in making sure that others become computer literate—especially children. If there were more time for good sense to enter this article I'd mention that I've written a paper on how to take care of a computer. Time hasn't allotted that sheet of typed instructions to be written yet. Somehow it seems easier to repeat the same lecture each time.

Giving doesn't stop with food, clothing, books or anything else you have readily available. Sometimes people need money to help them over a rough spot in their lives. To cite a statistic, most of us are two paychecks away from being homeless. Once you fall behind it can become impossible to catch up again without the help of others. Utilities, rent, gas, medicine, transportation, etc., are an enormous expense. Share without expecting a breakdown of how your cash donation was used. Too many times I have listened to sisters' diatribes because their money wasn't spent the way they expected. When you give cash, don't make someone feel as if she has just picked your pocket. Cut the strings and put yourself in her place. Sharing privilege does not give you control over the women needing help.

There are other things I could list, but I'm sure that everyone can think of ways to help on a regular basis. We can all procrastinate, but the truth is, there are untold ways of making the life of others easier. The government has made “need” a four-letter word. It shouldn't be part of the vocabulary our sisters use or accept as truthful.

Don't become a “Glass Ceiling Sister.” (A woman who has been elevated to her position through the help and work of numerous women, but turns away from helping others in a meaningful way.) Never lack the willingness to reach down and pull a woman up to a height that lifts her out of the position where she feels she doesn't belong.

Judy Freespirit

Report from the Supposed Deathbed

(Written with Ariana Manov and Carol Graywing)

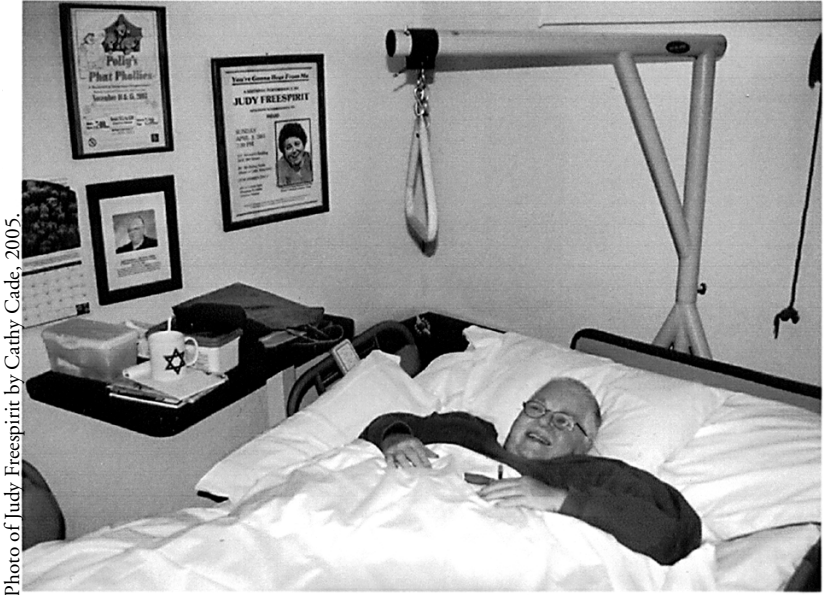


Photo of Judy Freespirit by Cathy Cade, 2005.

*In the space
between living and the unknown
she lies beneath
the healing hands quilt*

*Surrounded by friends who
sing to her
read to her
belly laugh and
weep*

*then ask her
How are you doing?*

*a question she can't answer
Medical science has no answers
If the Great Spirit knows
it is not yet revealed*

(continued)

*In that space she feels more joy
than she has ever known and wonders
how this can be?*

*How can this be/ she asks
she who wants answers
 wherewhenhowlong?
dances in the unknown*

*Her truth-telling friend, says, you want answers...
you're the same demanding bitch you've always
been leaving the others gasping*

*while they guffaw together from the depth
of their 35 years of naming that which
can not be spoken*

*Yes she wants answers
her dearest ones want answers
and she is mad—
very mad*

*Kubler-Ross's "stages" don't pertain
the order is all wrong
some don't exist at all*

*How can she answer when they question
when no one can answer when she asks?*

*Oh, everybody knows "we're all dying"
from the moment we begin to live
It's so trite
Some of us are just learning
the lines of Act III
while others have been planning the memorial
and she ever the clown,
wants to be there
at the memorial*

*How can she be there
when it is the after-party?
she thinks she would like to be there as
 a fly on the wall
 an angel
 a ghost*

*She thinks at times it would be so much
easier to have a
messy death
one simple car crash over Devil's Slide
then...*

*The phone rings interrupting
the moment
the momentum*

*I'm in a taxi, almost there,
the woman's voice informs her
I'm bringing seder to you*

*You're a crazy woman
you know that
she says laughing*

*I know, I know, but I have things
to tell you, tonite
I'm on a mission*

You're crazy Sheila!

*I know, she repeats
I love you
See you in a few minutes*

*It's 8:15
they'll be bringing pills
that make her groggy*

*The pills can wait
time is short
art comes first*

*and the kiss of friends and old lovers
and a crazy woman bringing matzoh
and peanut butter
and stories about caged birds
and freedom*

April 2005

Cathy Cade

On Being an Activist-An Interview with Judy (Ackerman) Freespirit



Photo of Judy (far right) and the Fat Chance Theater Group by Cathy Cade, 1979.

Rheem Valley Convalescent Hospital
July 30, 2005

JUDY: If you were to ask me to give you one word to describe myself, I would say, “activist/organizer.” Now, I know that’s two words. I know, I know, you don’t have to tell me. It’s just that I can’t do it in one word and anyway, I never follow rules exactly. It’s part of being an activist; you have to break the rules.

It took me a long time to learn that I was an activist; I didn’t become one until I was close to thirty. If you look at the hard things in my childhood, you would probably realize that I was destined to be an activist, but at the time I didn’t think that way at all. I was going to be an *actress*. My family did not support me in that so I switched my major in college to speech therapy. That was practical. Meanwhile I got married in my senior year, had a child and I became a housewife. When my son was old enough to go to nursery school, I went back to college at Cal State Los Angeles. I didn’t have anything to do one day at lunchtime and dropped by the office of the Con-

gress of Racial Equality (CORE). This was in the winter of 1963, I was pretty green, but immediately was demonstrating against the university administration for their support of housing that discriminated against blacks.

As a Jew I identified very strongly with black people as they do with my people. If you look at the black church, it often focuses on stories from the Old Testament. A lot of black spirituals are about Jewish oppression, like “Go Down Moses Way Down in Egypt Land.” They identified with the people of the Old Testament and Jews are the people of the Old Testament. When I found that CORE was open to white people, I felt here’s how I can do something. I’d always felt totally powerless until that time. I had no sense of myself as a person who could be a part of making history. So that beginning was very important. As I learned more in that movement, it led to a generally heightened consciousness. I now see how all these oppressions are connected and how they all have to do with fear and power and a sense that there is not enough to go around. Every one of the movements I’ve been a part of is fighting oppression linked to greed and unequal distribution of resources—they’re all linked in that way.

Prior to that I had felt so overwhelmed, felt that there was nothing I could do, and there was something, finally, being offered that I could do. After college I worked for four years in a psychiatric hospital as a social worker. During those years I got a real good taste of mental health oppression—from the position of both the patients and the lower level staff. I learned a lot about racism there too. I heard about feminism while I was working at that hospital because of newspaper and magazine articles. I read somewhere that there was a women’s center on Crenshaw Boulevard. On a very hot day in September of 1968 I was wearing a wool dress, a full corset, nylons, high heels and make-up for a job interview. I was feeling hot and miserable; I didn’t know if I was going to get the job or not. However, I knew the center was somewhere nearby, I found it and that was the beginning of my new life.

Within a year, I became a feminist, then a radical therapist, a lesbian, and a fat activist. Radical therapy described mental health oppression and how much we are influenced to feel that we’re responsible for everything. We turn our just rage inward and therefore do not take action to change things that we really could change. Each time I learned about something new where there was a movement that needed to happen, it just felt like a different version of the same problem.

The Fat Underground began in Los Angeles in 1971 with our manifesto. The Fat Liberation Movement is the only movement I can claim to be

a part of from the beginning, but after a few years I left the Fat Underground because I had too much going on in my life. Also it was in its very, very infant state and was requiring a huge amount of effort because we were trying to develop the theory and there were only six of us. I was getting burned out. I guess I didn't believe it was ever going to be a movement. I was coming out as a lesbian just about the time that the Fat Underground was getting going as a movement and, at that point, I prioritized radical feminist therapy and coming out in my personal life over political life for several years.

Aldebaran (Vivian Mayer) who was the primary mother of Fat Underground was always sure that it was going to be a movement and she and Lynn McAfee kept working on it, thank goodness. They kept the faith—with the help of other people who joined them later.

The spring of 1977 I moved to Sonoma County, in northern California, where I worked full time for about five months against the Briggs Initiative and became a gay rights activist as oppression came down not just on lesbians, but also on gay men. The Briggs Initiative was a state ballot measure asking Californians to vote that lesbian and gay teachers and their supporters not be allowed to teach in public schools.

I was one of the hired as assistant coordinator of the Sonoma County Campaign for \$80 a week. I was working about 100 hours a week. *[Laughs.]* I actually was paid \$30 a week with the remaining to be paid after the vote, if there was any money left in the coffers. It was a very interesting time of my life. Some of the time I rented a room, but most of the time I was crashing around sleeping on peoples' floors. I was in my early thirties. It was a very heady time and we won! The Briggs initiative was defeated.

After the Briggs Initiative I moved to Berkeley and got a job at the Center for Independent Living where I became a disability rights activist. Then I got really sick with environmental illness and struggled within the disability movement to have Environmental Illnesses and Multiple Chemical Sensitivities included in the fight for civil rights for disabled people.

So you see my identity is not of just a specific kind of activist, but of an activist in general, although its not literally true because I don't fight for all my causes at all times. Different people know me as a disability rights activist, or a fat activist, or lesbian activist, or as a writer, but not as all of them.

Early on, part of my activism involved trying to educate people. I was inspired to write things down by Aldebaran (Vivian Mayer). She inspired me to write about my activism, not to just do it, because that way you reach a lot more people. Until that time it hadn't occurred to me I would have

more impact. I began writing, first about Fat Liberation and feminism and then lesbianism and childhood sexual abuse.

I've been writing for most of the time I've been an activist—poetry, short stories, essays, and humorous pieces for performing. I was a member of a dance troupe in the 1970s called “Fat Chance” where we swung around on trapezes and talked about our lives. In the early 1980s, I helped found “Fat Lip Readers Theater.” I wrote a lot and preformed in Fat Lip for three years until I left to work on other things; the group went on for another fifteen years.

CATHY: *Did you ever feel a conflict or a tension between art activism and political activism?*

JUDY: No. The writing was just part of being an activist. I never wrote for art's sake. I never felt I was an artist. I wrote partially to heal myself, to tell my stories and I published them for other people to read and realize they could take some action to make their lives and work better. I had taken a little step and maybe they could too. I *have* developed my craft as I've gone along and gotten better at writing.

The first time I realized how much distance my work had traveled was when I realized it could be found all over the world. I received a letter from a friend who was traveling around the world. She was in India and found a copy of *Sinister Wisdom* in her hotel lobby with a story by me in it. When you write and publish, you just don't know where its going to end up, who is going to see it and who it is going to impact. It's incredibly powerful to be a published writer, even on a small scale. That gives me a deep feeling of satisfaction.

Sometimes I hear that somebody likes or remembers something that I wrote twenty years ago, and that doesn't happen with other kinds of political work very often.

Everything that I have learned in my movement activism has informed my writing. For example, a couple of years ago I had a conflict within my church with a woman about fat politics. This led me to want to educate the people in the church on the issue. While I didn't feel a lot of fat oppression there, it turned out that there was a lot of underlying, unspoken, oppression that I never knew about—people's self-hating of their own bodies as well as real strong dislike of other fat bodies. While they could see that I was an extremely fat woman, they liked me, which probably confused a number of them. They kept their mouths shut about it and didn't ever say anything oppressive. For instance, at a potluck I never heard anybody say, “Oh, I better not eat that; I'll put pounds on me.” I was a member of that church

for ten years before I “got it” that fat phobia was really present. Prior to this, I had done education on environmental illness in the church, but I had been doing my fat activism *outside* of the church.

So I tried to think about what I could do to most effectively educate people within the church to start thinking about fat politics, about the fact that what they were thinking was mythology, not what’s really going on. Which is what all these movements are about—about mystification. So I decided to write a fat activism play that I would present at the church.

As I started writing the play, it cried out for songs. [*Laughs.*] I decided it had to be a musical with a lot of fat characters who were smart and funny—the way my friends are.

I wrote the play first and, since I’m not a musician and don’t write music, I went through my huge collection of Broadway musicals looking for songs that would fit my play. I found the songs, then the next job was to get the church to agree to let me put this on as a fundraiser for the church. This took about six months. The play was preformed on November 14 and 15, 2004. It included a five-woman fat belly dancing troupe and a fat hip-hop dancers group. The whole fat community turned out for it. I wish more people from the church had come. We publicized it a lot, but I think people are afraid of this topic, maybe not as much as anti-Semitism, but close. In fear we close our eyes. But some people from the church did come. I would say we had over 250 on Friday night and about 300 on Saturday with maybe one-third being church members. I got so much satisfaction out of doing the play and I felt it was the most powerful thing I have done.

In March of 2004 I was given the Pat Bond Old Dyke Award for Activism. Up until then I always felt like I was an activist and I felt recognized, but I had never really felt honored in that way. It was like winning a Tony or an Academy Award.

Later in the spring of 2004, I became involved with another political movement, fighting anti-Semitism. This was the first oppression I experienced as a child and is the last oppression I have taken on. I am helping to demystify what anti-Semitism is, how it works, and how it affects progressives and liberals who don’t understand it—including many Jewish progressive and liberals. Until recently that also included me. I was a consultant to the organizer who knew that she wanted to give a conference on anti-Semitism on the Left. She knew what she wanted to do with the subject matter, but she had never organized a conference. As her consultant, I was able to use all the skills I had gained in other movements, particularly in the fat liberation movement where I have organized many conferences.

I took this on at a time when I was [*laughs*] very, very ill, as I have been off and on throughout my life. Not having very much energy, it was good to be able to take a few hours now and then to consult. We learned from each other.

I attended the conference and I've done more reading, but I was too sick to join anything afterward. I did decide at that time that I was going to do a church service for summer worship at the First Unitarian Church of Oakland with Heather MacLeod, a church member, who was also at the conference. I was getting sicker and sicker all the time. I have a heart condition, lung problems from a lot of asthma and environmental illness, and now I was having symptoms of possible kidney failure. This landed me in the hospital four times in December 2004. After the third time, I was home for about six weeks and during that period Heather came over to my house every week and we worked on this service. We decided it would be about—but not called this—about anti-Semitism on the Left. For instance, it showed up in a lot of Iraqi anti-war rallies when no one dared get up and say anything about the suffering children in Israel. The speeches were only about the suffering Palestinians. There was a definite non-seeing of Jewish oppression and only recognizing one side, as if it were a one-sided struggle. Clearly the history of anti-Semitism shows that it isn't one-sided, but most people don't know the history.

We wanted to get the church people thinking about the history and what it means to really know the past of both peoples, to try to get a handle on what is happening with all the other countries involved—its not just about two peoples. It's about many different countries, about many different groups who are using these two peoples for various reasons. We want to start our church people thinking about a more complex understanding of the Middle Eastern conflict.

So Heather and I spent many Thursday evenings together at my house. I was in bed full-time, unable to get up. After we read from various writings on the subject and had long discussions about how to do this service she would sleep over so I wouldn't be alone. Today is July 30th and next Sunday on August 8th that service will be given by Heather MacLeod and another church member, Peter Hand. I'll be there in my heart, but physically I'm in a convalescent hospital where I've been for three months. My activism, at the moment, is done by telephone.

CATHY: What do you love about being an activist?

JUDY: I love the excitement of being part of a community of people who think they can really do something to change things. I like both the

action and the community, the friends that I make. I've made a whole different kind of friends since I've been an activist. There are reasons for what we are doing and solidarity. Even when there are conflicts within movements, I still love being there. Once I became an activist I belonged.

The place where I feel I belong the most, where my heart is most filled, is at the First Unitarian Church of Oakland. Many of the people there are activists of one sort or another and there's a kind of understanding of, and respect for, what that means. I get a respect for my work and my life; I get inspiration to move on and do more.

CATHY: What's hard about being an activist?

JUDY: [Sigh!] As a person who has a lot of illness, the thing that's the hardest is the exhaustion. I don't have the stamina that most activists have. In the early years we would have these meetings that would go all night. If you work on consensus, which most of these groups do to some degree, you have to have the stamina to hang in until the group comes to a consensus. Because I was so ill, I sometimes just couldn't stay and that's very frustrating to me. I had to give up struggling at times to take care of my health so that I could go on. I remember one of the first slogans that impressed me was by Anita Friedman, a radical psychiatrist from Berkeley who said something like, "Staying alive is the most radical thing you can do because they want you dead. They want you gone." I've internalized that.

So it's three months since the doctors told me I had between two weeks and two months to live. During that time I was both closest to death and most coherent with what I wanted. I wanted to be powerful till the end. I made some choices during those first weeks when it was pretty certain that I was not going to live much longer. I decided I wanted to do some last radical acts. The first one was to be buried in a coffin made by some people from my church. The second one was that I wanted to write a book, a book about my life and the process of dying. I asked two of my artist friends, one a photographer/personal historian and the other a writer/editor, if they would do it. And we are working on it now.

But here it is three months later and I'm getting better and it looks like I'm not going to die right now. So the work is going on. It will be a different book and a different story by the time we're finished. The plan is to keep working on it as long as I'm alive and to publish it after my death. It will be given to people close to me and hopefully some people will read it and it will be put in archives.

So, I'm making history. I never liked reading it, but I'm making it. I think I would have liked it better if the kind of history I'd had to learn in school was more like the kind I'm writing—and living.

While I've been here at the convalescent hospital one of the board members of the National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance (NAAFA) came and asked if it would be all right if they were to make an activism award in my name at the next conference, which also will be taking place starting the week of August 8th. So while the church service is happening they will be presenting an activism award to someone from NAAFA. It feels really weird that someone is being given an award in my name and I'm not even dead yet. This will be an annual award. [*Laughs*] It makes me giggle.

I'm laying here feeling pretty powerless on one level. On another level I'm still doing political work out there while I'm just lounging in bed, trying to get well. There's one thing I've learned about myself in doing all this political work over the years. When I first realized it I was a little embarrassed—to even think it and even more embarrassed to say it, feeling it was arrogant. The insight was that I've always wanted to be immortal. I know a lot of people don't; they're satisfied just doing the work. They know that they did it and they feel good about it. As a child I felt so unseen and unappreciated that this small bit of immortality has helped heal the damage done to me, not completely, but to a great degree. Now, on some small level, I'm immortal. Or I will be sometime in the future, since I'm not dead yet.

For more details on Judy's activism google "Judy Freespirit."

In the future, Judy Freespirit's archives will be available at the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Historical Society archives.

657 Mission Street, Suite 300

San Francisco, CA 94105

Phone (415)777-5455 ext. 6#

Fax (415) 777-5576

www.glbthistory.org

Learn more about Cathy Cade's work/activism at www.CathyCade.com



Photo of Merle Woo by Tee A. Corinne.

“Art and politics are integrally linked. We are freedom fighters with words as our weapons—on the page or on the picket sign. And as we fight, we educate. We encourage our people to change the reality and to demand it all. And no amount of censorship will ever silence us.”

-*Chinese American Poetry: An Anthology* edited by L. Ling-chi Wang & H. Yiheng Zhao. University of Washington Press, 1991, p. 215.

