

Open Issue

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See page 5 for additional names.

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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 judgment, as lesbians evaluating our community and our world. Statements made and opinions expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the publisher, board members, or editor(s) of *Sinister Wisdom*.

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A Journal by and for Lesbians

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Notes for a Magazine

In this 76th issue of *Sinister Wisdom* we continue our long legacy of tender, fierce, life-changing words and images. *Sinister Wisdom* has been sending passionate love letters to the Lesbian community for more than thirty years. As we know so well, we are writing for our lives. In the gynergizing words of Mary Daly, let us keep Spiraling further out, continuing our Intergalactic Voyaging, and charting the Daring way for others (*Outercourse: The Be-Dazzling Voyage*, Harper, 1992, p. 415).

Special notes of appreciation go to the many Lesbians who, with generosity of spirit, keep *Sinister Wisdom* alive and well. To name a few: Rose Provenzano (for her amazing intuition, vision, kindness, generosity and solidarity); Susan Levinkind (for steadfast work behind the scenes); Roxanna Fiamma (for listening and courage); Kimba Fusch and Jan Shade (for layout expertise and perseverance); Moire Martin (for coordinating bulk mailings); Stacey Shade (for hard work and tenacity, especially at the post office); Sue Lenaerts (for website magic); Judith Witherow and other board members (for support and advice); Juanita Ramos, Julie Enszer and others past and future (for brilliant guest editing); and many other wise, inspiring Lesbians for believing in the importance of Lesbian words and images (see page 5 for more names). AND THANK YOU to our gifted writers and artists for making these pages come alive once again.

For those of you wondering how you can help *Sinister Wisdom* celebrate her 33rd Anniversary and beyond, there are many ways to help us continue our important work:

- Organize a *Sinister Wisdom* Reading/Celebration in your area
- Encourage your friends, libraries, and bookstores to subscribe
- Give *Sinister Wisdom* for birthdays, holidays, and special occasions
- Organize a benefit or subscription drive for *Sinister Wisdom* in your area
- Become a sustaining subscriber by adding money to your subscription
- Put a notice in local papers and newsletters
- Help spread the word at events, online, etc.

Fran Day
Sebastopol, California

LESBIANECONOMICS:

WHO DO WE GIVE OUR RESOURCES TO?

We believe that it is imperative that we Lesbians constantly examine and question ourselves and each other as to who do we give ourselves to? Who do we give our monies to? Our time and devotion? Louise's Mother has a saying she often quotes to us; it goes "cast your bread in such a way that it returns to you seven-fold." We believe that means to give grave consideration to who we give our resources to and to give in such a way that we are blessed to have it returned seven-fold times. So we ask ourselves and other Lesbians, who do we give our resources to?

LESBIANS RETURN TO LESBIANS TO COMPLETE THE CIRCLE.

WE WIMMIN MUST UNITE TO SURVIVE.

Louise and Maryanne from Something Special www.dykenotes.com



Osa. Ultrachrome print (©)2007. Lenore Chinn

Filmmaker Osa T. Hidalgo de la Riva, Hayward, California.

The creator of Royal Eagle Bear Productions, de la Riva comes from a creative and community oriented family. She has a doctorate in film studies from USC.

Appreciations

Thank you to the following supporters for their generous donations to *Sinister Wisdom*:

Priscilla Bell, Diana Cerise, Marianna DeFrances, Marva Edwards, Barbara Ester, Faye Gagehabib, Nancy Garden, Sally Gearhart, Patricia Gilmore, Jan Griesinger, jody jewdyke, Sandra Kaplan, Joan Margaret, Vera Martin, Ann Powers, Rose Provenzano, Studie Rakusin, Lauren Ravi, Margaret Reilly, Shewolf, Sandy Tate, Irene Weiss, Susan Wiseheart, Elizabeth York, Laura X, zana, and Cindy Zelman

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Fat Liberation Movement Statement

Because 98% of all diets fail and yet women spend well over fifty billion dollars on diet products every year;

because women had their ribs removed to fit their bodies into tight clothing;

because women have willingly swallowed tapeworms in the hope of becoming thin;

because one in ten women throws up the food she eats before it can be digested;

because diet “products” cause anal leakage, cancer, or heart failure and women still find this better than the alternative;

because women refuse to quit smoking in the fear of weight gain;

because 67% of girls aged 6-16 have been brainwashed into denying themselves nourishment they need to grow strong and smart;

because 165,000 North American women die every year of self-imposed starvation;

because anti-fat evangelists think fat equals sin;

because by the time they're in grade one, most children have learned it's okay to despise fat people;

because the average model is 5'10" and 100 lbs while the average woman is 5'4" and 130 lbs;

because no one has ever shown that being fat is less healthy than being stressed out and on a diet;

for all these reasons and many, many more, we belong to the fat liberation movement.