Merle Woo

Responsibilities of Freedom

*Those of us who have chosen the path less traveled
Abandoning values of capitalism and patriarchy*

*Are freedom fighters
And at the same time so free*

*That without our comrades' criticism
We may repeat the old
Harmful inhumane ways we treat others*

*Can we see leadership in the most disenfranchised?
Can we build new personal and collective lives
Unaffected by internal competition, jealousy, and power?*

*Are our lives less painful, less filled with struggle?
Indeed not
For freedom demands responsibility and
Constant consciousness*

*In political work, we welcome free and open debate internally—
Externally, we're a solid clenched fist in the air.*

*But what about the personal?
That undefined herstory that needs re-creation
Creativity, objectivity, consciousness
Not bound to memory, bad experiences, addictions
Of our past*

In our freedom

*No revolutionary can abandon
The personal life, the joys of supportive friends,
families, and lovers
We do have those.
But sometimes our loved ones do not support what we do and
believe
We struggle for their respect and make compromises*

*In the absence of clear road signs
In our freedom,
We seek approval and acceptance—
At the same time we have had to create
Our own gauges of better human relations
Comradeship. Morality.*

*Often I feel such self-doubt
Paranoia almost*

On my off days, hard-won victories turn upside down

*Having no job security
Hounded from job to job
Threatens my self-confidence
Chronic illness
Threatens my self-confidence*

*As I near my 60th birthday
I intend to have my own recommitment ceremony
To this freedom.*

*The hardest to change
Is to attach no blame
Or judgment to what I
Consider to be an unfair criticism—*

*If someone disses me
I want to go on the offensive
I want to focus on the hurt done to me
Rather than ask what motivated that
Comment and ask kind questions and listen.*

*Then **that** gets muddled with suspicion
Doubts about how other comrades perceive me or regard me.*

*In our own little group of warriors
Always going against the grain
How do we know what's right
If not by our comrades' loving criticism
Which can hurt—
Especially when we are weak in evaluating
Our own worth*

*There is pain in realizing
That in this area of socialist human relations
I have been impatient,
Not understanding—
Judgmental and angry*

*In this freedom we have so much power
We'd be given even more leadership if we wanted it.*

*Only by being a radical in this oppressive for-profit society
Can we come close to realizing our human potential
But we must constantly struggle for it—*

*Freedom means responsibility
For making better choices
Based on new consciousness,
Like the common good and self-defense—
Our comrades
Our socialist feminist theory and program.*

*We determine not to mimic
The oppressive negative behavior of our past
When that's all we knew—*

*Taking the path less trodden
Clearing the way responsibly
For others to trust and be hopeful
Optimistic about our human future—flourishing!*

Reprinted with permission from the author from *Yellow Woman Speaks: Selected Poems Expanded Edition*. Radical Women Publications 2003, pp. 48 – 50.

Mary Meriam

Nabad iyo Chaano

There is an old Somali proverb (Nabad iyo Chaano) that is translated as Peace and Milk. The story goes that without peace there can be no milk, and without milk there can be no peace.

*I fear my activism will not fit
in any book. It's what I do at home
that counts the most. It's how I use my wit
to put a stop to war and make shalom.
I feed my wit with water, bread, and beans.
(I lack the funding for the finer fruits.)
Give me a bowl of soup, I've got the means
to fight a country full of fascist suits.
Give bombers healthy milk, they'll want to live
and let all others live. I'll set the table
with several billion chairs. It's time to give
good food a chance to make our people stable.
You laugh. You think I'm kidding? That's ok.
Please tell me if you find a better way.*

jody jewdyke

Interview with Rhonda Simmons



Photo of Rhonda Simmons by jody jewdyke

July 20, 2005

JODY: Could you introduce yourself?

RHONDA: I am an Afro-Canadian, Lesbian, multi-media artist living in Vancouver, British Columbia. I began my artist's path early in life and always knew I wanted to create. When health issues forced me to adjust to living on disability benefits I saw it as a chance to make my life my own. I am a self-taught artist who has had many diverse creative learning opportunities, from being mentored in private studios to formal training. Clay is my first love. Most of my art is political and deals with different social issues.

JODY: How would you define yourself as an activist?

RHONDA: Activism started with being born a Black female. Encountered racism from day one. From an early age was well aware of the social issues-whether they were local or global.

JODY: Can you say more about what issues and what you did about them?

RHONDA: Being a woman and where I fit outside of my own personal environment. I had a mother who was very much before her time. She was the first feminist in my face. From a very early age I was surrounded by women,

very strong women. By their example, I got a quick study in worldview, and how they felt about diverse issues. Such as community, relationships, spirituality, violence, racism, classism. That awareness was part of my growing up.

JODY: When did you first become involved in activism?

RHONDA: When I entered elementary school. I was always very aware of the underdog and always made sure they weren't being bullied. I took an interest in them. Of course, racism was an everyday experience for me. When someone made racist comments, I would go at them, as in hit them. Some would think that approach was violent, but as a kid, that's what I knew. As well as using my hands, I used my strong verbal skills to speak out about wrong doings.

JODY: How would you define your activism today?

RHONDA: No laying of the hands (laughing) and more use of teaching and leading by example in terms of how I live my life. I have channeled the laying of the hands into my artwork, which is my main form of activism these days.

JODY: Please say more about your art.

RHONDA: Many issues run throughout my art, such as classism, feminism, body image, sexuality, alienation, exclusion, and ignorance. Each piece can include many issues at once, or be focused on one particular issue. One of the pieces I did last year that was extremely powerful was "The Domino Effect." What was interesting about that particular piece, was that it wasn't the initial piece I had submitted to be juried for the disability arts show in Vancouver, BC. One of the Lesbian curators challenged me on my initial submission, saying it was rather lackluster, shall we say. And so a dialogue began. Out of that, I remember being specifically asked what I would really like to do. Out of the ashes came my strong passion for political art. Especially the issue of poverty and how it intersects with ablesim, lesbophobia, and exclusion.

The following is a statement Rhonda wrote about her piece for the show last year:

"Domino Effect" is a game mimicking life. It was born of my frustration with the continued chaos of government slashing of necessary programs and resources, with the biggest impact and greatest effect on our poor. This art piece is fashioned after the childhood game of dominoes. All ages and abilities are encouraged to interact with "Domino Effect" and to lay out a pattern or grid that allows them to rise above the poverty position to one of self-sufficiency. The dominoes themselves are life-size, since I see poverty to be a life-sized issue that spans our globe.

The mainstream domino game has dots, but I felt my dominoes should have words on them associated with poverty. As an artist creating this game,

I had the expectation of freedom, of the vast number of words that I could adhere to each domino, but the reality was that I was limited to nine letters per line on the domino. I was reminded that we are all limited by the resources we have.

In playing the game, the players have to ask themselves if there is a way out of the maze of poverty or if it is cyclical and self-perpetuating. How does one move above their reality of limited resources to a place of having enough and abundance? Or is it just a matter of survival of the fittest?

I feel every piece of Art I create in my community becomes a large part of the shared journey between me and my audience. As individuals we have to find our own way in life, with the resources we have.

I invite everyone, from those with abundance or power, to those with limited resources to play my game, "Domino Effect." Those with resources will be the fortunate ones. It is only a game for them, something they can walk away from and enter back into the reality of their comfortable lives.

It is not a choice to be poor. With more understanding and more support, the opportunities for the poor will allow them to work toward independence and abundance."

JODY: How do your multiple identities with respect to oppression affect and inform your art work?

RHONDA: Some people would say I have many strikes against me. I am woman, I am a Lesbian, I am Black, I am a fat Dyke, I have a mental illness, I am a survivor, and I'm poor. But I see all of those strikes as opportunities. For me, not only to lead by example, but to talk about my experiences that have been full of adversity. I have used all those experiences for my highest good. I have what I want. And what I have is being able to communicate through my art of who I am and how I go through the world. Which ultimately connects in some way with whoever is seeing/experiencing my art. I've learned from my experiences and transformed them into opportunities for social change. Every time I do a piece in terms of political action, I am given an opportunity to learn more about the issue. This allows me to constantly reframe my perspective.

JODY: I love your work depicting happy fat Dykes. Please tell us about it.

RHONDA: Emphasis on body image is so rampant in our society. Certainly not in an affirming way! As Lesbian womyn we are so bombarded with the perfect barbie doll figure. And I'm here to tell you I am quite far from that. (Laughter.) I am who I am along with the rolls. My experience has been in the past that mirrors were not my friend. And so in order to accept my body as is, I went on a quest to bond with the mirror. What came

out of the mirror was my shattered image. I took those mirror pieces that I shattered, because I couldn't look at myself whole. And decided to put the pieces back together again. It gave me entitlement and empowerment and acceptance of my body.

JODY: Please describe your pieces dealing with body image and mirrors for those who haven't had the pleasure of seeing your work firsthand.

RHONDA: The two pieces would be the goddess of empowerment and Makena. Makena means 'the happy one' in the language of the Kikuyu of Kenya. The goddess of empowerment is a five foot garden goddess who languishes among the flowers in the summer and hangs out on the wall in the winter. The Makena is a big happy fat Dyke dancing in celebration of Self. She comes in different sizes from five-feet-high to a two-feet-high garden stake. Both pieces are constructed of wood, stained glass pieces, shattered mirror, grout and sealant.

What I like about shattering mirrors, is that I have control on what reflects back to me. I can take my body image and deal with it as a whole or fragments. I like the challenge of using fragments in my body image pieces, because it gives me an opportunity to look at those small pieces of myself that I would otherwise ignore. And it's all mosaic. It's not as easy to put all the pieces of glass and mirror together which very much tells about who I am. Who each fat Dyke is. We are COMPLEX womyn. So why not celebrate this complexity through shards of glass whether they be colored glass or mirror. I like to refer to these pieces as a mirror image.

Other body image art that I embrace is the casting of torsos; I enjoy working with the fuller bodies and those of us who are fat and bigger who struggle more with body issues. We stand out more, literally, in society.

JODY: Thanks, Rhonda. My last question is what or how do you think art can contribute to social change and Lesbian community?

RHONDA: Art in itself is not something that I see as an absolute as its form is creatively diverse. Art has a way of connecting, informing, teaching and awakening parts of self that we may be unaware of. Art is a necessary ongoing language of itself and its continued contribution is necessary as we evolve globally.

As an Artist I feel that my creative expression is a window into who I am as a Lesbian artist and the issues that I am deeply passionate about. I may not be able to articulate them but Art allows me to create and my art shows more than I can say. As a Lesbian, I want to share my journey, my pride in who I am within and outside of my community. Being and Doing art is my way through the world; it's my talk and if my talk touches others in gaining awareness, then I can gracefully move on to the next issue that fires me up.

Lenore Chinn

Creating New Models for the Arts

My signature paintings, with their super realistic, crisply rendered compositions convey a subtle message of visibility for the socially and politically disenfranchised peoples in my personal social landscape - people of color, women, lesbians, and gay men. In my oversized acrylics on canvas I explore a genre that is largely invisible in the fine arts. Through character studies in contemporary themes I restore cultural difference to center stage, creating a presence which resonates in its luminosity, texture, color and light. While enticing the viewer with a non-confrontational aesthetic these narratives simultaneously challenge Old World views and compel a rethinking of how we define society's *others*.

As an American realist my educational background was profoundly rooted in a Western European arts tradition. I received formal training in the visual arts and my knowledge of art history was based on a very narrow canon which did not encompass individual references to women artists nor did it acknowledge in any way the artistic contributions of artists who were not of European or Euro-American descent. That was the *norm* of the time.

The form of my art was a natural evolution of my rendering skills and when these inclinations were applied to painting it became my most fluent language in the visual arts.

Presenting my work was the challenge; however, as the content of my paintings limited greatly the kinds of venues which were available to me. Thus I began a journey of navigating off the beaten path modes of finding my own niche and developing my own audience.

One must realize that mainstream arts institutions, composed largely of museums, galleries and art schools, are predicated on a belief system constructed and maintained by arts power brokers with a vested interest. They are the keepers of the gate in a hierarchical system that is elitist at its core and this system tends to breed conformity. Those who participate in it believe in its merits and subscribe to its standards. So, while few of us would deny ourselves such lofty sites to showcase our work if granted an opportunity, prevailing forces in this world pose formidable challenges.

It takes a movement to bring social change and the art world as an arena is no different in this regard. But there are historical precedents if one has gleaned anything of value from one's abridged art history lessons.



“Before the Wedding” by Lenore Chinn, 2000.

What I am saying is that if one does not choose to accept mainstream notions of what constitutes art, or how it is defined, there are ways of identifying, nurturing and growing an audience. One must remind oneself that artists of merit, even famous ones, have seldom followed the tasteful sentiments of their day. Visionaries follow their own calling.

If one does not adhere to the ideologies of museum and gallery models I would suggest that there are parallel institutions which can be constructed, which offer new canons and forums for critical thinking and are healthier for one to participate in.

I made decisions long ago not to take a strictly mainstream approach in the presentation of my work and the cultivation of an audience. I did not subscribe to the values that go along with a program of conventional wisdom and I chose to take what some might consider a great risk. What madness to paint images of people no one would want to purchase. That's an attitude I often encountered. Well meaning people would advise me to paint more "universal" themes but that would have required painting subjects that meant very little to me.

Instead I have challenged viewers to rethink what "universal" means. I consider my themes "universal" but I approach them from a more ethnically diverse and/or lesbian/gay cultural perspective.

This has been the direction I have taken as an artist. And in my work as an arts activist I have involved myself in the construction and maintenance of organizations which, in my view, were compatible with my own philosophies. Toward that end I have been a founding member of Lesbians in the Visual Arts, co-chairing the board years ago with the stalwart arts curator and historian, the late Adrienne Fuzee, and I am currently involved with Qcc, which presents the National Queer Arts Festival in the Bay Area each year.

For more information please visit:

<http://www.queerculturalcenter.org/Pages/Chinn/ChinIndex.html>

Kim Rivers and jody jewdyke

Dyke Separatist Thoughts on Activism

We want to begin by acknowledging and appreciating all the Dykes before us, both known and unknown, who have thought about these ideas, expressed them, written them and lived them. This discussion emerged as we thought about our lives as Dyke Separatists, as proudly out and obvious Dykes, and the concept of activism. We began talking about how being out Dyke Separatists is itself a form of activism, though different from the more familiar form that we commonly think of.

We have both engaged in the types of activism that involve organizing large group actions, such as Take Back the Night, World March of Women, December 6th memorial/demonstrations (1), anti-racism/anti-fascism actions, as well as civil disobedience, and political graffiti to name a few. What excites us both most right now, are the forms of activism Joyce Trebilcot refers to as ‘feminist activism’.

In her article entitled, “In Partial Response to Those who Worry That Separatism May be a Political Cop-Out: An Expanded Definition of Activism,” which appeared in *Gossip* (2) and *off our backs* (3), Trebilcot wrote:

“To be an activist is to engage in actions intended to make changes in who has what political power. In male-thought, it is assumed that there is a fixed amount of power in a particular situation. Hence, activism is understood by men as aimed at a redistribution of power (as distinct from the creation of new power) and as essentially adversarial. In this context, the essence of activism is to persuade those in power that they morally (i.e. because it is right) or prudentially (i.e. because it is in their interest) ought to change their behavior. Paradigm cases of activism include demonstrations, letter-writing campaigns, and guerrilla actions.

This heteropatriarchal concept of activism excludes two central kinds of feminist activism: separatism and private activism. The activism of Separatists is based on the understanding that one way to change the distribution of power is for a hitherto powerless group to separate off and empower themselves. When women separate and hence create power for ourselves, certain men are deprived of power they would otherwise have had, i.e. power over these particular women; but the women’s power isn’t seized from the men, it is created by the women for ourselves. Thus while separatism doesn’t redistribute power, it alters, sometimes radically, the over-all distribution of power.”



Photo of jody jewdyke (L) and Kim Rivers (R) by Laurie Parsons.

While our focus is on Separatism as a form of activism, we want to be clear that we deeply value all the forms of activism of all the Dykes who have worked and are working to change the world. We value the many things Dykes have done, and are doing to create and sustain Lesbian culture and community. We need us all to do what we can. Know that our inten-

tion is to explore how Separatism is activism and celebrate that as an essential part of our collective struggles to create the world we all long for and know is possible.

An important question that comes to mind is whether to call the things we do as Separatists 'activism' in order to value it, or do we need to call it something different so that it distinguishes between those who fight against the current system and those of us who work to create an alternative one? Generally when we think of activism, we think of actions against the current system. When we think of Separatism, we think of acting, doing, to create our own Lesbian possibilities and realities. While these may complement each other, they are very different.

How do we value all the actions on the continuum of activism from large scale mass actions to individual choices and intentions and daily interactions with others in our lives? Not wanting to minimize the value of large actions or imply that a daily choice to buy local, and organic, is the same as a month long preparation for a mass demonstration to oppose a war. At the same time, both these actions support a world that we all want to create. We want a world with peace and no poison. And aren't they really the same thing?

Heteropatriarchy (hp) wants to create limits in our lives, to take our energy away from our Lesbian-loving world and keep the focus on the fragmented and hierarchical system they've created. Traditional forms of activism may at times help keep the focus on males and their system. Putting lesbians first is a form of withdrawing and refusing to give hp energy. Making those Lesbian centered choices in our lives is not always so absolute or immediately tangible. We can minimize the hp values by being in our values now. It lessens its hold on us. It weakens hp's fabric, creates a tear and each tear will eventually shred it. It cultivates Lesbian community, Lesbian values, Lesbian ethics, and our Lesbian world. It's the idea of living right now, as we would, if there was no heteropatriarchy, as opposed to waiting for it to end, and then putting us first. There are moments of being in both worlds and many of us at times walk that fine line between both worlds.

Some of the ways we do Separatist activism, is by being Dykes who move through the world proudly as ourselves, speaking out when we notice oppression and violence, making daily choices to buy things that support our values, choosing Lesbian businesses and services, keeping our \$ in the community, and choosing to give our energy to Lesbians first.

We encourage these things and value them. The very act of being a really OUT Lesbian takes a certain amount of courage and certainly involves risk, and we do this on a daily basis. One way this can create change is in the messages sent through this very simple act: we have a right to be here and are entitled to move through the world as we please. We are everywhere, that it's an option for girls and women to consider, simply by perceiving those of us who are happily ourselves. Like so often happens among oppressed peoples, seeing a proud, out Lesbian on the bus, on the street, in the store, can inspire and strengthen other womyn and Lesbians to take more risks to be more themselves and to accept themselves.

It calls into question the entire heteropatriarchal system. If there are so many Lesbians who love being Lesbian, (and there are, and we do!), then what about these absurd ideas that womyn exist to serve men, must hate ourselves and each other and must be miserable? Being unapologetically a

proud Dyke creates space for all womyn and Lesbians to be unapologetically themselves, and calls into question the ridiculousness of womon-hating and Lesbian hating social messages. How often have we thought, "If she can do it, I can do it?" What possibilities this creates for all womyn! This is potentially very powerfully transformative. Creating possibilities and perceiving them is so liberating. Part of what keeps any of us trapped in something is the belief that there are no options. So learning about options, that there are many possibilities makes it much more likely that change and growth and movement will take place.

With these ideas in mind, consider the following definition from Mary Daly:

"Active-Eyes: The power to dispel images that cloud lesbian's perception, 'perceiving ourselves'. Magic-being able to dispel false images. Cracking the (mirrored) illusions of heteropatriarchy to see beyond the deceiving mirrors." (4)

This concept is another way of perceiving activism as literally liberating and discovering and creating ourselves and our world.

The other thing that comes to mind is energy. It's so important to be mindful of what energy we, individually and collectively are expressing. Wanting to beam out loving, supportive, kind, peaceful energy, instead of feeding the fire with fire. When we respond to hostility with aggression, we have added energy to the situation that is part of the continuum of violence that is plaguing our planet. If instead, we respond with gentleness, while of course, not allowing the unacceptable, we have generated energy that is of another world, literally! Loving Lesbian energy can transform this world.

This conversation is more about thinking and questioning as we keep working towards our dreams. Since this is all an ongoing process, ongoing work of examining our choices and actions, we'd like to end with more questions, to leave all you wonderful Dykes with your own answers and possibilities. As we consider ways of creating and cultivating the Lesbian-loving world we want right now, we wonder:

How can our choices call the world we want into being?

What can we do to make this happen?

What daily actions can we do?

What ways can we reduce our environmental footprint?

How can we work towards building solidarity and encouraging respect among all Lesbians?

How can we encourage accountability, dialogue, self-responsibility, consideration and compassion for each other?

What can Lesbians do to sustain community?

What action can we each take today, this week, this month to nurture a world free of heteropatriarchy?

Notes:

1. December 6th, 1989 is the date of the Montreal Massacre. On that day a man entered a Montreal university classroom of engineering students, told the men to leave and shot and killed the 14 womyn left in the room, saying he hated all feminists, blaming women for all sorts of things, and then shot himself. In Canada, the day is recognised as the day acknowledging, mourning and fighting against male violence against women. I (jody) was 19 and living in Montreal when that happened and it propelled me forward dramatically, in my radical feminist understanding of the world, at that time.

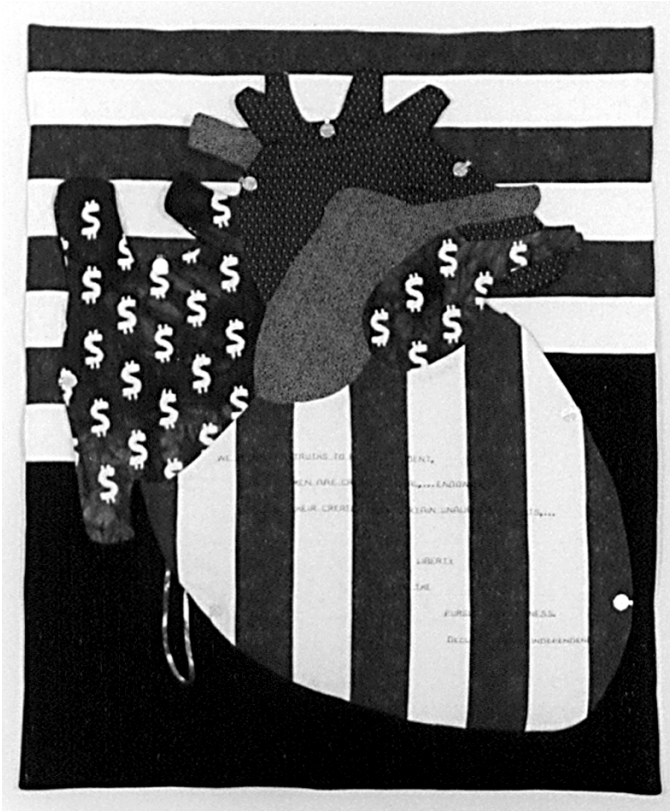
2. *Gossip* #3 (1986), pp. 82-83

3. *off our backs* (May 1986), p. 13

4. Inspired by Mary Daly's definition and adapted to make it more accessible. From Webster's *First New Intergalactic Wickedary of the English Language* by Mary Daly and Jane Caputi, p. 103

Virginia R. Harris

Political Quilts



THE HEART OF AMERICA

26 inches X 31.5 inches. All Cotton. Machine pieced and quilted, hand beading. By Virginia Harris, 1998.

So much of the history of this country is misrepresented, and in some cases it is downright lies. Like clogged arteries cause deadly heart attacks, the “fat globules” in this heart perpetuate the disharmony and hatreds we as a nation continue to experience. Cleaning up one’s diet, living healthy lives can diminish heart attacks. The same is true for the health of the nation. A diet of misrepresentation, lies and deceit is killing the nation.

A quote from the Declaration of Independence is on the front.

“We hold these truths to be self-evident. That all men are created equal,...endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights...Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”

The following quotes are on the bottom part of the open heart:

“If men could get pregnant, abortion would be a sacrament.” (Florynce Kennedy)

“All oppression creates a state of war.” (Simone de Beauvoir)

“The key to security is public information.” (Margaret Chase Smith)

“Profits are springing like weeds from the fields of the dead.” (Rosa Luxemborg)

The “fat globules” say: Port Chicago, Manifest destiny, Misogyny, Sexual repression, Power, Censorship, Mandatory minimum, Japanese Internment, monopoly, No niggers, Jews or dogs allowed, Assassination, Homelessness, Nuclear tyranny, Reproductive control, Imperialism, Greed, Infant mortality, Tuskegee experiments, Broken treaties, Cruelty, Homophobia, Irish need not apply, Trail of Tears, Slavery, Genocide, Forced sterilization, Cross-racial Hostility, Corruption, White supremacy, Land grab, Chinese Exclusion act, Prison Industrial complex, War, Lynching.

Additional Political Quilts by Virginia Harris:

21st CENTURY ROGUES GALLERY
COUP D’ETAT
DU SOUP –MANGIA!
GUARANTEED SAFETY
IN THE NAME OF GOD
NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND
NO PREFERENCES, PLEASE
ONE NATION
THE NEW ALCHEMY
THIS LITTLE PIGGY WENT TO MARKET
WE HAVE TO BE CAREFULLY TAUGHT
WHAT GOES AROUND . . . (installation)

Shaba Barnes

Activism, OLOC and Me

This article involves some highlights of my life as an activist and is also about my present position as Co-Director of the National Old Lesbians Organizing for Change (OLOC).

I never considered myself an activist until my friends and associates began referring to me as one. I was in my late 40s or 50s by then. As a child, when I played games that were designated for boys only, at least by my family, I was called a tomboy. When I refused to be the designated waitress because I was female, I was called rebellious. As a young adult, when I said that I wanted to be minister, I was considered a dreamer. When I marched in protest against the Korean War, I was called unpatriotic. Never during this entire time was I called an activist.

Although I have spoken and fought against inequality and injustice actively since I joined the work force, I saw it as a personal form of survival. If I was going to make it in this rich white man's world, it was best that I unite with others who felt at least some of the same oppressions that I did. I had to work at exposing unfair hiring and promoting practices.

I once witnessed an incident when I was about 12 years old. I was sitting on my stoop one day reading a comic book when some boys ran by shooting at another boy. Someone started shooting back and I just sat there looking in amazement at this excitement. It was not until a bullet got too close that I finally ran. Later I realized that I could have been killed or badly hurt. I decided then and there that if I were going to die other than from natural causes, it would be for a good purpose, it would be for something that would be beneficial to all so-called minorities.

I remember applying for jobs that were then specified for men only, just to challenge the system. I was the first woman back then who was accepted for a job in the Post Office working on the docks unloading and loading mail. It was a major gain for women; yet I kept it only until the Christmas rush was over. It was not what I really wanted. I just wanted to know that if I was eligible, discrimination was not going to hold me back.

Some of my family members and friends often referred to me as a workaholic because I usually spent 12 or more hours a day at work. I tried to be a role model for Lesbians and Gays, by setting examples for those

who were mostly closeted or just beginning to deal with their sexuality, by being an Out Lesbian myself. Some Lesbians criticized me for my openness and refused to associate with me in public, while others would secretly come to my office for counseling or just to talk. Being instrumental in forming The Lesbian and Gay Association at work, giving workshops titled “Lesbians and Gays in the Workplace” as part of the diversity programs took up even more of my time, but I was glad that I was able to be a part of it. After many challenges and hard work, we were able to get domestic partnership healthcare benefits. We were able to celebrate this accomplishment when it went into effect the year that I retired. Unfortunately for my partner and me, we had moved to another state and were not able to personally reap the reward.

I balanced my remaining hours with home, sleep and church involvement. Again, I chose to be Out at church; as a minister, I felt that it was my calling to be available to everyone, no exceptions. I have given workshops at the Lesbian and Gay Service center in Los Angeles on metaphysics. I also worked with women, some Lesbians, in prison by visiting them once, sometimes twice a week. I offered counseling and supported them by showing up on their court day or visiting their children and family at home in their absence. It gave me great joy when a woman once stopped me in public to share the comfort and support she received from my radio broadcast, called “In The Flow.”

I actually got involved with Old Lesbians long before OLOC was formed. I received a phone call one day from a friend who worked in a woman’s bookstore that I frequent. She invited me to a meeting to plan a conference and celebration for Older Lesbians on the West Coast to be held in LA. It sounded like fun. Older Lesbians would be there, so I gladly accepted. At that first meeting, I started to leave. I did not feel that I had anything in common with the women except that we were all Lesbians. They talked about other women whom I have never heard of who were community activists and well known in the Lesbian Community. The women at this first meeting, like most of the meetings to follow were professionals, all with graduate degrees and more. They were writers, lawyers, doctors, professors, psychologists, and therapists and white. I admired each of them and their accomplishments. I was bringing another voice to the table, another way of knowing. Me, an African American Minister, I received my degree by using my life experiences and attending classes on the weekend. Yes, I received a license as a minister for attending four years in the Seminary and yes, I did have an honorary Doctor of Religious Science Philosophy Degree plus many

certificates for special studies. Yet, I did not feel that I would be understood and accepted among these remarkable women. I had not come this far to be discriminated against by my peers, by Lesbians my age who had the same goals and interests at heart. (I smiled to myself because that was exactly what I was doing, discriminating against myself.) After the meeting, I spoke to one woman who approached me and asked me what did I think of the meeting. I told her that it sounded exciting but that I would not be back. My strength, uniting others in spirit and love, definitely had a place here but I did not think the women would be open to including spiritual input in the meetings. I shared with her that I would attend the Celebration and promised to do what I could to help if called upon, that I believed in the concept, and I was beginning to feel the oppressions of ageism. This woman was very persistent and wanted to exchange phone numbers. It was easy talking with her; not only was she a psychologist but she spent months out of each year at an Ashram and had great spiritual insights. We soon became very close friends. She was able to convince me that by walking away, I was contributing to the group remaining all white, I was giving control to others when I now had an opportunity to help represent and give a voice from another perspective. She convinced me that all Lesbians were welcome and invited to participate, whatever race or ethnic group they may belong to. Her name was Shevy Healey.

I was able to vote initially and did for the minimum age to be 60. Even then, there was some opposition to limiting the age to 60 years old and older. I believed and still do, that Lesbians under 60 cannot know or feel what Lesbians 60 and over are going through, or what they are experiencing and feeling. Lesbians in a younger generation cannot know the feelings and experience of a Lesbian of the next or older generation. As a Lesbian under 60, I was able to be a part of the organization but unable to vote.

I was invited to attend meetings and to volunteer as support; I took the minutes and whatever other tasks that I was requested to do. (We have something in place now that is similar; it is called an Intern position.)

I continued to attend the meetings and participated in the First West Coast Celebration. Shevy was instrumental in beginning and ending each meeting by pulling our energies together in an united spiritual force, by centering or sharing a short affirmation or meditative thought. The group began asking me to initiate the process.

Through the years I continued to spend time counseling women and working within the spiritual group that I am a part of. Whenever I feel vulnerable and think about giving up, I share spiritual truths with others

who are on the path that I follow. In turn, I am able to help others who may be going through some difficulty, perhaps suffering the loss of a loved one, or experiencing some debilitating health situation; I reach out to offer them support and an opportunity to talk and share. I find that when we know the spiritual power that we have and how to use it for good in our lives, going through difficult times is not so hard and we feel better.

Much of the work that I have been involved in as an activist has not been directly Lesbian or Feminist related. One of my proudest moments was when I was nominated in Mexico City, as a result of my activism during the International Women's Year Conference in 1975. I was nominated as a Representative at World Conference of the International Federation for the Formation of the Permanent Integration for Women.

My circumstances at the time did not allow me to follow through with this nomination.

Another rewarding achievement was forming an organization called Threads of Unity to produce events in honor of Black History Month. My reward was being able to unite and share history, in art form, of oppressed people of color into a present that makes Black History Month another strong fabric in American History. This took place during the winter months, planned and executed within a two-month period, in the small town of Taos, New Mexico. Taos is well known as an artist community; it is also a tourist and ski town. There were less than 80 African Americans, including me, living in the area at the time; most of our funding and support came from the business community including the mayor's office.

Balance is important. I balance my life with the healing tool of music. Listening to jazz music is a great form of entertainment for me, but what I enjoy most is writing and reading poetry. Poetry Slams are my favorite. It helps soothe me and gives me an artistic outlet for sharing with other Women in the community.

One of my strongest assets is my ability to let go of fear. I allow myself to have the experience, negative as it may be, I learn from it and move on. I cannot change you or the situation but I can change the power that the experience has over me. I learned a long time ago that thoughts are things. The things we think about and worry about become our reality. I use mental imagery to deal with problems and to create positive outcomes. I also use the power of affirmations.

I encourage others to become more involved in OLOC. There is much work to be done. The harvest is plentiful but the labors are few. Ageism is raising its ugly head continually. Recognize and challenge Ageism in every

arena that it surfaces. Sharing my experiences and the personal rewards that I receive for doing something about the injustice that Old Lesbians experience is gratifying. You too may offer to do some task, no matter how small or make a donation to OLOC. Shevy was right. Don't point at what is missing. Come, be a part of us. You can make a difference.

I am excited about the future of OLOC and look forward to its continued growth.

No matter how old or young you are, I invite you to help stamp out Ageism, support OLOC with your donations, by subscribing to our Newsletter, *The Reporter*, and by telling an Old Lesbian you know about us or give her a gift subscription of our Newsletter. Give us your support, together let's create a synergy of strength, wisdom and power to instruct and inspire all Old Lesbians, Lesbians, and Women everywhere.

Shaba Barnes may be contacted at smokeyb2196@aol.com.



OLOC banner at the San Francisco Dyke March 2005. Photo by jody jewdyke.

Tee A. Corinne

Kay Tobin Lahusen: Photographer as Activist

During the mid-1960s, Kay Lahusen, using the name Kay Tobin, took photographs which graced the front and back covers of *The Ladder*, a lesbian monthly edited by her lover, Barbara Gittings. In doing this, Lahusen became the first lesbian photojournalist publishing lesbian-themed imagery in the United States. Activist in intent, these images are the initial step toward public visibility. They form a bridge between the private images contained in lesbian scrapbooks and the open imagery of the liberation movements of the 1970s. In the early 1970s, Lahusen helped found Gay Activists Alliance in New York City. She wrote and photographed for *Gay*, a Manhattan news weekly; and coauthored *The Gay Crusaders*, a pioneering book of gay biographical sketches. (1)

Kay Lahusen was born January 5, 1930 and grew up in Cincinnati, Ohio. After high school, she had a six year relationship with a young woman who broke up with Lahusen in order to marry and have a “normal” life. Devastated, Lahusen tore up all photographs of the other woman. For several years, she worked for the *Christian Science Monitor* in Boston in its reference and research library, then heard about the lesbian organization DOB (Daughters of Bilitis) which had a New York chapter. Lahusen joined in 1961.

Lahusen was thirty-one when she met her life partner, Barbara Gittings (1932-) at a DOB picnic in Rhode Island in 1961. They had been lovers for two years when Gittings began editing *The Ladder*. Together they worked on the magazine from 1963-1966. According to Gittings, “It was Kay’s campaign to move *The Ladder* from mediocre illustrations to good images. Images were important to us and we thought that we ought to make lesbians and the world in general see that lesbians were happy, healthy, wholesome, good-looking people. The only way to do this was to have [photographs of] live women as the cover subjects for the magazine. That wasn’t easy to do. Hardly any lesbians were openly gay in the mid-1960s.”

Lahusen had always been interested in photography. She says, “Even as a kid I liked using a little box camera and pushing it and trying to get something artsy out of it. When Barbara became editor of *The Ladder*, we were not pleased with the art work on hand. It was pretty bland, little captions, insipid figures. We were very interested in ‘living propaganda,’ trying to bring the lesbian out of the closet and into the light of day. The problem was that we couldn’t find people who were willing.”

The magazine, which published monthly, used line drawings (pairs of cats, bunnies, hearts, faces) until April 1964. That issue featured a photograph of a statue of a woman in a raincoat. The June 1964 front cover showed a view of New York City where DOB's 3rd national conference would be held later that month. The July issue had a photograph of a sculpture of a nude woman balanced on a large fish credited to "Kay" with no last name given. This was Lahusen's first cover photograph. Lahusen writes of the name *Tobin*, which she would use for her photographs from this point forward, "I went to the phone book and randomly chose a name that would be easy to pronounce and spell."

August's front cover was a drawing, then, beginning with the September 1964 issue, the next twenty-one front and back covers featured photographs. Although photographs were not used in the interior of the magazine because they were too costly, eleven of the front cover images were by Lahusen.

Lahusen and Gittings kept hoping they would get somebody who would pose for them. But, according to Lahusen, "the order of the day was that women just did not want to be photographed. Barbara did some posing, sort of back to camera or in profile from a distance, (to avoid promoting herself), on some of the early covers." Then, "there was a progression of people. Once someone stuck their toe in the water and they were willing to appear in profile or in silhouette then someone else said, *Oh, just do a full profile*, and somebody else said, *Oh, I'll do full face, but with sun glasses on*. Each one being a little bit bolder."

The first of Lahusen's photographs credited to Kay Tobin was the September 1964 issue which shows two clothed women standing together at the beach, looking out to sea. They lean toward/against one another, but their hands don't touch. Writer and philosopher Tangren Alexander notes, "how poignantly lesbian that their hands weren't touching."(2)

The October 1964 issue pictures two women walking down Beacon Hill in Boston, holding hands. They are shown from behind. There is no one else on the building-lined street. According to Lahusen, the photograph was taken early in the evening. A closer photograph of the same women, still viewed from behind and again holding hands, graced the April 1965 cover. According to Lahusen, it was taken in the same photo session as the October 1964 image.

Lahusen's photograph for the cover of the May 1965 issue pictures a woman from the front, sitting on the grass in front of an academic-appearing building. She is reading, her lowered face obscured in shadow. On the cover of the following issue, June 1965, a fully-dressed woman wearing sun-

THE LADDER

Adults Only .50

June 1966

A LESBIAN REVIEW



The Ladder front cover photograph of activist Ernestine Eckstein by Kay Tobin Lahusen, June 1966.

glasses stands on a beach. Her body faces the viewer, but her face is turned away, lit by the setting sun. September 1965 has another woman in profile wearing sunglasses, this time carrying a small dog, also shown in profile.

A major breakthrough came four months later when, on the front cover of the January 1966 issue, a woman with a radiant smile and no sunglasses, her face open and well lit, faces forward. Her hair is gently lifted by the wind. The subject, not identified in the issue, is Lilli Vincenz, a writer and activist who was the new editor of *The Homosexual Citizen*, a Washington, D.C. Mattachine publication.

Sometimes changes occurred quickly. According to Lahusen, “when picketing started in 1965, that was the opportunity to just run out and take photographs of women and men marching together in the line. When you’re photographing a news event you don’t have to have releases, so that sort of blew the lid off.” Lahusen’s photographs of picketers at the Pentagon on July 31, 1965 were first published on the back cover of the October 1965 issue of *The Ladder*.

Gittings and Lahusen worked on *The Ladder* through the July 1966 issue. Three more cover portraits by Lahusen were published during that time. One was of Ernestine Eckstein, an African American lesbian activist who also appears in photographs of political demonstrations. Eckstein later became vice-president of the New York Chapter of DOB.

When Gittings and Lahusen took editorial and pictorial control of *The Ladder*, the word ‘lesbian’ did not appear on the cover. They added the subtitle *A Lesbian Review* in March of 1964. By February of 1966, the subtitle appeared in bolder lettering than the title. According to Gittings, by the end of their time with *The Ladder*, “we had a waiting list of women wanting to be on the cover.”

Lahusen went on to photograph many events in the movement’s early history. She wrote and photographed for *Gay Newsweekly*, worked in the Oscar Wilde Memorial Bookshop (the first gay and lesbian bookstore in the United States), was active in the gay caucus of the American Library Association, and originated a popular New York discussion forum called Gay Women’s Alternative.

As a real estate agent in the 1980s, she placed breakthrough ads in gay papers, organized gay agents and got them marching with large group-identifying signs in New York’s Gay Pride parade. (3) More recently, she has curated and exhibited photographs and, along with Gittings, has encouraged gay and lesbian archive activities.

According to Lahusen’s 2005 bio, she views photography as “an indis-

pensable tool in the struggle for gay and lesbian rights, for un-demonizing gay people, and for saving our history.”(4)

In 2005, Kay Lahusen and Barbara Gittings, living in Wilmington, Delaware, were organizing their forty-six years of documents and photos for donation to a major gay archive. In that year, both were honored at the dedication of an official historical marker at Independence Hall in Philadelphia saluting the gay rights pickets held there each July 4th from 1965 to 1969. Lahusen’s ground-breaking images, often reprinted, are a testament to her love of the gay rights cause and her tenacity in promoting it.

NOTES

1. Much of the initial information for this essay comes from a telephone interview with Kay Tobin Lahusen and Barbara Gittings conducted by Tee Corinne March 27, 1995. Additional information and corrections come from e-mail correspondence 1995-2005. Eric Marcus in *Making Gay History: The Half-Century Fight for Lesbian and Gay Equal Rights* (New York: HarperCollins, 2002), interviewed Lahusen and Gittings extensively about their political activities. See also Paul D. Cain, *Leading the Parade: Conversations with America’s Most Influential Lesbians and Gay Men* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2002). Brief mention of Lahusen and Gittings can be found in Mark Thompson, ed., *Long Road to Freedom* (NY: St. Martin’s Press, 1994), p. 18. See also: Kay Tobin and Randy Wicker. *The Gay Crusaders* by New York Paperback Library, 1972; Arno Press, 1975. According to Jesse Monteagudo, “Tobin wrote *The Gay Crusaders* by herself, and only added Wicker’s name after the publisher insisted on gender parity.” <http://gaytoday.badpuppy.com/garchive/people/112999pe.htm>.

2. Conversation with Tangren Alexander, July 10, 2005, Sunny Valley, Oregon.

3. From the Bio supplied by Kay Tobin Lahusen, July 2005. KTL has had four photo exhibits: “Standing Tall Before Stonewall: The First Gay Pickets” at the William Way Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Community Center, Philadelphia, PA, 2000; “Opening the Closet Door: Photos of the Early Gay Rights Movement” at the Wilmington (DE) Public Library in 2001 and at the Hormel Center, San Francisco Public Library, in 2002; “From the Dustbin of History,” at the William Way Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Community Center, Philadelphia, PA in 2004; and “Gay Pioneers” (about the seven activists featured in the documentary *Gay Pioneers*), William Way Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Community Center, Philadelphia, PA, 2005.

4. Ibid.

Chrystos

Going Into the Prison

the guard growls, What's this?!
Poetry, I answer, just Poetry
He waves me through
with a yawn
that delights me
So I smuggle my words in
to the women
who bite them chewing starving
I'm honored to serve them
bring color music feelings
into that soul death
Smiling as I weep
for Poetry who has such a bad reputation
She's boring, unnecessary, incomprehensible
obscure, effete
The perfect weapon
for this sneaky old war-horse
to make a rich repast of revolution

for Linda Evans

Reprinted from *Fire Power* by Chrystos (Press Gang Publishers, 1995, p. 3)
with permission from the author.

Chrystos

In the Land of the Free

*where they massacre the brave
imprison more people
than any other place on earth
where enormous wealth
accumulates from slave labor
where each of us
has been manipulated into believing poisonous lies
about ourselves, our needs
& our work
where art & poetry are dirty words
death is more common than bread for the poor
In the land of the free
white liberals write about how much
everyone else in other countries suffers
numb to our neighbors and families
When I go to Australia
speak of our homeless, our prison sentences
they are shocked unbelieving
Every city to which I have gone
has men & women & children
standing on freeway ramps or streets
with cardboard signs saying
Will Work For Food
in a country which is
called the breadbasket of the world
In the land of the free
my eyes still see
the slaughtered bodies of my ancestors
my back is raw with the memory of whips
my belly bitter with hunger
my mind aches & flails with lies
I grasp what I see
name it reality
Refuse to put on the emperor's clothes
pretend to be rich & happy drifting through movie stills
stoned out on drugs to disguise my despair*

*In the land of the free
I insist on wearing our chains
our mutilation
our shame*

for Roseann Marble

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Photo of Chrystos by Tee A. Corinne

Marylou S. Hadditt

She's Called Miss Lil

I was a teenager in 1943 when I met the woman who forever changed my life: Lillian Smith, a white Southern anti-racist activist, author of a best-selling novel and co-director of a girl's camp in the North Georgia mountains. In the past ten years, there has been a resurgence of interest in Smith. Her novel, *Strange Fruit* and her psychology of race oppression, *Killers of the Dream* are still in print. Her decades long involvement in the Civil Rights movement can be found in any history of that movement. A recent video documentary has been made of Smith's camp.

My life was changed by Laurel Falls, an avant garde camp for girls located in the North Georgia mountains. Lillian Smith and her life-long partner, Paula Snelling were co-directors. The camp catered to girls age 8 to 18 from the South's well-to-do white families. Despite having to protect their carefully closeted relationship, Smith and Snelling were bold in presenting campers with an awareness of the South's racist society. This was twenty years before the 1960s Civil Rights Movement.

Snelling was known to campers as "Paula". Her specialty was horsemanship and her assignment was to tailor schedules to individual camper's needs. Smith, endearingly called, "Miss Lil", adapted current psychological theory and feminist approaches to childhood education.

She also shared her deep love of music and literature with all the campers.

Counselors, all of whom were Southerners, supported Smith's ideals for Southern change and activism. These women were college graduates and professionals in their fields, dancers, singers, teachers who provided a creative and expert touch to camp activities. Often a few counselors stayed on after camp season was over. Some even chose to stay through the winter. In retrospect, I speculate that Laurel Falls could have been a private and safe lesbian haven. I do know that nearly all agreed a counselorship at Lillian Smith's camp was the optimum way to spend a summer.

In addition to the usual camp activities: swimming, riding, hiking, tennis, arts, crafts and so on, each cabin had a weekly "psychology class" with Miss Lil. These sessions were geared to different age groups but all focused on the difficulties of growing up. Sibling rivalry and resentment of parents were acknowledged as a healthy part of maturing. Classes happened at "the Little House," a cozy stone cottage where she and Paula lived. Miss

Lil had her special chair by the fireplace. The campers sat on braided rugs. The cottage was always cool, even on hot days there was a fire. Van Gogh's *Sunflowers* looked down from the mantel; hundreds of 78 RPM wax classical music albums stretched on the lower shelves of split pine bookcases. Above was a massive library to which campers had complete access. In this room, girls of every age were told about menstruation, pregnancy, child birth. Masturbation was discussed and allusions were made to sexual intercourse. Laurel Falls' girls took home a general sex education. One camper even reported that when she went home, her school friends rushed to find out what "that Miss Lil woman told you." Smith was skillful in weaving sexuality and emotions into a single metaphor for growing up: climbing the rocky steps to maturity. A camper wrote this teasing song:

*Sing me a song of emotional maturity
 There's nothing else that will do
 We want a tune inspirational
 We want a song that's sensational
 How not to climb and stumble on the rocky steps
 How to mature
 Not regress
 Ain't a thing worthwhile
 If it ain't in style
 Laurel Falls is the best.*

Smith, outspoken in her opinions, was closely involved in guiding campers and directing activities. Her white hair haloed around her rather sharp nose. Her broad mouth had an instantaneous smile which captivated campers and counselors alike. An imaginative, articulate speaker, she reached children and adults with equal clarity. Sexuality and pubescence were saved for the intimacy of the Little House, larger social concerns like race were discussed most often on the Sunday meadow on the ridge. Under Miss Lil's tutelage, campers discovered things they had never noticed. For the first time they questioned why their black nannies were forced to sit in the back of buses, could not drink from white-only fountains, were forbidden use of public toilets or compelled to climb exterior fire escapes to sit on the last row of a movie theater. These Southern customs were accepted as much a part of Southern lives as biscuits and fried chicken. Until Miss Lil intervened.

Sunday mornings everyone in camp gathered on the high meadow of Screamer Mountain to hear Miss Lil's Sunday "talk." This was her prime teaching time for the entire camp. Most times, she talked about the South.

As we sat on the pine duff, we asked questions, heard answers. Miss Lil's Sunday talks were eye openers to policies and customs of the deep South. She talked about lynchings, a brutal form of murder in which African American men and boys were hung from trees and then burned; we learned about Poll taxes and other ruses which prevented blacks from voting. She told us that such abuses were condoned by local law enforcement. She explained the demeaning impact of Jim Crow segregation with its lack of everyday amenities that white people took for granted: parks, good schools, decent housing and job opportunities, none of which African Americans had. Smith firmly believed that segregation affected not only blacks but skewed white lives, filling whites with hatred, fear and an inability to be true to themselves. She said integration was the most feared word in the South. Integration meant whites and African Americans must sit beside one another in school rooms, movies, restaurants and buses. Integration meant dignity for black people. Integration also ultimately meant intermarriage which terrified the white South.

On Sunday mornings one of the cabin groups would take a theme from Miss Lil's talks and dramatize it. Twelve year old girls from Chippewah cabin created a playlet which, unknown to them, pinpointed a typical conflict of Laurel Falls parents. With the morning sun on the meadow, young campers presented a typical dining table scene. Three girls, seated, wore identifying signs: "Mother," "Father" and "Myself." The meal began with the usual blessing. Conversation started with Father using the "N" word. Myself interrupted, "Miss Lil says that's a bad word, you mustn't say it." Father reacted angrily until Mother soothed Father, reiterating how much Myself enjoyed Laurel Falls. "One summer isn't going to change her," Mother said.

Myself turned to the gathering and in a stage whisper, said, "I'll never use those awful words again and I'll do my best to keep others from using them, too."

Miss Lil commented on the play warning us that at home we could experience things like Myself did. She instructed us to always be mannerly to our parents, but we must hold closely to the ideals we knew to be true.

The camp staff worked closely with Smith and campers in creating the yearly "project" - a longer, original camp play with music and dance centered around a relevant theme. A "proper" play with scenery, music, and dance. Rehearsals, too. These plays were an extraordinary teaching tool as they used a variety of skills: painting, building, costume and scenery design, creating dance and rhythms and, of course, long discussions of the theme

being explored. *Behind the Drums* (1939) was a dramatized history of African Americans and their continued struggle for freedom in the white man's world. From the script: "Rubbing hands in labor/Bending the spirit to white pride/Stooping the heart in shame."

The Girl (1942) was a feminist interpretation of a girl's striving toward maturity: A repeated theme from the play reads: "You must go until you find the tallest place/where you can look down and all around/seeing all that eyes can see./ Where you can look in every face and say/ It cannot injure me."

The Prince (1944) was a psychological interpretation of Antoine de St. Exupery's *The Little Prince*. The flower became the ego around which the prince danced. Baobabs were Hate, Fear, and Failure, led around the stage by a prim nursemaid, Guilt. The Prince was a girl. The finale, a reflection of Miss Lil's pacifism, has become my lifelong metaphor for hope in the world. Campers and counselors, dressed in native garb from many nations, encircled the gym. We held hands, we danced together, we softly hummed Beethoven's Ode to Joy. We were all the children of the world singing, dancing and joyfully being together.

Smith tried to keep that hope alive one summer afternoon, 1945. The gong ending rest hour rang early. The entire camp was called to the Sunday clearing for an urgent meeting. Counselors, Miss Lil and Paula huddled together quietly talking; some were crying. Miss Lil announced that a terrible thing happened. America had destroyed an entire city with one bomb. The bomb had killed everyone in the city of Hiroshima, Japan. It had killed hundreds of thousands of young girls just like Laurel Falls campers. Miss Lil said it was hard to imagine such killing. The whole camp looked to Miss Lil for an answer. She was a strong pacifist, an admirer of Ghandi. She always seemed to know what to do. Campers and counselors waited. The only sounds were chipmunks scurrying through the pine duff. She finally spoke, she said we must put an end to war, not by killing but by peaceful means. All humankind must learn to live in peace. We must remember the things we've learned at Laurel Falls, take them home with us. Take them into our lives as a beginning toward living in peace.

I've made two adult pilgrimages to Laurel Falls. In the Spring of 1959, I went with my children to camp. I wanted to show my small son and daughter the place where all the happy lullabies had come from. I most especially wanted to see Miss Lil, report on my activities and camp's ongoing influence on my life. Miss Lil had cancer, my visit was to be a brief one. While Paula gave my children a tour of the camp and told them some of the tradi-

tional stories, I visited Miss Lil. The stone dining room had been remodeled into a country home for Paula and Miss Lil. The large plate glass window which overlooked the lone pine tree Screamer Mountain was all I recognized of the old dining room. The reproduction of Van Gogh's *Sunflowers* from the Little House overlooked the room. Miss Lil lay on the sofa, her long white hair, which I'd always seen in a bun, fell loose against the coverlet. I summarized my Chicago activities and tried to articulate what Laurel Falls meant to me.

She stroked my cheek, said I was doing good work; she was proud of me and I should hold tight to my ideals and make them happen. She gave me a tiny hug. The visit was over.

Almost fifty years later, 2003, I returned to Laurel Falls for the filming of the video, "Miss Lil's Camp". The parking lot was the same, the horse ring had become a field of future wild flowers. Smith's and Snelling's cottage and two of the cabins were now houses for an artists' and writers' retreat. The Little House continues to be a library. The rocky steps to the ridge and maturity itself were firmly embedded in the hillside as was the spirit of Laurel Falls embedded in my heart, my mind, and my social conscience.

This camp experience has been with me my entire adult life. Sometimes leading the way, sometimes following me like a kindly ghost. It brought me from Atlanta to Chicago, coaxed me to live in an interracial community and encouraged me to work fifteen years for a small newspaper in the forefront of civil rights on the South Side of Chicago. Laurel Falls touched my soul whenever I heard Beethoven. Miss Lil, Paula and those creative, independent women who were counselors gave me a gentle push into the women's movement. Laurel Falls was there when I struggled to understand 'whiteness' and white privilege when I was moving beyond Laurel Falls. Laurel Falls followed me to California where I came out as a lesbian and a lesbian activist. I thought then of Paula and Miss Lil - their life-long love publicly denied. How sad they lived at a time in history when lesbian love could not be public. How painful it must have been to keep such a secret. When I became an activist in the lesbian community, I knew I had moved far beyond Laurel Falls, I moved with a sureness in my heart for I knew I had Miss Lil's approval.

Lillian Smith remained active in the Civil Rights Movement until her death. Despite cancer, she continued writing and speaking on behalf of CORE (Congress of Racial Equality) and SNCC (Students Nonviolent Coordinating Committee). She died in 1966. Paula Snelling lived almost

another twenty years, dying in 1985. Smith and Snelling's lesbian relationship remained closeted even after death. It was finally revealed with the publication of Smith's letters in 1993.

Bibliography, by Lillian Smith, still in print:

How Am I to be Heard - Letters of Lillian Smith, ed. by Rose Gladney

Killers of the Dream

Memory of a Large Christmas

Now is the Time

Strange Fruit

Web Sites:

Lillian E. Smith Foundation (a retreat center for artists and writers)

www.lillianesmith.org

Miss Lil's Camp, 30 minute video. S. Neidland, A. Pasha, producers

Information: www.misslilscamp.org

Martha Courtot

In Celebration

*the dandelions in my winter yard
are tall and sturdy
white heads attentive to the dark
all these months I have not noticed them
growing taller
while I grew deeper into my typewriter
grew down into the roots of things*

*in every class I have been quarrelsome
non-cooperative
sometimes refusing everything but name, rank,
and serial number
sometimes divulging all basement secrets
when no one was even interested*

*the dandelions whisper in the dark
make contracts with the earth
continue to grow*

*meanwhile, I have fought gender wars
with a shadow enemy
fought with Milton, Lawrence, Blake
all those other boys from the Big House
I made a promise to myself to use the word lesbian
lesbian, the word lesbian,
at least three times a class
usually I have succeeded*

can I retire now, I ask myself

*the dandelions shine under the moon
the moonlight crawls between their fur
inflamed with some kind of love
I hear them outside laughing
because I am still here at my typewriter
as if it were a fireplace
and could supply some necessary warmth*

*I have a great affinity for dandelions
their French name, for instance
like my own, obscure to the American mind
I know this: I have been the dandelion
in too many gardens*

can I retire now?

*like the dandelion
I too grow secretly in the dark
and sometimes I let the moon entangle herself
in my soft furry mind*

*praise now to all subversive energies
planting themselves in the square structures
the formal gardens
growing stealthily, under cover of night*

*somewhere there is a dream of dandelions
pushing up from under the earth
strong sharp teeth
gnawing away at resistance*

*sometimes to survive
is a subversive act
and enough*

1992

Reprinted from *The Bird Escapes* by Martha Courtot (Earthy Mama Press, 2001, pp. 66-67) with permission from her daughter, Cynthia McCabe.



Photo of Elaine Mikels at the Pentagon, taken by Elizabeth Freeman.

Elaine Mikels

Women's Pentagon Action

My main involvement was with the War Resister's League (WRL), a pacifist organization whose national staff members I had known in my antiwar activities in 1967. Since the director was a lesbian, I was delighted that my two worlds of social activism and lesbian identification were brought together. There were seven of us planning to participate in the Women's Pentagon Action (WPA) in D.C. Danna, the staff worker for WRL, informed us that those who had been arrested last year in the WPA action might get a longer sentence if they were arrested again. Others in the group had never committed acts of civil disobedience, or CD, before. After several meetings, it turned out that I was the only one who still wanted to do CD while the others would only be participating in the protest. This was disappointing for me as I preferred the safety of being arrested and jailed with people I knew and trusted. In the last two weeks before the action, three Duke University students who were all friends, joined our affinity group. They would be doing CD but would take bail rather than go to jail.

In D.C. on November 14, 1981, WPA attracted more than four thousand women. It was exhilarating to be engaged in a peace demonstration with women only. In our meetings before the action, we broke up into small groups, called affinity groups, and used the feminist process, making decisions by consensus and sharing leadership. There was time allowed to talk about feelings whenever there was disagreement or tension. There were no "leaders" or experts. In the absence of male energy and men's tendency to take over, there was a sense of community with the other participants that I had never felt in a mixed-gender group.

Although nuclear proliferation was the main target of the protest, we also demonstrated against the Reagan administration cuts in social services, against the U.S involvement in Central America, and for women's equality and gay rights. We attended workshops on the issues of working women, artists, women of color, and disarmament. The day of the action, we silently marched through Arlington Cemetery. We were emotionally moved looking at all those white crosses and Stars of David, feeling that hundreds of thousands of young men and women had died for foolish patriarchal reasons.

At the Pentagon, we had a ritual on the grass. Each woman brought a cardboard tombstone, commemorating a known or unknown woman who had died through male violence, and planted it in the grass. All kneeled as

we dramatized our grief. Then we turned our grief into rage, which was led by an angry red puppet while our drummers beat in a slow, solemn way. We screamed our anger, shaking our fists and shouting,

“Shame! Shame! Shame! What about the children?” and “No more war!” The golden empowerment puppet and the women playing brass instruments then led to an encirclement of the Pentagon. We chanted, “Take the toys away from the boys!” Pentagon employees watched from the windows; some smiled and gave us the peace sign.

Those of us planning to commit CD left the encirclement and began our two-hour occupation on the Pentagon steps. Six rows of policemen stood in front of the doorways. It took a lot of maneuvering to move from the first row of steps to the final third row sometimes sitting on the policemen’s feet. We linked arms and hands so that employees had to step over them to pass through. We sang our lungs out. It was so empowering for me as a woman and as a lesbian to be blocking the entrance of the Pentagon! Here we were, surrounded by policemen, MEN, who were reluctant to use force until the proper moment.

We wove a barrier of yarn between the banisters on one section of the steps and moved to another part and did the same. Then a large cop on a motorcycle stopped in front of us and walked up to the railing in a macho John Wayne fashion, drew out an enormous pair of scissors, and snipped away! Each time he cut the yarn, we tied the ends together again. This infuriated him and gave us a greater sense of power.

Our Durham group joined two women who were near the doorway. When the police began to pull us away, we all laid down and wrapped our legs and arms around each other. Next, a policeman tapped each of us on the shoulder, made his arresting statement, and dragged each woman inside. Then two women threw blood on the U.S. Department of Defense sign in front of the Pentagon.

In the lobby, we were searched, photographed with our arresting officer, and taken down to the garage. We were greeted by ninety-four other women who had been arrested at the other entrances. We were processed and photographed. Sara, who was blind, refused to be fingerprinted and had to be dragged and held up by the police. She was a courageous and dedicated woman whose life ended tragically a few years later when she was standing on a street corner, a bus struck and killed her.

In the basement, the police distributed citations indicating that we could leave but had to appear in court at a later date. Twenty took the citations and were released on their own recognizance. The rest of us were trans-

ported to the Arlington Jail. What a surprise to find Elizabeth and my support group waiting at the garage door as we were ushered into the paddy wagon. Every chance we got, we sang, "You can't kill the spirit. She is like a mountain, bold and strong. She goes on and on." The singing and chants were a unifying factor while we were incarcerated for ten days in the jail.

We were placed in the jail gymnasium on the top floor. Cots were lined up against the walls, with a row in the middle. It was difficult to feel any closeness or intimacy in the group, surrounded as we were by cold cement blocks, high ceilings, the glare of eight mercury lights, and an iron door that made an awful sound every time it closed. We were constantly under the scrutiny of our guards. They looked through the window of their locked offices; they sat before an electronic keyboard; and they used their loud-speaker system for giving orders and for paging us.

The energy level during our stay kept changing, the mood of the group fluctuating from high to low or subdued. We sat alone on our beds, read, wrote, and slept. Some paired off or gathered in small numbers on the floor. We read out loud together, told our personal stories, and sometimes had large discussion groups on the subject of nonviolence. We danced to our own music of clattering spoons and drumming on plastic chairs or wastebaskets. We exercised by walking, doing calisthenics, Yoga, basketball, or baseball. We had made a basketball from a shirt tied in a knot and placed in my down jacket hood, and we made a baseball contrived from a pair of socks rolled in a knot, with a rolled newspaper for a bat.

At 3:00 A.M. on the tenth day, the lights went on and the guards announced that those with longer sentences were to leave immediately for Alderson Federal Penitentiary in West Virginia. We stood in a parting line to say good-bye, kissing and hugging each of the fifteen who departed. At 6:30 A.M. they woke us again; by eight we were released. I went with five others to the WPA office and was taken to breakfast by the support team that had been waiting for us.

I felt good that I had participated in this protest and could, through civil disobedience, vent my outrage over Reagan's military policies. I was lucky I could be in such an action. I had nothing to lose, no job or reputation to worry about and no personal responsibilities to consider. Plus I had a lover who gave me encouragement and support.

Reprinted from *Just Lucky I Guess: From Closet Lesbian to Radical Dyke* by Elaine Mikels (Desert Crone Press, 1993, pp. 275-279) with permission from her niece, Lisa Law. Copies of Elaine's book are available at lisalaw@cybermesa.com

Lilth Rogers

Revolutionary Dykes

*It seems to me
that Lesbians in particular
have an obligation
to live for revolution.*

*Women loving women that we are
most of us having as little as possible
to do with men
why should we settle
for what little space
they now allow us?*

*Why should we huddle
in those small corners
of our closets
with our hands over our heads
waiting for them to drop
whatever it is they choose to drop
on us, on our loved ones
on our beloved planet?*

*“Dykes Unite!
We Have Nothing to Lose
But Our Chains!”
should be our cry
or even
“An Army of Ex-lovers
Cannot Fail!”*

*It seems to me
that we CAN
that we SHOULD
ACT OUT
as much as possible
get out of that corner
out of that closet
and Not Settle
Not Settle
Not Settle
for less than
Everything!*

July 16th, 2005

Lilith Rogers

My Lover, the Lesbian Activist

My lover, Luna Luvster, is the most revolutionary activist I know. Ever since she was a young woman, she's participated in all the radical movements that have come along—civil rights, anti-war, feminism, gay rights, abortion rights, disability rights, animal rights, anti-war again, environmentalism. Here is an interview I recently did with her.

LILITH: *Luna, how did you become an activist?*

LUNA: Well, it began with my dad. He was always telling me the truth about things. Like about the American Medical Association, the Dental Association.

LILITH: *The Dental Association?*

LUNA: Because they recommended fluoride! Poison! He said if they or the AMA recommended anything it was just to make money. And, even though my mother sent me to Catholic school, he taught me not to trust the Catholic church. Besides that, we lived in a working class neighborhood on Long Island, a mixed neighborhood of Italians and blacks, and I saw that the people who work the hardest got the worst deal.

LILITH: *Was there a political event that awakened you to activism?*

LUNA: When the U2 incident happened! When Gary Powers was shot down over Russia! Before that I thought we lived in an honest country, the best country in the world! Then my eyes were opened.

LILITH: *Did you get involved in anti-war activities during the Viet Nam War?*

LUNA: Yes, three older women and I—I was in my early thirties then—formed the South Shore Moratorium on Long Island. We handed out leaflets against the war at the Long Island Railroad mornings and afternoons, did draft counseling to young guys who were scared out of their wits, went to Washington and demonstrated with thousands of folks at the White House. Besides that, we protested other bad things our government was doing, like we went and picketed at Attica State Prison against the Rockefeller drug laws that were busting hundreds of people, especially black people, for just having a little pot!

The youngest of my three kids—Frank—was little then and I'd take him along with me to the protests. There was a picture of him on the front page of the paper once with his little protest sign. And he's still very political

today. He was born deaf, you know, and he's very active in the deaf gay community and he just returned from a month in Viet Nam where he helped with some deaf school programs over there. I'm very proud of him.

LILITH: *I'm sure you are. After the war, did you stay involved?*

LUNA: Oh, yes. I was a big listener and small financial contributor to WBAI—community supported radio—and that led me to helping clean up the Hudson River, to animal rights protests, to vegetarianism and eventually veganism. I always had a vegetable garden—I grew up with that—my grandfather that my family lived with in the family compound worked as a gardener and we had a big vegetable garden growing up. All organic of course. I consider growing at least some of your own food a revolutionary act. And composting, too. And besides, it tastes so good.

LILITH: *How about feminism and lesbian and gay rights?*

LUNA: Well, I marched outside of abortion clinics to support them and I was always a strong woman in my family. I worked and supported our family financially while I was married and then when the kids were grown and I came out as a Lesbian and was on my own, I traveled on my own around the world, always paid my own way, and always support my daughters and granddaughters in their choices. One of my daughters and my son are gay, too and we proudly march together in the Gay Pride Parade in San Francisco with all our partners. And my other daughter is a union leader.

LILITH: *Are you still active politically?*

LUNA: Of course! Don't you remember marching with me the last few years against this terrible, stupid war in Afghanistan and Iraq? And I tithed money to lots of radical groups. I send checks regularly to Adopt an Activist, small animal rights groups, KPFA, the Purple Berets, etc. And I subscribe to small, activist magazines like Mother Jones, YES, ODE, etc. I believe in putting my money where my mouth is! Or, as I also say, 'Be present and walk your talk.'

For example, even as we speak on this bright sunny summer day, the clothes are being dried on my "solar dryer," i.e. the sun! Lunch, quinoa and veggies from the garden, are cooking in the yard in my little cardboard and foil solar cooker that I made myself at the Herbal Symposium two years ago, and my composting toilet is making soil out of my own waste material. My garden is growing on gray water from my bath tub. And in a few minutes, I'm walking downtown to the post office and the library—saving gas, the ozone, and getting some good exercise all at the same time!

LILITH: *Anything else you'd like to add?*

LUNA: I'd like to say that I believe in living my life the way I'd like to

see everyone else live. My spiritual path—a combination of Buddhism, Hinduism, and Paganism, with a sprinkling of everything else thrown in—leads me to act with integrity, love, and compassion. I've been blessed by the Goddess with good health, a supportive family, loving friends and a wonderful partner. I live in one of the most beautiful parts of the country and I'm grateful every day for all these gifts.

And, most wonderfully of all, I've been able to live with and help guide my three grown granddaughters toward carrying on as feminist activists in this amazing and beautiful world.



Photo of Lilith (L) and Luna (R) taken by an unknown passerby.

Jean Taylor

Activism from a Lesbian Feminist Perspective

I became a feminist activist in the Women's Liberation Movement here in Melbourne Australia, from the moment I stepped into my first Consciousness-Raising (CR) Group meeting in 1972 and felt right at home. It took me till 1979 before I came out as a radical lesbian feminist activist and it's been an indelible part of my identity ever since.

While I was a feminist activist in the 1970s, I did roster at the Women's Liberation Centre and WL Halfway House, helped to set up and was then hired as a paid Coordinator at the local womyn's refuge, went on marches, attended demonstrations and numerous meetings, went back to study and continued with CRing on a regular basis. (During that same time, I left my husband in 1973, worked as a waitress then at La Trobe University to support my two children while studying for a BA degree.)

Into the 1980s, I continued my political and social involvement with the WLM, doing unpaid roster work at the refuge, being an activist member of several collectives including the WL Switchboard and the WL Archives both situated in the WL Building. I joined the Aboriginal Rights Solidarity Group and developed a growing awareness about racism towards the Indigenous people in particular. I attended spiritual conferences and Reclaim the Night gatherings, supported Sybylla Press fundraisers and organised poetry readings. In other words as an active member of the lesbian feminist community I was into whatever was happening.

For example, in 1987, lesbian and heterosexual feminists over forty years of age got together for the annual live-in National 10/40 Conferences over the easter break. These predominantly lesbian events were organised by each state in turn around Australia. In 1992 I was a member of the organising collective that hosted the 10/40 in a live-in camp in Healesville just outside of Melbourne where we workshopped various topics of interest to us in our older age, entertained ourselves with a concert, a Trivia Quiz and a dance, and held a memorial candle ceremony for our loved ones who'd died, amongst other things.

It wasn't till the 1990s that I really began to concentrate more on lesbian-oriented events and activities to the exclusion of all else. The big one was the first Lesbian Festival in Australia, which was held in Melbourne over ten days of plays, exhibitions, concerts, sporting events culminating in a three-day Lesbian Conference in January 1990. I was a member of the

organising collective for the Lesbian Conference, three days of workshops and entertainment with over 1000 participants (small by US standards but huge in a country with less than 20 million people). And I knew this was where I wanted to concentrate my energies.

Since then we've had a LesFest almost every year with the lesbians in each state taking it in turns to do the organising. For the past ten or so years the LesFests have been live-in events with much smaller numbers. But for dykes like myself getting together with other like-minded lesbian feminists is not only essential for my well-being and sanity, these gatherings provide a continuity, a political and social expression of who we are as a community and how we're living our lives as lesbians.

Nowadays the Lesbians Over 40 Gatherings are organised as lesbian-specific events along similar lines to the 10/40s that stopped in 1997. For a number of years I very much enjoyed my two interstate trips a year so that, for example, in 1991 I was in Perth, Western Australia, for the 10/40 and in Sydney, NSW for the LesFest, which ended in a concert at the Sydney Opera House, still one of my all-time favourite events. The energy that evening had to be experienced to be believed. In 1993 I went up to Alice Springs, Northern Territory, for the 10/40 where we had cross-cultural workshops and learned to dance with the Aboriginal Elders, and later across to Perth again for the first live-in LesFest.

Needless to say, I have attended all but one of the 10/40s, all of the Leso 40s, and all of the LesFests, not wanting to miss out on these invaluable exchanges of information and fun. I've also either been a member of, helped organise, participated in or attended as an enthusiastic supporter of, ump-teen numbers of collectives, events, conferences and what have you over these past 30 plus years. I'm still an active member of the Victorian Women's Liberation and Lesbian Feminist Archives, am a regular participant in a meditation group for lesbians and generally keep in touch with and attend most of the events happening in the lesbian community.

Sad to say, over these past couple of years the lesbian feminist community has been under siege ever since a MTF transgender dobbed the LesFest organizing collective into the Equal Opportunity Commission for advertising the LesFest as an event for Lesbians Born Female only. The organisers then got an exemption from the Tribunal to exclude males, heterosexual womyn and transgenders on the grounds that as lesbians born female we had a distinct and essential culture and needed to have exclusive gatherings where we could meet, celebrate and affirm our own particular cultural way of being. Unfortunately, a couple of weeks later the exemption was rescinded

on a technicality and rather than run the risk of being sued for holding what under the equal opportunity law was strictly-speaking an illegal event the LesFest 2004 was cancelled.

However, we haven't been radical lesbian feminist activists all these decades for nothing and while it means we can't advertise and have to rely on word of mouth (ironical, isn't it after all this time?) we still manage to meet, we still exchange information, hold workshops, affirm our political ideas, chat, have fun, laugh and exchange email addresses so we can continue the friendships and politics in other ways.

Whereas writing is my breath (I breathe therefore I write) lesbian activism has been and still is my life's blood. I count myself extremely fortunate that over these past 30 plus years I have had the opportunity not only to participate in one of the most vibrant and politically necessary revolutionary movements of our time but the Women's Liberation Movement has enabled me to instigate changes so I can live my life as a radical lesbian feminist in ways that suit my best interests.

Elana Dykewomon

Women in Black – International Jerusalem Conference 2005

*Choose Justice and Care Together**

Women in Black is an idea and a strategy. The idea is that women can make our presence felt on the great political issues of our time; that women can make a difference in the perception of war and justice; that new perceptions will gradually flood world consciousness and bring about real change.

Sure, this is not a new idea. But those of us who are compelled to work for peace, dignity, economic equity and alternatives to domination politics must, in every generation, find ways to embody our desire.

Women in Black's strategy is disarmingly simple. Encourage women, by example, to hold vigils for peace: silent, non-violent vigils in which women dress in black and carry explicit signs about their governments' injustices. Any woman can start a vigil and call it Women in Black as long as the vigil embraces non-violence. Any woman can join a vigil – going every time, or showing up once in awhile. No dues, no pledges. Each vigil is free to decide on how much, or little, structure to employ (and even to define what the symbolism of "black" means for them). No one keeps a demographic breakdown of participants in these vigils, but it's clear that many of the participants are lesbians – in the San Francisco Bay Area, my best guess would be 60-70% of the women who go to vigils are dykes, and possibly more; at this International Conference, at least 50%.**

Women in Black has existed since the first Palestinian Intifada in 1988 when Israeli women started a small vigil with signs that read: Stop the Occupation (they have faced extreme hostility for these vigils, although sup-

* From a speech by Lepa Mladjenovic, Belgrade.

**Although the original Conference schedule included one lesbian workshop, Palestinian women told the Israeli women that the workshop had to be dropped, apparently because Palestinian men objected and/or because some of the Palestinian women were in/running for political office and feared backlash from being formally linked to lesbians. You can imagine the reverberations! But to everyone's credit, the conference did not come apart at the seams. Instead, lesbians were visible to each other from the beginning, many wore the t-shirts of the Palestinian Gay Women's Organization in solidarity throughout the Conference, and nearly every speech included calls against homophobia or for the inclusion of all sexual preferences.

port has visibly grown). Now Women in Black are thousands of individual women committed to non-violent action for peace, holding vigils on every continent except Antarctica. The international movement, represented by Israel and Serbia, was nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize in 2001. Women from these world-wide vigils have formed links with each other as well as other peace organizations, have been developing internet communication networks, and have held 13 International Conferences.

Each year, the conference grows larger – this year, 750 of us from 44 countries met August 12-16 in East (Palestinian) Jerusalem to share our visions and commitments.

Me, I'm a long time dyke radical and mostly I work with and among lesbians. Why go half way around the world to a war-torn country to listen to women talk about peace when I could stay safely home and tune in to KPFA (alternative radio) and read the internet? The answers are complicated – very personal, and, I hope, universal as well.

In my body I hunger for a better world than the one we live in – that's the most simple and clear way I can put it. I identify this hunger as kin to what women talk about as spiritual need and other kinds of fierce political determination. Its root is not ideological, although I have developed politics around it. It is the same need that motivates people this week, looking at the devastation of Hurricane Katrina, to help – the need to be of use, to act *with* others. And the parallel need – to not let injustice be done in our names. As Audre Lorde used to say, if you are not taking your own power, you can be sure someone else is taking it from you. We are overwhelmed by events, seduced by “bread and circuses.” It's difficult to conceptualize that even now – as we have our barbeques and film festivals, relationship dramas, ordinary jobs and commutes – someone else trying to go to work has a gun in her face. Someone else, desperate for water, is pushed into the mud and drowned.

The point, as many women made at this conference, is not to act out of guilt. We need to act out of responsibility. What's the difference? It is not our fault that men still control the world, that their response to difference is fear and war. But it is our responsibility to root out the fear they constantly manufacture. It is our responsibility to listen to other women's stories. It is our responsibility to bear witness, to act when we can. And taking up this responsibility is a gift – a gift of making connection.

Around eight years ago, I started getting e-mails from my lesbian cousin in Israel, Gila Svirsky (whom I met through correspondence around an article of hers we published in *Sinister Wisdom* #40), a peace activist (and an organizer of this conference). The e-mails were about actions Israeli women

were participating in, protesting the occupation of Palestinian land. They were graphic, eye-witness reports of Israeli brutality, oppression, and systematic destruction of Palestinians' homes, fields, economies. Feeling like I had to do something beyond letter-writing (which I think we should all do as much as we can though I have the usual cynicisms about it), I started going to Women in Black vigils and actions in the Bay Area.

Why? For the same reasons I have ever gone to any protests or marches: I want to be counted as a witness, as a resistor, to the violent policies of governments that say they are conducting business in "my best interest." No, they are not – not the U.S. government, not the government of Israel, which claims to act for Israel's security in the name of Jews worldwide. It's physically difficult for me to do this, and I stopped for many years, but I began again with Women in Black and the protests against the Iraq war, and have found satisfaction in it as *one* way to respond.

At one of the panels in Jerusalem, Dalit Baum, an Israeli queer peace activist, talked about the "body experience" of protest and resistance. Protest she defined as taking up the outcast position in your own society – pressing your queer/othered body up against the conservative body and demanding to be seen. This is a very difficult body experience – to be reviled among your own people for taking an unpopular position, for putting others in the physical position of having to deal with your presence.

The idea of the individual body as a site of both oppression and resistance is a popular one in academia now – but it has concrete applications for activists. Baum suggests we work to move from protest to resistance – joining with other groups, at their invitation. In Israel, activists have this experience by going to Palestine and facing the Israeli army (their own army, sometimes their relatives), using the resources of their bodies' privileges, and know the joy of working for liberation as a physical sensation. She works with Black Laundry, an all-gendered group of queers, as well as with Women in Black, and insisted, in her speech, that we never erase who we are when we engage in any form of protest or resistance. Bringing our bodies – queer, female, all races – is part of the act of liberation. I would add that our disabled, fat, old and young bodies be seen, be part of the pressure on brutal regimes.

750 women met on the Mount of Olives in East Jerusalem, and each one had a different body experience. The Arab Israelis* and Jewish Israelis journeying across their divides to create a space for themselves and for the

* Palestinians from the West Bank and Occupied Territories were not able, for the most part, to make it through the check points in order to join us.

international women did not have an easy time working with each other. Yet the messages from Palestinian women were clear: “This is not about suffering; it’s about what we can do differently. The process of liberation begins from within,” said Salwa Hdeib, a Palestinian citizen in Israel. Arabiya Monsour, also a Palestinian citizen of Israel, spoke during the closing session about how, while of course we must create solidarity, we must also fight the occupation within us. She acknowledged the difficulties of Palestinian and Israeli women working together, but stressed how the patriarchy within us, that we inherit from our mothers and grandmothers, must be confronted.

Listening to Palestinians, Italians, Indians, Nigerians, Columbians talk about patriarchy, about analysis of power relations, brought back the feminist and lesbian political atmosphere of the 1970s and ’80s. In the U.S., we tend to think of it as old-fashioned – but these women reminded me that it is *women* who bear the terrible physical aftermaths of war and men’s policies. In Israel, pundits are fond of the statistic that Arab violence against Israel has decreased by 80% since work began on the apartheid wall. But no one in power is talking about how violence against women has *doubled* on both sides.

In Jerusalem this August, the women had a passion for what they were doing that shimmered in the enormous heat. Hundreds of women hung on each other’s words. If you have never been to an international conference of women, I urge you to find a way to have that experience (most conferences, as this one, work hard to raise travel funds for those who need them). While those of us in the English speaking world bear the uneasy privilege of hearing most speakers in English, translation is one of the major underpinnings of international coalitions. At WIB this year translation of the “big tent” addresses – which was much of our time together* – could be heard in Arabic, Hebrew, English, French, Spanish and Italian. The women who spoke other languages were accommodated by friends and strangers who undertook to retranslate. During the two workshop sessions, where professional translation was logistically impossible, women sat in language clusters, giving the gist of intense discussions to each other – and thoughtfully allowing time for translation to be made.

In the workshop on Women, Writing and Resistance which I facilitated, British, Israeli, Spanish, Argentinean, American, Italian, French and

* One criticism I heard from many women was that there were too many “big tent” speeches, encouraging us to be consumers of the conference rather than participants. Many of us wished for more workshops and small group discussions, more opportunities to forge personal connections.

Palestinian women read from their work and talked about how they used writing to deal with political realities. A French woman spoke of life as a professional storyteller – how important it is for every generation to hand its stories down. A British woman talked about how her writing brought her into contact with refugees in her town. A Palestinian woman wept, describing her journal as the only place to go for validation when she experienced the conflicts of being both a Palestinian and Israeli citizen. I saw how the time lag of translation helped us think – considering not just the surface meanings, but the nuances we know we must be missing. Does peace mean the same thing in San Francisco as in Belgrade? I don't think so. So I am listening carefully to my new friend from Belgrade when she describes her work – the many ways she has dared to cross borders.

In the U.S., our borders are so easy! Imagine if we had to show our passports to cross the bridges into Marin county, and could be turned back by a soldier's whim. Imagine you – or your friend – needing surgery, but the nearest hospital is across a border and you are denied papers to pass. In the small Palestinian village of Bil'in, I sat next to a woman outside a small convenience store, where a handful of us who could not make the full march to the demonstration site had gathered.* The Palestinian woman was my age or younger, and walked with clear pain. She said she needed a serious operation, but the only place she could get it was Hadassah hospital in Jerusalem, and she had been waiting a long time for approval – even with the right papers, she might not be allowed to come in. Since then, Israeli forces, angered by regular, peaceful protests in Bil'in, have invaded her town, complete with tear gas and rubber bullet assaults and curfews.

Bil'in was the last stop of over 400 international women, hosted by Palestinian women in the Occupied Territories – entering via the settler's road in eight huge air-conditioned buses. From the windows we could see Israeli soldiers sticking their guns into the windows of a small passenger van. From the windows we could see the red roofs of the Israeli settlements – and the new construction that looked to be doubling the size of several that we passed. It was clear from what we could *see* that Israel is grabbing Arab land and pushing Arabs into smaller and smaller spaces, while minimizing the amount of social/infrastructure services it's compelled to provide. Withdrawing from Gaza, for instance, means a great savings for Israel both in terms of no longer having to protect the settlers and no longer having responsibility for water, electricity or anything else

* For current information about the wall and demonstrations against it, you might start with: zope.gush-shalom.org/home/en

in the space it has so recently colonized and has now barricaded off from itself and the world.

So much to describe! Go to the Israeli Women in Black website: coalitionofwomen.org/home/english/organizations/women_in_black or google Women in Black to get some idea of the scope of this worldwide movement.

At the end of the conference, Yvonne Deutsch, one of the founders of the Israeli women's peace movement, asked what the political achievement of the conference was. Her answer: it energized Israeli activists and it gave new allies and hope to Palestinian women. And I would add: it pushed critical mass forward, and gave women worldwide opportunities to make contact, connection, friendships with women they would otherwise have no access to.

It made me glad to come home and put my body forward among others, to renew my intent to be seen by passersby on Market St. in San Francisco at the monthly Women in Black vigils (first Friday of the month if you want to come).

Once, while handing out leaflets, an adult couple with two teenaged girls refused me. "Don't pay any attention," the woman instructed the girls.

"But look at them!" One of the girls was staring intently at the group behind me, holding the Women in Black banner. "They're so beautiful – they have a passion for what they're doing that's like a poem. Their faces are shining."

Now I am thinking of my friend Gloria Anzaldúa and her visions of forging paths across borders. Women are everywhere moving into the borderlands, against the dictates of male states. The work of reaching each other is fraught with pressures from within and without. And still we come, year after year, more and more of us.

Join your local vigils. If you can't find one, start one. Watch for Women in Black 2007 in Spain.

San Francisco Dyke March Committee

San Francisco Dyke March Statement 2005: Dykes Across Borders: We Will Not Be Divided

WELCOME!

Allow us to welcome you to the 2005 Dyke March! Here you join with other dykes of every stripe and flavor, of myriad nationalities, ethnicities, races and border-transgressions. We gather as survivors of every form of violence, and gather to continue the struggle to dismantle the boundaries that those in power erect between and among us: we won't be divided!

WHAT ARE BORDERS?

"As a mestiza I have no country, my homeland cast me out; yet all countries are mine because I am every woman's sister or potential lover. (As a lesbian I have no race, my own people disclaim me; but I am all races because there is the queer of me in all races.) I am cultureless because, as a feminist, I challenge the collective cultural/religious male-derived beliefs of Indo-Hispanics and Anglos; yet I am cultured because I am participating in the creation of yet another culture, a new story to explain the world and our participation in it, a new value system with images and symbols that connect us to each other and to the planet. Soy un amasamiento..."
-(Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, p. 80-81)

In the world we inhabit, borders demarcate power relationships, haves and have-nots, and not just divisions. Dykes refuse to acknowledge national/cultural borders as limitations: we care about and are affected by everything that happens in the world. Borders do not justify the denial of human rights. We recognize human experience as human experience. At the grassroots level, we organize around common causes: hunger, shelter, living wage, environmental devastation, resistance to fascist corporate takeovers. We recognize as illusory the boundaries of the state, and simultaneously, we respect people's rights to their national self-determination.

Dykes face opposition no matter nationality or place of origin. Our outsider's perspective is necessary, particularly in response to the U.S. government's irrational obstinacy when it comes to the good of the world. Our border-crossing is in variance with U.S. foreign policy, and we flout these heavily-guarded lines in the sand with intentional grace and beauty, love and struggle.

Once again, in 2005, we continue to say NO to the war and invasion of other lands perpetrated by the United States. Dykes must raise our voices in

dissent, to articulate what is unspoken and unspeakable, to say what we have been trained out of speaking, and so that we may hear one another. We march in solidarity with dykes worldwide fighting for their own lives and the lives of those they love: in Iraq and Afghanistan, Rwanda and Sudan, in Palestine and Puerto Rico, in Hawaii, in all places where people are fighting for their survival. We march in solidarity with poor dykes, battered dykes, and dykes on the front lines of each and every one of the U.S. government's racist, imperialist, greed-driven wars, at home and abroad.

We march for a better world: for a humanity that is stronger and more whole, less fragmented. We march for dykes, but not only for dykes: we believe that by gathering together and speaking our truth, we each make the world a better place. This is a statement of solidarity. As we gather in clear and intentional violation of the boundaries intended to keep us (all of us) separated, we further the work of connection and peace. We stand in solidarity with the struggles for self-determination and against U.S. imperialism that are ongoing worldwide. We march across borders, take one another's hands, and declare that a world safe for dykes is a world safe for everyone!

We live in the most powerful, most oppressive, most hated country in the world, a country currently in the midst of a right wing, religious fundamentalist revolution primarily aimed at women, gay and poor people internally, and Muslims and Arabs externally. Those participating in this right wing agenda are attacking and dismantling social security, Medicare, education, civil rights, and health care. Armed vigilantes have taken it upon themselves to stand at the borders between the US and Mexico, yet jobs are shipped across these (and other borders) to be done under the most brutal conditions, and women continue to be trafficked without public outcry.

Extreme, rightwing fundamentalists occupy the White House and the Congress. State by state and in the federal government there has been a surge in anti-abortion and anti-queer legislation. When the right wing goes after "activist judges" that's code for gay marriage and abortion. Left unchecked these efforts threaten our very existence. You don't have to embrace gay marriage to recognize that the attacks on it are part of a larger right wing strategy to foster hatred and bigotry directed at queers. We cannot accept the imposition of the heterosexual, religious fundamentalist ideology as a model for living our lives. We recognize the parallels between the way piecemeal anti-gay legislation is being passed and the early, local stages of the Nazis' anti-Semitic campaigns. We gather to draw attention to what is happening all around us. Those who do not remember the past are condemned to repeat it.

Denial of a woman's right to choose imposes a set of standards which are women hating at the core. Anti-woman governments, opposed to our autonomy and self-determination, opposed to our control over our bodies and our right to love as we choose, aim to have greater and greater control over each individual life, and thus society as a whole; for dykes to reach across borders is to subvert this power structure. We are inherently interstitial, and share this in common with one another. We must remain conscious of our differences, and simultaneously resist conservative political attempts to divide us from one another.

We also march to reassert our love for our own bodies and the bodies of all dykes, all women. We march to defend our right to choose: to choose what we shall do with our bodies and how. We march to assert the need for accurate information to be made available so that we are able to make informed choices in all aspects of our lives. We march for the right to choose to be dykes, and to choose to love dykes. We march to declare our right to pleasure and joy. We march for nature, our nature, and the Earth that holds us.

"Dykes Across Borders" is about dykes manifesting a challenge to the racism, the xenophobia, the ageism, the classism, even the internalized homophobia and misogyny that keep us separated from, silenced around and struggling against, rather than alongside, one another. We gather to express our devotion to the dismantling of the white supremacist capitalist patriarchy (thank you, bell hooks) that keeps our minds, bodies, children, friends, sisters and families and human community beaten down and enslaved. We gather as a manifestation of the world march for the world we want to live in — a world safe for the whole spectrum of each of our fabulous, multi-layered selves.

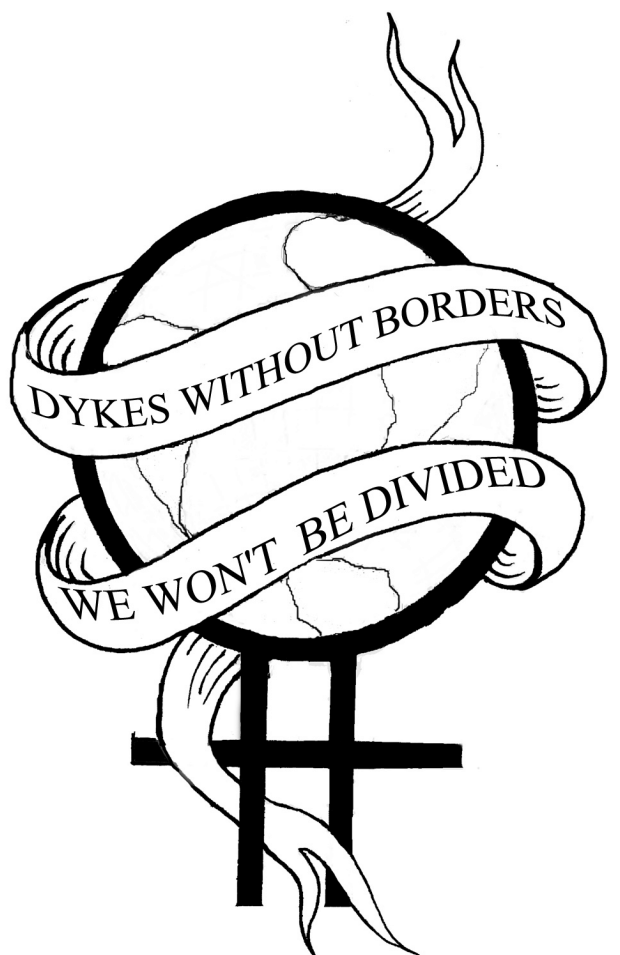
DYKE IDENTITY - A MARCH FOR ALL DYKES

We continue to demand that the Dyke March and rally be DYKE-ONLY SPACE. In other words, we ask that men NOT participate, but rather that our brothers support us from the sidelines, cheering us on and helping with finances or other support. This march is for DYKES. Dykes gather at the Dyke March to celebrate our love and passion for women and for ALL dykes. We celebrate our queerness in all its manifestations. Celebrate Dyke Diversity!

WHO WE ARE

The coordinating committee is a crew of community-oriented dykes who come together from varying backgrounds through our love of dykes and for the San Francisco Dyke March. We are grateful for the work of the

DM's founders over its first eleven years, for their continued guidance, and for the foundation they laid that we now stand upon in our work to keep the annual March thriving. We are femmes, butches, and otherwise-identified; dykes-of-color, dykes of mixed race, Jewish dykes, and white dykes; dykes of varying ages and classes. We are each of us dykes seeking to put our myriad talents to use for our communities.



SAN FRANCISCO DYKE MARCH
SATURDAY, JUNE 25th 2005

Patricia Jackson

Different Windows

We all gleaned understanding of lesbian oppression through different windows. I came out “through bathroom windows,” escaping raids of Gay bars from Louisville, Kentucky to San Jose, California. I participated in Civil Rights struggles, was part of the 60s War on Poverty, and demonstrated against the Viet Nam war; always in the closet. For forty years I have lived alone, with a lover, or in lesbian collectives in many cities and the countryside. We shared everything, all emotions, lovers, our crises and pain, but, especially our periods! All I really miss about not having a period is the shared comforting, the hot tea and talks.

Stonewall 1969 gave me a personal is political understanding of oppression. I helped form one of the first Gay Liberation Fronts and for a time was the token woman. Later that year, a call went out for militant gay activists to gather for a conference in Berkeley, California. I hitchhiked from San Jose to Berkeley and found a new life as a proud political Dyke. The weekend conference of Gay activists was held in a liberal church with scores of hippie Gay men reveling in their sexuality. The pinnacle the first night was a collective nude phallic ritual on the altar in the sanctuary. Though appreciating the paganism and in-your-face heresy of the act, I realized then and there it was not around sexuality that I would unite with my brothers. My search for other Lesbian women began. A few people had gathered in a small room to hear Judy Grahn read her poem, “Edward the Dyke.” Her words put politics to the feelings of why lesbian oppression was qualitatively different from that of Gay men. That night I followed Judy and her lover Wendy home and my life changed paths.

Lesbian women of San Francisco and Berkeley in the late 60s and early 70s fell in love with ourselves as women. We came from different places, different backgrounds, were of different races and ages. But for that special time we came together and made miracles. We were birthing ideas and creating new ways of being women together. We created collectives of women households, women with children, shelters for women, places for women to gather, formed anti-rape squads and rescue teams for battered women. We collaborated on writing “it Ain’t Me Babe” newspaper, running presses for our own books. First we fought for spaces in bookstores and libraries to display and sell our works. Then, we created our own bookstores. Some of the roots for women’s presses and bookstores grew from a collective household in Berkeley.

Our collective household became a gathering place for Lesbians. Weekends spawned impromptu parties with dancing and debates. Discussions on theories of sexism and women's oppression took place in the kitchen. Socialism debates and good drugs were shared on the stair steps. We planned the first West Coast Women's Dance, patterned after one held by sisters in New York. This jarred the male counter culture norms of the day but delighted all the women. We gave talks to straight groups about Dykes, once plopping one of us on a table in a nervously still room of people and stating, "now let's examine this specimen of dykedom". We held sit-ins with children in banks and other public places to emphasize the need for childcare. One hot summer day, we showed up at the local ice cream parlor en mass in our "East Bay Queers" t-shirts. We completely enjoyed this in-your-face bravado. We held the belief that this explosion of energy was taking place in other areas, and often set out to find those other sisters

We convinced the hottest Lesbian bar in the Bay area, Maud's, to hire us Dykes to cook food for other Dykes. We needed to make some more money for rent, but we too wanted to drink and hang out, while spreading lesbian feminism, of course. This led to many discussions about Butch and Femme, like, "just which one of all of you is the butch of the house?, or the femme?" to which we replied, "we all are!"

We formed Gay Women's Liberation. Taking Del Martin's appeal in, "If That's All There Is," we attended the North American Homophile Conference and called for Lesbians to separate from Gay men. No longer, not within the Gay movement nor the White male Left would women's oppression be an adjunct, last on the agenda, something dealt with after the revolution. We had read, "Goodbye to All That" by Robin Morgan. We saw our oppression as Lesbians unique, yet inextricably linked to all women's oppression. Many of us had tried to join women's organizations, like NOW. But most strictly straight women's groups were terrified to identify with us, afraid of being called "man haters" and Dykes. There were individual relationships between "straight" women and "lesbian" women ending too often in painful partings as some women went back to their male lovers. At the 1977 UN International Conference On Women, Houston, Texas, an international bond as feminists was declared with the passage of a resolution acknowledging the oppression of Lesbians. Immediately, the entire conference of women erupted in excitement pouring out to celebrate in the streets!

In the Fall/Winter of 1970, we teamed up with the San Francisco Mime Troupe. That season the Troupe had produced a feminist melodrama, *The Independent Female*, or *A Man Has His Pride*, a Joan Holden play and *Seize*

the Time, an epic history of the Black Panther Party. We caravanned across the country setting up our literature tables after each Mime performance. In every city we connected with women (known as networking today) and talked about feminism and Lesbian oppression. We met women in Lansing, Michigan who had formed a Horse-back Anti-Rape Patrol. In New York, we talked with Robin Morgan, who had just written *Sisterhood is Powerful*. We attended meetings of women trying to form a National Women's Party, and visited with Rita Mae Brown. In New Haven, we attended the trials of Panthers Erica Huggins and Bobby Seale. In November, we ended up in Washington, D.C. to participate in the historic Black Panther Party, Revolutionary People's Constitutional Convention (RPCC).

In 1975, I left the city, joining with other women to establish Lesbian Separatist land. With a women's grant, we bought 80 acres of land in north-west Arkansas. We sent articles into *Lesbian Connection* magazine with our vision of living as Separatists. Women from all over the world showed up. This was an era before so many women had moved onto the land as collectives of women only. Our collective vision of living in Arkansas ended a few years later. Our inability to resolve race and class differences, our disagreements on separatism, and our feeling disconnected from struggles in the cities sent us in different paths. But, primarily, we were faced with constant attacks, even death threats, surrounding our life style and our political work to stop aerial spraying of the herbicide, 2,4,5T, aka Agent Orange, used in Viet Nam. Back to the land did not mirror my dreams of running streams or escaping from patriarchy. Living on the land did reconnect me to Mother Earth and women's spirituality, and, intensified my understanding of capitalism and imperialism.

Returning to the city began a time of joining a socialist party, organizing AIDS educationals, working in people's food co-ops and health clinics. In the mid-eighties, I went from full-time activist work, supporting myself with part-time jobs, to full-time jobs with little time left for activism.

For several decades, women-identified-women have been creating space for women in the world. We dealt with fierce opposition to women-only places as we carved out niches to safely uncover our own herstories. We revealed repressed knowledge of goddesses and the Divine Feminine. We practiced ancient rituals and created new ones, for rituals nourished our souls. Once we knew ourselves as part of this ancient herstory, there would be no maskings of any kind of woman hatred hurled at us from any angle, without our understanding the source, but, best of all, not taking it inside. Lesbian separatism gave us the inner strength to

never believe the lies, the pride to claim being a Dyke and the strength to fight.

With eco-feminism, women merged political analysis and activism with the Divine Feminine. We realized the direct correlation between destroying the earth and the battering of women. Dominating women's bodies, controlling our womb of life force, equates control of our Mother Earth. All forms of women's oppression give fodder to forces that feel entitled to destroy what is not respected. Women all around the globe have united to stand against wars, genocide and femicide, against racism, environmental racism and destruction of indigenous cultures, and the greed of global warming. We have developed sustainable ways to live together on the earth.

Bridges can be built between younger women and us older dykes to overthrow the backlash against feminism. Younger lesbians are eager for our stories, wanting to know of our lives before their births. For us pioneer lesbian feminists, there is now an opening for speaking up to expose the lies created about us; that we were anti-sex, never had any fun; hated all men, were too political and were bad dressers! In those dyke days, with our energized spirit, we believed we could do anything. We can infuse others with that hope. We can pass on our experiences, share and meld together our generational wisdoms. We stand on firm ground and have readied ourselves to step out, to end the present political tyranny. Now, is our time to speak out, to believe and create the vision of a new world possible.

At 64, returning to full-time activism with part-time jobs, I have time to synthesize political experiences, spiritual knowledge, and feminist theory. After all, what good is it to be a crone if we don't crow about everything!

Ruth Mountaingrove

Who is an activist?

For me I see an activist as one who works to form committees, organizations, marches in the streets, stirs up trouble. Well, I enjoy stirring up trouble once in awhile but mostly I like to stay out of the spotlight, do things quietly.

An activist makes visible changes. I was that kind of activist when I lived on the east coast. I became an activist with the Vietnam teach-ins and the Civil Rights movement. I moved on to my own civil rights - the women's movement - working with that movement while I was still a research technician at the chemical company Rohm and Haas, organizing women in my lab to protest our unequal pay for the same work. Bringing in the National Labor Board to protest the glass ceiling. At that time I was divorced, raising four children so I was risking my job.

One of my friends in her twenties was in New York City for the protest against the Republican convention and Iraq. Now she is down on the border of Mexico making sure the Pastors for Peace caravan makes its way to Tampico and Cuba. That's what I call activism.

Am I an activist if I sign a pledge on the internet to stop destruction of the environment? Am I an activist if I'm on the board of the local women's shelter? Am I an activist if I write letters to the editor of the local paper? If I work with a national organization on their steering committee doing layout for their newsletter for three years? If I write reviews of lesbian/women's books for my local lesbian newsletter?

Am I an activist if I am on the local community TV board? If I'm a producer of a local radio program for women/lesbians? If I'm on the board of the local Gay center? If I'm part of a Consciousness Raising group? March in the Gay Pride parade?

Because I've done all these things at one time or another in the twenty years I've lived in California. But these activities don't fit my east coast definitions. This isn't my picture of an activist. I really haven't seen myself as such. Maybe I'm a low key activist.

Dianna Grayer and Sheridan Gold

Quietly Loud Activists

Activism is about taking action and doing something positive for a cause. It can be loud, attending marches and demonstrations and waving picket signs, or it can be quietly taking a stand. That's the kind of activism we do. We view our activism as being proactive in helping our community members become emotionally healthy, empowered people. We've always wanted to find a way to help the gay community and amazingly, opportunity came knocking at our door.

For the past five years, we have been writing articles about relationships for our local LGBTQI community newspaper and in the last year began co-hosting a monthly radio show, both about relationship issues, both called Living Proof. After all, after nearly 28 years together, we feel like we have something to share! We believe every person can be living proof that through our relationships with our partners, co-workers, family members, and friends, we will be empowered to be centered, grounded, healthy, and able to tackle homophobia and racism.

We [Dianna and Sheridan] don't have a problem sharing and discussing the hard times and the almost giving up times and the part that kept us fighting for our relationship times. When people ask, we talk, and even when they don't ask, we talk. We even ask them about their relationships and how they are working them. We offer ideas that will help people get back on the right path to making their relationships work. What it comes down to is how honest you are, how you communicate your needs, wants, and disappointments, how worthy you feel you are to have a good relationship, and how hard you're willing to work for it to be successful.

Relationships are a wonderful thing. It saddens us to hear so often that so many LGBTQI people are deciding not to work at making a relationship happen because they've been burned too many times and the pain is too much to try again. We believe with knowledge, people can form loving and lasting relationships. That's why we do what we do. In the process of offering the "how tos" we're empowering individuals in our community and helping them become stronger people.

If people don't take care of themselves and get healthy emotionally, physically, and spiritually, they'll get weak, sick, and run out of energy. The soul will be left unattended. Then the enemy can overtake them. We encourage people to work toward building their self-esteem, self-love, and self-acceptance, be-

cause if these are solid, then they'll stay healthy. When we accept, love, and honor ourselves we become freer and stronger to stand against those who want to oppress us and deny our freedom. We need to be grounded to fight even if it is a quiet voice writing an article or signing a petition. We believe by grounding ourselves, we can stabilize our relationships, and through stabilizing our relationships, we can stand together, solid, in our communities.

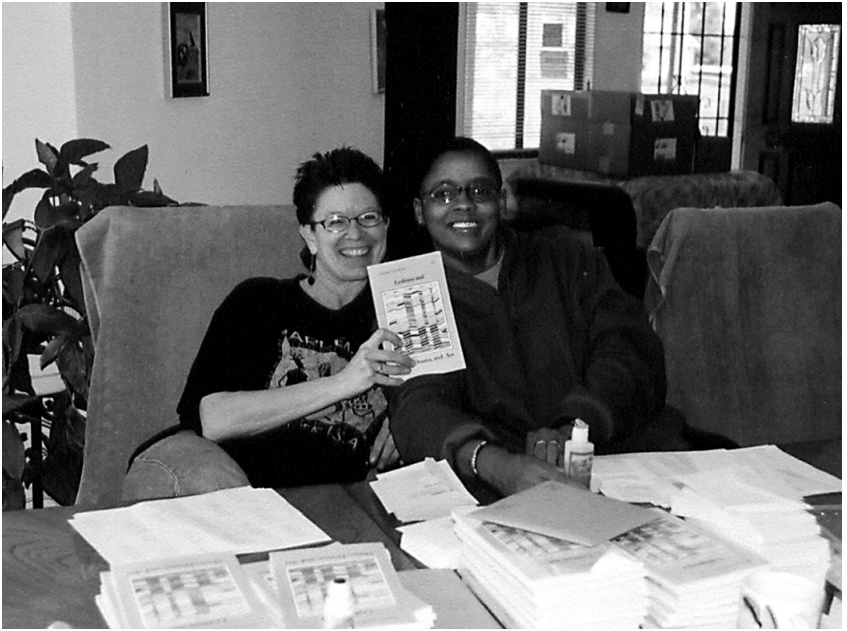


Photo of Sheridan Gold (L) and Dianna Grayer (R) at a *Sinister Wisdom* mailing party. Taken by Lilith Rogers 2005.

Nisa Donnelly

Chasing Mother Jones' Shadow

"No matter what the fight, don't be ladylike."

- Mother Jones

We grew up union, Denise and I, back when such things mattered more than they do today. Thank you, Ronald Reagan.

In the 1950s, when we were kids, the American dream could still be bought with overtime and sweat. We lived well between contracts and ate oatmeal when the union went out on strike. In the UAW town in Illinois where I grew up, the contract came up every three years in late fall. Those years meant no Christmas for the kids whose dads were walking the picket lines outside the factory at the end of our street where the strikers' tents were pitched on the gravel parking lot. Green canvas Army surplus, the sides heaved as wind blew cold snow and rain through the tent flap that was always open a foot or two to accommodate the men who slogged in to warm their hands over the barrel they kept fed with local coal. The mine contracts came up earlier and in different years.

Miners were tougher than the autoworkers, or so it seemed. Meaner and angrier. Maybe it was the thick-cleated boots that scrunch-scratched the gravel when they walked, or maybe it was the guns they kept tucked under their belts. The miners were always on the lookout for scabs, men more poor and desperate than my uncles or maybe just less lucky, who were hauled down from the big cities up north in converted school buses with bars across the windows. In California, Denise's dad once climbed up on a logging truck not unlike that as it rolled toward the mill gate, and broke the windshield. She doesn't remember him doing that, actually, because children, especially girl children, were seldom allowed near the strike lines, but she often heard the story. We both heard a lot of stories.

When it comes to union, my ancestry stretches back to the beginning of America's organized labor movement. My great-granddaddy was one of the original organizers of the United Mine Workers of America. I never knew him, of course. He was an old man by the time my grandmother was born and an old old man when my father was just a boy. My grandmother, his youngest child, born in a mining camp, arrived in this world the same year as the eight-hour day. Her dad had spent most of the previous 20 years away from the family, organizing miners in Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Kentucky

and the Ozarks that spill from southern Missouri into the part of Illinois I still call “back home.” When his grandchildren asked the old man what he’d been doing over those stretches of years when he was gone from his wife and eldest daughter, he would regale them with stories of how he had ridden with the outlaw Jessie James. In truth he was working in company towns with names like Skeleton, Mount Hope, Prosperity, mining coal in deep and dangerous holes. He watched other men die from landslides and cave-ins, bad air and coal dust, from 14-hour days and seven-day workweeks that provided pay envelopes filled with scrip that was worthless anywhere except at the company store, where the only thing prime about the gristle and fat that was passed off as meat were the prices. Bullets broke through the night to blow off the heads of union organizers. My great-grandfather was lucky; the company thugs kept missing him. His wife and eldest daughter were less lucky. One winter, while he was gone, the company put them out of the company-owned house where they lived. The priest at the company-owned church turned them away. I do not know how they survived, only that my great-grandfather cursed the priest and his church when he came back to find his wife and daughter starving. Those stories came in secrets and scraps over decades, until I could piece them together like a quilt. I can see how the imaginary exploits of riding with an outlaw gang would make a more palatable memory. It sounded easier. It probably was.

I don’t know if my great-grandfather ever met Mother Jones, but it is likely. They were both Irish immigrants driven to America by the Potato Famine. They were in the same areas during the same times doing the same work. They called her the Miners’ Angel. She wore long skirts and lace, looked exactly like the teacher and dressmaker she’d been before she took to rabble rousing. They say she was a fiery public speaker, and fearless because she’d lost it all already. We could do worse for a role model.

During the 1970s, what I now call the lesbian days of rage, I came out as a political lesbian. I joined the great queer migration to California; became a kind of cultural worker in the ‘80s; was waylaid by the twists and turns of my too-emotional mind in the ‘90s; and finally claimed my own power not long after the start of this new millennium. Over the years, I have marched on Washington and through the streets of San Francisco and Chicago, carried signs and banners, written books and articles.

Here is what I learned: Marches are better places to meet women than bookstores, or even bars.

Denise, who had the great good sense to have been born in California, heard about the Daughters of Bilitis in 1970 and drove the 200 miles south

to San Francisco to find them. She spent a truly terrifying and confusing Saturday night, at least for her, in San Francisco's Mission District. The next morning as dawn stretched pink-gray across the city, she climbed back into her truck and drove the 200 miles home to a small town up near the Oregon border. It's been a lot of years since she's been back to San Francisco.

If you ask, she will tell you that she is not a political lesbian. She did not carry signs or banners. When I tell her that the personal is political, she does not believe me.

She is the most political lesbian I know.

While I was busy picking up my next girlfriend at one of the interminable marches for the Equal Rights Amendment, Denise was being hired at a paper mill. The first woman to not work in the office. When I was writing stories that mattered no more or less than words ever do or can, she was working nights, taking care of her first girlfriend who was felled by an early stroke. That was 25 years ago, before domestic partners became household words. There was no insurance. Nobody except the bill collectors recognized their relationship. Bill collectors do not care if you're queer, so long as the check doesn't bounce. While I was deconstructing feminist literature and queer theory, she was a union steward fighting for the rights of a fellow worker who'd lost his eye when a pipe exploded in his face. The company refused responsibility. Prove it if you can. While I was writing about lesbians and their relationships to their mothers, Denise was leaving her left breast with a cancer doctor. Twenty years of working in industrial toxins takes its toll. The paper mill moved to Chile a few years back. No justice. No peace.

We are nothing alike. We are everything alike.

We met because the Teamsters decided to discriminate against their own. If you go to the International Brotherhood of Teamsters website, you'll find a lot of hyperbole about solidarity and equality. Unions are good at hyperbole, they always have been. It's a big part of their job. You'll also find a statement by their current president James Hoffa—son of the still-missing former president Jimmy Hoffa—who said in 2000 that the "time for domestic partner benefits has come." He was talking about the Northwest Airlines strike. A couple of years later in Boston, one of his special assistants said the same thing in response to a proposed amendment that would have banned domestic partner benefits in Massachusetts. Organized labor is concerned, they said, because it is an equal-pay-for-equal-work issue. It is also a good chip to have at the bargaining table and they know it. Rights for domestic partners have been burbling to the surface across the country and organized labor needs all the support it can get.

But what labor leaders believe in Washington, D.C., takes a long while to filter the 2,800 miles across the country to the far reaches of Shasta County in northern California. James Hoffa has never been to the shabby little Teamsters local union hall out on Highway 273. The chances of him coming aren't good. And why would he? It's a sleepy little local led by a one-time forklift operator who tends to the small-time business of organizing in equally small-time companies. A few dozen workers here, another 50 there. It's not easy to make a mark when your job is to organize labor in a place where there are more retirees than workers, more churches than factories, and more old folks' homes and golf courses than high schools. Wal-Mart, that American icon of anti-labor practices, is building a superstore a couple miles down the road from the union hall. Wal-Mart is obviously not running scared. At least not here. Maybe not anywhere. But, I digress.

We met because a mutual friend believes me to be more political than I actually am. It's a common misconception. Denise had been trying to get the Teamsters to offer health insurance to domestic partners. They'd refused. I knew my way around laws and legislators. I was good with words and research and letter writing. Would I help?

I had spent the better part of a very pampered and comfortable decade working for a university that provided such things as domestic partner benefits. Not that it mattered. My girlfriends always had their own benefits. It had been a long time since I'd thought about activism.

So," I asked, "your girlfriend doesn't have insurance?"

"I don't have a girlfriend."

"Then why are you doing this?"

"Because evil flourishes when good people do nothing." She really does talk like that.

I did the research. Wrote the letters. Dissected and translated the actuarial data. Attached pages of documentation, justification, citations and ramifications. Signed off with the phrase "In Solidarity," as if I believed it. The arguments were formidable, the data solid. Who would not be convinced? We waited. Months passed. Finally, a one-paragraph response came from an attorney at a big-ticket Sacramento law firm known for representing organized labor. His clients, he informed Denise, were doing nothing illegal by discriminating. He, of course, did not use the term "discriminating." Lawyers seldom leave themselves open like that. But words are only words. Writers know that better than anyone.

I wrote more letters. Attached more documentation. Found more actuarial data, more cases to support our position. Indignantly, we demanded

that they show us their data. Accused them of making decisions based on whim and supposition, in hopes of shaming them into at least looking at what we had provided. Words are only words, but they are supposed to open windows if not doors. We were met with silence.

More months passed. Denise forced the local union leader to call the attorney, who recounted the plot of the *Shawshank Redemption*. Why is it that the privileged think fiction makes the reality of discrimination more palatable to those they oppress? He told her he really was on her side. That she needed more patience. That our time would come. He advised her to write more letters. That no one would answer. He didn't say that. He didn't have to.

Months turned into a year. Denise cursed the local union secretary-treasurer when he came to the corporation yard one day. "When are you going to do your job and get us domestic partner coverage?" He was there for a company picnic. The other men around her laughed as he walked a little too quickly away, blushing. She laughed, too, imitating his gait.

We stopped writing letters and began waiting for California's new domestic partner legislation to go into effect in January 2005. Under one of the new laws, large employers who provide coverage to spouses have to provide it to registered domestic partners—except for those employers that are self-insured. The Teamsters are self-insured. Some Teamsters in some parts of California—mostly the big locals in urban areas—have domestic partner benefits because their governing boards voted it in. For the rest, nothing changed. By law, nothing had to.

Like Mother Jones, I am fond of long skirts. And, like her, the older I grow, the more fearless I become. Perhaps there is less to lose or more to gain. I do not know. I only know that by chance and happenstance, justice sometimes steals in through the back door. In the spring, Denise and I were at a small conference for Teamsters at the local Best Western hotel. Historic images of hardscrabble hardworking men and women lined the hallway and a large poster declaring "equal pay for equal work" stood outside the conference room door. When I found the attorney, I asked how he could justify the antithesis of the image against the reality of discrimination. He said, and these are his exact words, "I do not have to justify anything to you. What we are doing is legal."

We didn't know an important Teamsters vice president was speaking that day. That was luck. Getting to him first was determination. "I am the great-granddaughter of one of the original organizers of the United Mine Workers of America," I began. He was intrigued. "And I want to know why

the Teamsters are discriminating against their own.” He frowned, listened, asked for our data, for copies of the dozens of letters we’d sent and the three replies received in nearly two years. The local union leader, who had expected accolades for his coup of getting such an important man to come to town, stood by, his face blanching, speechless. The attorney, who had assured me there was no one at the conference who could help us, who just that morning had advised me to become “more political,” hid in the corner, studying the bottom of his cup. Perhaps he was reading tea leaves. Perhaps he was thinking, once again, of movie plots.

Here is what I know for sure: Men are terrified of women’s anger.

We e-mail the vice president every so often now. He assures us that the attorney has been “enlightened” and instructed to draft language that parallels state law. The board will vote next month. We will probably win this skirmish. Denise and I don’t need the insurance, but that was never the point. We’re getting to justice a few steps at a time. Peace, though, will likely take longer.

Tamara Gorin

Dyke March, Vancouver 2004

It is gorgeous. Hot gorgeous. We carry buttons, stickers and small chap-books detailing feminist lesbian herstory. My lover worked the button maker yesterday; I must remember to kiss the calloused palm of her right hand.

“Dyke Power”

“Lesbian Separatist”

“my mom is a lesbian”

“dykesr’us”

“radical feminist lesbian”

“this lesbian loves her dog”

“Lesbian Lover”

We made 30 labrys. Cardboard. Silver Spray Paint. Heavy Cord. Bam-boo.

Our first and only action together. We are wary rads, crashing, upping the ante, insisting on feminism. How can 1000 dykes get together, even if only for 3 blocks, and not recognize this act as feminist? The organizers manage to. We won’t.

We sweat, squint, and approach lesbians we think might just hate our guts. (Our fear, though relentless as this July sun, is not to win out today.) We offer buttons, stickers, herstory and Amazon battle-axes. When through, 100 buttons and 200 stickers adorn lesbian breasts, buttocks, baseball caps, shoulders, cheeks, baby carriages, and bicycle panniers. Small, sweet victories.

And they don’t hate us. Dykes are shocked we aren’t out to make a buck. Many are relieved, glad for our wee gifts. Happy we chose boldness. We are too.

Later, at the other park, personal takes over political. I get caught up in the dramas of my sex, you refuse to bring your radical lesbian friends over to meet us, you are lonely for your ex and a wistful rock star, you are just tired really and want to get a bit tipsy. I glimpse, out of the corner of my eye, in the place where intimacy and solidarity should be, our separations. Soon, our unity slips away entirely.

Still. Lesbians gathered. We insisted.

The sun glints off buttons made with the hands of willing dykes.

Francis Eatherington

Beverly Anne Brown (1951-2005)



Photo of Beverly Brown by Francis Eatherington, June 19, 2004.

Author and social justice activist Beverly Anne Brown died at home on October 27, 2005, after a long struggle with cancer. She was born February 21, 1951, in Fresno, California, grew up in Redding, California, and attended Reed College in Portland, Oregon.

Over the course of her life, Beverly was dedicated to the struggles for the rights of women, working people, and immigrant families. Bev sustained (and was sustained by) her love of and interest in nature: trees, geological formations, and especially the lives, behaviors and habitats of insects. Even as her cancer advanced, she took daily walks, sharing her wonder and observations with friends. She is widely known as the author of *In Timber Country: Working People's Stories of Environmental Conflict and Urban Flight* and as the founder of the Jefferson Center for Education and Research, a popular education organization with links from California to British Columbia.

In the late 1970s Beverly fought the threat of surface strip mining in rural areas of southern Oregon. She was active in the women's and lesbian liberation movements and, in 1983, founded *Maize: A Lesbian Country Magazine*.

For many years Beverly lived in Sunny Valley, Oregon, with her long-time partner Tee Corinne. One of her great pleasures was cultivating the beautiful garden at their home.



Mabel Hampton at Gay Pride Day, New York City, 1980. Photo by Morgan Gwenwald.

Contributors' Notes

Shaba A. Barnes has been a community activist most of her adult life. After moving to the West Coast in 1969 from New York City, Shaba joined the National Organization for Women and quickly became the secretary of the Los Angeles Chapter. She also joined the Feminist Theatre which was active doing guerrilla theatre or street theatre as well as performances at Universities in California. Shaba has been active in theater, acting, and producing. She was instrumental in achieving Domestic Partner Rights for all members via the Lesbian and Gay Association at Kaiser Permanente Hospital in Los Angeles. She is a Co-Director for Old Lesbians Organizing for Change (OLOC), the only organization of its kind dedicated to combating Ageism; OLOC was founded by and for Lesbians over 60 years old. Shaba presently lives in Albuquerque, New Mexico with her partner of 37 years. She enjoys poetry readings as she continues to seek avenues of expression by sharing insights on the spiritual and the power of being an Old Lesbian. She is still available to teach workshops and classes with a spiritual theme.

Tanya Brannan is a women's rights advocate, investigator and journalist. She founded Purple Berets in 1991, and has been a thorn in the side of local law enforcement officials ever since. Tanya is currently attending law school.

Cathy Cade has been documenting the lesbian community since the early 1970s. In addition to photography, she now offers services to people to help tell their life stories. To see more about her work and services visit www.cathycade.com.

Lenore Chinn: Focusing on painting as her primary expressive medium, Chinn's work explores and depicts a wide spectrum of people of color, lesbians and same sex couples. Her inclusion in Harmony Hammond's "Lesbian Art in America: A Contemporary History," the first study of American lesbian visual artists, vastly expanded her national visibility. Her portraits documenting the historical evolution of San Francisco's Queer community challenge the social conventions that currently constitute the racialized order of things. Chinn was a founding member of Lesbians in the Visual Arts and Queer Cultural Center and is affiliated with the Asian American Women Artists Association.

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.

Tee A. Corinne's artwork has been identified with *Sinister Wisdom* since her cover and poster for issue #3 in 1977. She is the author of one novel, three collections of short stories, and several poetry chapbooks. Her most recent book of art, *Intimacies: Photos by Tee A. Corinne*, published by Last Gasp of San Francisco, was a Lambda Literary Award finalist.

Martha Courtot (1941- 2000) was an activist and a prolific poet. A native of Cincinnati, she spent twenty years in Sonoma County, California. She once wrote, "I write to keep the ghosts in the corner happy."

Nisa Donnelly has won Lambda Literary Awards for her novel, *The Bar Stories* (St. Martin's Press), and for the anthology, *Mom* (Alyson Publications). She is also the author of the novel, *The Love Songs of Phoenix Bay* (St. Martin's Press), and of numerous short stories and essays, which are included in many award-winning anthologies. She and her domestic partner Denise Wallace live in rural Shasta County, California.

Elana Dykewomon has been a cultural worker and activist since the 1970s. Her books include *Riverfinger Women*, *Moon Creek Road* (recent stories) and the Jewish lesbian historical novel *Beyond the Pale* (Lambda award for lesbian fiction). Recent essays on community and identity appear in *The Journal of Lesbian Studies* and *This Bridge We Call Home*. She brought *Sinister Wisdom* to the San Francisco Bay Area in 1987, serving as an editor for nine years. Currently, she teaches at S.F. State, works on the S.F. Dyke March committee, and gives multi-genre creative writing classes for lesbians as well as private editing consultations – see www.dykewomon.org. She lives in Oakland with her lover among friends, trying to stir up trouble whenever she can.

Francis Eatherington: I work for a small environmental organization focused on the Umpqua, Coquille, and Coos watersheds in western Oregon. As I travel through our endangered old-growth forests, I carry a camera, my best tool in educating the public on what they own and who is taking it from them.

Judy Freespirit is a 68-year-old lesbian writer and activist who lives and works in Oakland, California. She is a woman of many identities who has been known to step into phone booths to change her costume. Regardless of what she is wearing, she remains a fat dyke.

Tamara Gorin: I am a white lesbian of the urban working class. I organized against rape as a member of the Vancouver Rape Relief and Women's Shelter collective for 15 years. I am worried about how demoralized women and lesbians are, deeply troubled by lesbian refusal to identify with activism, feminism and the women's and lesbian liberation movement(s). I am hopeful of finding new ways forward.

Dianna Grayer and Sheridan Gold have been together for almost 28 years. Dianna is a Marriage Family Therapist and is in school earning her Ph.D. Sheridan has a Masters in Special Education and teaches at-risk youth with learning disabilities and behavior challenges. Dianna and Sheridan have been foster parents to 25 children and love playing pinochle with friends. They write for *We the People Newspaper* which can be contacted at wtpub@sonic.net and host their radio program every first Sunday of the month at 8 PM Pacific Standard Time which can be heard at krcb.org.

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 New York City and moving upstate she has returned to her exploration of fine art photography, finding joy in those deep and complex creative experiences.

Marylou Shira Hadditt: I've been happier these past thirty years of my life since coming out as a lesbian than I could have imagined. My life has fuller meaning - and more fun too. My writing flourishes as I focus on the women's world in which I write and live. Bat Mitzvah at age 77, I have lived on lesbian land in Northern California's Valley for the past two decades.

Virginia R. Harris: Since 1992, I have pursued quilting arts full time. I presently live in Santa Rosa, California.

jody jewdyke proudly obvious big Dyke Separatist of ashkenasi jewish heritage, 35, raised by a working class single mom, with some access to

middle class resources, canadian, currently able-bodied and round bellied, unemployed, worked as a feminist anti-violence worker for 10 + years, been an out Dyke and Separatist since 22, and am passionate about creating our own Lesbian world beyond heteropatriarchy.

Sonia Johnson came late to everything—feminism, activism, and lesbianism—so she had to run fast to catch up. A long time ago she wrote some books. Maybe she'll do that again.

Lori L. Lake is the author of lesbian fiction and a freelance reviewer for *Midwest Book Review*, *Golden Crown Literary Society's The Crown*, *The Independent Gay Writer*, and *Just About Write*.

Audre Lorde (1934 – 1992) described herself as a “black, lesbian, feminist, mother, poet warrior.” An internationally recognized writer, she was the author of more than fifteen books, including *The Black Unicorn*, *The Cancer Journals*, and *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*.

Bea Loud: I'm a 65 year old dyke activist of WASP and US American privilege who misses her Loud sisters and is re-learning to scream.

Rose Marcario is a lesbian poet and essayist whose work has appeared in numerous national journals and magazines including *ELM*, *Tricycle*, *Karamu*, *Pacific Review*, *Eclipse*, *Awakenings Review*, *Sinister Wisdom* and the *Wisconsin Review*. She is currently working on a non-fiction book, *Crazy Wisdom: Reflections on My Mad Mother*, and she is producing *The Break Up Notebook*, a lesbian rock musical which will premier in Los Angeles in Fall 2005. RoseMarcario@sbcglobal.net

Moire Martin: Among the many things that I love, fabric, design and color hover close to the top. I learned to sew at my Grandmother's knee. It was among lesbians that I discovered the power of using fabric to give voice to our lives. I currently live in Sonoma County, California, where I work as a sign language interpreter.

Mary Meriam is a lesbian poet-activist on the LOVE Diet. Her poems and essays have been published in *Lodestar Quarterly*, *HLFQ*, *Sinister Wisdom*, *Queer Ramblings*, *Bay Windows*, *So To Speak*, and *The Write Dyke*. She's looking for a publisher for her book, *The Countess of Flatbroke*, which has

ten original drawings by Sudie Rakusin and an afterword by Lillian Faderman. To learn more, go to <http://home.earthlink.net/~marymeriam>.

Sasha Merritt is an acrylic painter and tattoo artist living and working in San Francisco. Her work is organic in shape and theme and can be seen at Dragonfly Ink Custom Tattoo.

Elaine Mikels (1921 – 2004) was the author of *Just Lucky I Guess: From Closet Lesbian to Radical Dyke*. She lived through crucial epochs in lesbian history: The McCarthy era (in which she lost her job because she was a lesbian) the butch-femme bar scene of the 1950s, the rise of feminism and lesbian-feminism in the 1960s and '70s and the changes those movements wrought in the '80s and '90s. Throughout the last half century her lesbianism came together with her life as a social activist and a world traveler. In her seventies, Mikels reflected on her rich and diverse adventures, on her triumphs through adversities, on all that she learned and as the title of her memoir suggests, characterized her lesbian life as “lucky”.

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.

Ruth Mountaingrove, a single lesbian, leads a busy life in Arcata, California. At 82 she is only two years away from her third Saturn return. She can't seem to stay away from college so she will be taking a few courses in feminism/lesbianism. Humboldt State University now has a minor in Queer studies.

Kim Rivers: age 38, raised and living in Western Massachusetts, grew up poverty and working class, white, love food, animals and Lesbians, not always in that order, legally blind and able-bodied, 2nd degree black belt in, and teacher of Aikido, currently studying for a graduate degree in social work, been an out Dyke since I was 21, and a Separatist since 1999.

Lilith 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.

Margaret Sloan-Hunter (1947 – 2004) was an activist, organizer, lecturer and writer. She joined Chicago CORE at the age of fourteen, organized tenant unions and rent strikes and campaigned against lead poisoning. One of the early editors of *Ms. Magazine*, she toured extensively giving more than a thousand lectures on sexism and racism. Her articles, essays and poems were published in numerous publications.

Jean Taylor was born in 1944 and is a radical lesbian feminist writer and political activist based in Melbourne, Australia where she also does tai chi and is an active member of the Victorian Women's Liberation and Lesbian Feminist Archives collective. In between her political and writing commitments, she also knits, exhibits art work and enjoys the company of her grandchildren.

Judith K. Witherow is a Native American storyteller, poet and essayist known for her work on race, class, gender and sexual orientation. Her book of poetry, *All Things Wild*, was recently reviewed in *Lambda Book Report*. She currently serves on the Board of Directors for *Sinister Wisdom*.

Merle Woo, born to a Chinese Korean family, is a socialist feminist, lesbian and unionist. She fights as a teacher, activist and poet for these causes. Her essays, stories and poems have appeared in magazines and anthologies including *This Bridge Called My Back by Radical Women of Color*, *Plexus*, *Asian American Journey*, *Breaking Silence*, and *The Freedom Socialist*. A selection of her poems, entitled *Yellow Woman Speaks*, was published in 1986 by Radical Women Publications.

zana: i'm 58, jewish, living in the desert near tucson, arizona, for 21 years.

Books Reviewed by Lori L.Lake

Coming Home to America: A Roadmap to Gay & Lesbian Empowerment by Torie Osborn. St Martins Press, (October 1, 1996), ISBN 0312145721

In this "roadmap to gay and lesbian empowerment," the former head of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force provides a blueprint for broad social revolution that starts by looking within one's own heart. Drawing upon the personal stories of queer Americans representing a diverse range of ages, races, religions and sexual orientations, Osborn celebrates the courage inherent in every decision to come out, and argues that simply by living our lives, each of us provides compelling arguments for our place in society. She then suggests ways in which gays, lesbians, and everyone else can come together and build inclusive communities of hope which serve as models not just for the gay rights movement, but for all Americans.

Born to Belonging: Writings on Spirit and Justice by Mab Segrest. Rutgers University Press (August, 2002), ISBN 0813531004

An indispensable political and ethical guidebook for the twenty-first century. Veteran activist Mab Segrest takes readers along on her travels to view a world experiencing extraordinary change. As she moves from place to place, she speculates on the effects of globalization and urban development on individuals, examines the struggles for racial, economic, and sexual equality, and narrates her own history as a lesbian in the American South. From the principle that we all belong to the human community, Segrest uses her personal experience as a filter for larger political and cultural issues. Her writings bring together such groups as the Ku Klux Klan in North Carolina, fledging gay rights activists in Zimbabwe, and resistance fighters in El Salvador. Segrest expertly plumbs her own personal experiences for organizing principles and maxims to combat racism, homophobia, sexism, and economic exploitation.

Gay and Lesbian Rights Organizing: Community-Based Strategies by Yolanda C. Padilla. Harrington Park Press (November 1, 2003), ISBN 1560232749

Examine successful strategies designed to end discrimination and achieve social justice for sexual minorities! *Gay and Lesbian Rights Organizing: Community-Based Strategies* is the first compilation of case studies of local-level gay rights organizing efforts. It is an inspiring testimonial to grassroots work going on across the country, from a community located in the heart of the anti-gay operation in the US, the home of Focus on the Family, in Colorado, to a

moving vision of a different world told first-hand by four transgender youth in the Northeast, to a successful campaign in a community in Kentucky where a decade earlier television crews agreed to film only the feet of gay rights marchers in order to protect them in view of fierce opposition and even death threats against them. As Urvashi Vaid states in the foreword, “local and state activism remains the vibrant center of the movement.”

Restricted Access: Lesbians on Disability by Susan Raffo and Victoria A. Brownworth. Seal Press (October 1, 1999), ISBN 158005028X

In looking at the intersection of sexuality and disability, this nonfiction anthology challenges readers to confront how America deals with difference. Writers represent a broad range of disabilities (chronic fatigue syndrome, manic depression, cerebral palsy) as well as a variety of racial, ethnic, and class backgrounds. Lesbians and the disabled have long been marginalized by a society that restricts access to the category “normal.” In this anthology, nearly thirty contributors, representing a broad range of disabilities - both physical and mental - explore the complicated issues of identity and community, and the realities of living with disability. In doing so, they shed light on their personal and political struggles as disabled lesbians - and offer an important contribution to social justice movements of all kinds.

Why You Should Give A Damn About Gay Marriage by Davina Kotulski. Advocate Books (April 15, 2004), ISBN 1555838731

From the cover of *Newsweek*, to the Rose Garden at the White House, the long simmering issue of gay marriage has erupted into full boil. While countries such as Canada and Belgium have recently legalized gay marriage, the US seems steadfastly locked in the past. Change, Davina Kotulski argues, will only come through organized activism, but the importance of legalized gay marriage remains unclear to many in the GLBT community. There are no less than 1049 federal rights granted to heterosexuals that remain out of reach to gays and lesbians as long as they don't have the right to marry. This quick and simple read outlines the rights, benefits and protections afforded through marriage, exploring the negative effects of not having these rights through case examples of real couples who have experienced hardships and composite vignettes illustrating how couples can be hurt by lacking access to these protections. Through learning of the great disparity between how same-sex couples are treated compared to heterosexual couples, and of the membership privileges society affords married couples readers of this book will begin to see new possibilities in their lives, and be inspired to join the growing freedom to marry movement.

The ACCIDENTAL ACTIVIST: A Personal and Political Memoir by Candace Gingrich. Scribner (September 3, 1996), ISBN 0684824620

When Candace Gingrich met Roseanne Barr at a GLAAD dinner in 1995, the actress said, "Don't worry, honey, I've got a weird brother, too." Candace laughed, and at the same time realized how significant the moment was: she was speaking to a celebrity at a gay rights fundraiser about her conservative half-brother. Her lesbianism, and her relation to Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich, had catapulted her to a position both exhilarating and terrifying. She had become, quite accidentally, an activist.

This is the story of how a lesbian named Candace grew up surrounded by a loving, supportive family, went to college, came out of the closet, fell in love, worked hard at her job and played hard at rugby in a sleepy little town in Pennsylvania. Her life was quiet, her circle of friends tight, her family accepting of her girlfriend. But all the while, Candace's half-brother was realizing his political aspirations, gaining the ears of mighty, conservative politicians, and becoming a major presence in Congress. It wasn't until the Republican sweep of both houses in 1994, when Newt Gingrich became Speaker of the House, that Candace began listening to his political ideas. Newt had become conservative with a capital "C," aligning himself with antigay figures like Pat Robertson. How, Candace wondered, could her brother, the one who treated her girlfriend and their relationship with the utmost respect, be espousing discriminatory rhetoric? How could he vote to reject President Clinton's compromise on the gays-in-the-military issue, to prohibit use of federal funds for public schools that allow open discussion of gay concerns, to discharge people in the military who test HIV-positive, and to overturn a District of Columbia bill that allows unmarried couples to register as domestic partners, all without any stirrings of conscience?

Though Candace was troubled, she did not speak out. It was not until a perceptive reporter "outed" her to the press that, suddenly, she was fielding phone calls from every network. And just as suddenly, she realized it was time to challenge her brother on his hateful policies.

In *The Accidental Activist*, Candace Gingrich takes us on an intimate tour of life in the Gingrich family, growing up gay, and finding her activist voice. Her mother is convinced that she and Newt could find common ground if they just sat down and took the time. Until then, Candace will continue her crusade. A tireless lobbyist for gay issues and a political force in her own right, Candace, who was named Spokesperson for the Human Rights Campaign in 1995, is not giving up hope for Newt, but she's surely giving him a run for his money.

Unpacking Queer Politics: A Lesbian Feminist Perspective by Sheila Jeffreys. Polity Press (January 1, 2003), ISBN 0745628389

Unpacking Queer Politics by Sheila Jeffreys (Associate Professor in the Department of Political Science at the University of Melbourne) is a deftly persuasive and informationally charged study of gay and lesbian politics from the 1970's down to the present day. Postulating that the lesbian feminist movement of the 1970's was unfortunately incorporated and overwhelmed by the gay male agenda of "queer politics", *Unpacking Queer Politics* denounces the "queer politics" tenets of sadomasochism, cutting and piercing, and female-to-male transsexual surgery as forms of self-harm. Author Sheila Jeffreys then centers upon the importance of committing oneself to equality in all relationships regardless of sex; as well as heralds lesbian feminist ideals as necessary for social change for the better. A shrewdly written and well-presented viewpoint, *Unpacking Queer Politics* is highly recommended reading, both for academia and the non-specialist general reader with an interest in gender politics.

New Our Right to Love : A Lesbian Resource Book by Ginny Vida. Fireside (May 28, 1996), ISBN 0684806827

The complete lesbian resource guide, *Our Right to Love* instantly became a classic when it was first published in 1978. Now fully revised and expanded for the 1990s, this new edition includes over 60 articles and interviews covering the many aspects of lesbian life: relationships, sexuality, health, activism, education and sports, religion and spirituality, the law and legal issues, multiethnic lesbian experience, and lesbian culture. A group of essays explores the lesbian experience across cultures (African American, Latina, Asian, Native American) and age groups. Interviews with notable lesbians Martina Navratilova, Melissa Etheridge, Margarethe Cammermeyer, and Minnesota State Representative Karen Clark examine the particular experiences of highly visible out lesbians. An extensive bibliography, resource lists and index make this the complete lesbian reference.

The Truth That Never Hurts: Writings on Race, Gender, and Freedom by Barbara Smith. Rutgers University Press (November 1, 1998), ISBN 081352573X

The Truth That Never Hurts brings together for the first time more than two decades of literary criticism and political thought about gender, race, sexuality, power, and social change. As one of the first writers in the United States to claim Black feminism for Black women in the early seventies, Barbara Smith has done groundbreaking work in defining a Black women's

literary tradition; in examining the sexual politics of the lives of Black and other women of color; in representing the lives of Black lesbians and gay men; and in making connections between race, class, sexuality, and gender.

Courting Justice: Gay Men and Lesbians v. the Supreme Court by Joyce Murdoch and Deb Price. Basic Books (May, 2002), ISBN 046501514X

Compelling chronicle of the gay-related cases before the nation's highest court over the past fifty-odd years.

Prime Time Activism: Media Strategies for Organizing by Charlotte Ryan. South End Press, (December 1, 1990), ISBN 0896084019

An essential primer for all grassroots activists, this book demystifies the media in such a way that the reader-activist gains a framework for understanding the propaganda industry of the United States.

The Rights Of Lesbians, Gay Men, Bisexuals, And Transgender People: The Authoritative ACLU Guide by Hunter, Joslin & McGowan. New York University Press (October 30, 2004), ISBN 0814736793

In its fourth edition, this fully revised and updated survey covers the rights of lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, and transgender people under present law, specifically in regard to freedom of speech and association, employment, housing, the military, family and parenting, and HIV disease. Utilizing an accessible question-and-answer format and nontechnical language, *The Rights of Lesbians, Gay Men, Bisexuals, and Transgender People* provides an overview for understanding both the general themes in legal doctrine and the way in which individuals can begin the process of asserting rights provided by the law.

The volume is a useful starting point for people facing discrimination or legal uncertainty and helps readers navigate the turbulent and constantly changing waters of the laws regarding sexual orientation and gender identity. New to this edition are two appendixes that include contact information for national and regional LGBT legal groups, an overview of the legal system to explain some of the terms and concepts that appear throughout the book, and a summary of highlights of the law state by state.

Ferocious Romance: What My Encounters with the Right Taught Me About Sex, God & Fury by Donna Minkowitz. Free Press (November 6, 1998), ISBN 0684833220

Intrepid *Village Voice* reporter Donna Minkowitz thought she knew what she was getting into when she set out to go undercover among the religious

right. She was going to observe “the enemy” close up, on its own turf. But Minkowitz, a feminist, lesbian, and “sex radical” who has won awards for her coverage of gay issues, found something else entirely — a guide to some of the stormiest contradictions within her own soul.

Sex and love, good and evil, rapture and safety — the religious right, it turns out, is as obsessed with these matters as Minkowitz is, as many of us are. During her adventures with the Christian right, Minkowitz finds all-women Pentecostal services that are as sexually supercharged as her own experiences having group sex with strangers in a lesbian backroom bar. The Promise Keepers, trying to be good in an age when “good” men are branded as sissies, alternately move Minkowitz to tears and provoke her mirth when she disguises herself as a teenage boy to join one of their all-male gatherings.

With hilarious, sympathetic writing, Minkowitz explores the things she and the Christian right have in common — from their intense sense of “victimhood” to their desire to be loved at all costs. If the Christian right wants a God willing to die for them, Minkowitz wants a lover willing to suffer pain. “Because I have fallen in love with a masochist,” she writes, “I think I have entered the Garden of Eden.”

On this rollicking trip to hell and back, Minkowitz reexamines staples of gay life she once revered — like Sex Panic!, a group that wants to applaud all that is “evil” and “transgressive” in sex. She wonders why she ever embraced the idealist assumption that gays are inherently freer, sexier, and “better” than straights.

And the more she visits the Christian right, the more she discovers that neither she nor they have been getting what they’re looking for. Whether “getting slain in the spirit” with adherents of the Toronto Blessing, which Minkowitz calls the “punk-rock version of evangelism,” or being given a female makeover by Total Woman Ministries, or engaging in mutual confessions with executives from Focus on the Family, Minkowitz comes to understand that both she and they have been using sex and God, not being saved by them.

In the end, Minkowitz discovers a very different kind of ecstasy. It is not the ecstasy of overcoming the Other; it is not the frenzied search for safety. It is an embrace of all the dangers and beauties that our deepest selves can offer. Here is a tour of the extremes of body and soul in America that may exhilarate and shock while it enlightens, but will remain indelibly stamped in the memory long after the last page is turned.

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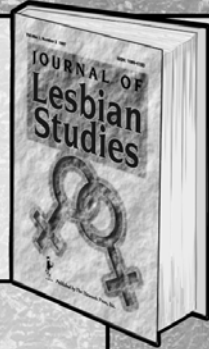


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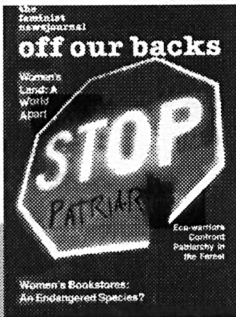
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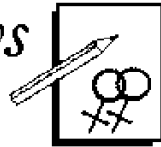
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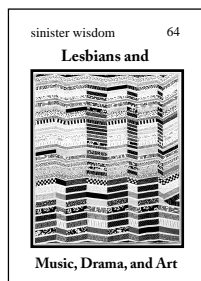
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