Gaye Adegbalola

I Ain't Ashamed (Song)

I ain't ashamed
 No, no, no I ain't ashamed
 I ain't ashamed
 No, no, no I ain't ashamed
 Well it's dark in the closet
 Now I'm out in the light
 Proud of who I am
 And my light is shining bright
 Yea, yea, yea, yeah
 I ain't ashamed

I ain't alone
 No, no, no I ain't alone
 I ain't alone
 No, no, no I ain't alone
 Got my brothers and my sisters
 Standing by my side
 Fighting for our freedom
 We will not be denied
 Yea, yea, yea, yeah
 I ain't alone

I ain't afraid
 No, no, no I ain't afraid
 I ain't afraid
 No, no, no I ain't afraid
 I'm out in the open
 I no longer live in fear
 I can look you in the eye
 And smile from ear to ear
 Yea, yea, yea, yeah
 I ain't afraid

Repeat 1st verse



Photo of Gaye Adegbalola taken by Cathy Cade at the Old Lesbians Organizing for Change Gathering, Summer 2008 in Los Angeles, California.

Susan Hawthorne

Learning Sanskrit and writing lesbian poetry

In the early 1980s, I studied Ancient Greek for three years because I wanted to read the texts in their original. Among those I yearned to read were Sappho, but also the playwrights and the philosophers. I wondered if we might get to look at Linear B. All these things happened and then life took over and I stopped reading Greek. I did go on to learn a little Modern Greek for travelling and I dabbled briefly in Sanskrit in 1982. So when in 2007 I decided to take up Sanskrit again, I knew how difficult it was, or rather, I thought I knew. Two years on, I career between being completely overcome by my passion for Sanskrit, and at the other end frustrated by my inability to remember enough. The puzzles thrown up by the language make me compare it to sudoku on drugs or one of those three-dimensional puzzles.

Again, it is poetry, mythological and philosophical writing that drives my learning. And, in the process of my study, I have begun to write poetry. Some are about the language itself, others are about particular words or concepts, while others are a prelude to what I hope will become a major poetic project.

Sanskrit

This rock wall is perpendicular—
she scrambles for a foothold
a tiny jutting of rock to grab onto.

The language is perpendicular—
the roots elude her, the gerunds
are thick with meaning and she slips

and falls crashing to the ground.
Picking herself up, she climbs
a conjugation, declines a declension

all the while, the endings are tangling.
Seven mountains she crossed, each
one higher than the last. The participles

present not too much challenge, but
the passive is aggressive. Now and then
she has etymological epiphanies,

blinding insight and then finds
it was the wrong form, the wrong verb,
an unknown Vedic version.

She has taken to reading the dictionar
forwards, backwards, horizontally and
vertically, even then the sandhi—

internal and external—takes her on
another spin down the rock wall.
Falling is easy, she hopes she never lands.

In May 2008, Suzanne Bellamy and I created a joint performance, *Community of Selves*, which showcased our art and poetry and our parallel development as artists. The poem, Sanskrit, developed into a performance that combined aeriels and text collaboration. It was both a challenge and enjoyable to put together two such different art forms.

One of the challenges of the Sanskrit language is the sheer breadth of it and the multiple meanings that attach to words and derivations of words. The following poem came about because I was trying to work out why Madhu was getting such bad press. I suspect that Madhu is a female personification, but it is not always clear. Madhu — sweet — seems to have something in common with the Greek Melissa who is a Delphic priestess, the bee and closely related words refer to honey, honey combs and bee-related work or objects. In Sanskrit, the word extends into the season on spring and becomes Madhava through the process called sandhi — as well as music and festivities that take place during that season.

Notes towards a Poem about Madhu / Honey Demon

Madhusudana	killer of Madhu
Madhuripu	enemy of Madhu

These are the names of Krishna
Who is Madhu?

And why does Krishna
hate him or her so much?

Madhu	progenitor / springtime
madhu	first month, the season of spring

Madhava the name of spring
spring brings forth her glory

she is fruitful, she is honey-dewed
she is sprung with life, Madhava

madhu	honey
madhukara	honey maker / bee

madhu as sweet as honey, lip licking sweet
the bee dancing like a lover

the sun rising out of winter
the bee rising from the flower

madhura	sweet
madhuram	sweetly

sweet honey melody, a raga played
below the horizon, a dance spun

like honey's drop. How sweet is that?
Killing love, killing sweet honey spring?

Madhu	demon
Madhumathana	tormentor of Madhu

Krishna tormentor, who's sweet life will you take?
Has the bee stung your lip? The honey, prized

raw food of old mother forest, caught you in a trap?
Oh, honey murderer, will the season end?

I am fascinated by the figure of Sarasvati. She is the goddess of writing, of words and of eloquence. Sarasvati is also a mythical river that flows underground and I take this as a metaphor for the invisible river of lesbian history, our underground knowledge and culture. Our poetry too is coded so that those who read with their eyes wide open can read between the lines.

Sarasvatikanthibharana (the necklace of Sarasvati)

So, you who are to blame for all the world's ills
You who dance in ever expanding spirals, turning the universe on a point
You who speak as if you are the world's know-all¹
You whose smallest lapse becomes earth's fault line
You who sweep the sea's tides into our arms
You whose hair is a chaos of cunning

¹ In one of those marvellous moments of synchronicity, among the pieces exhibited by Suzanne Bellamy in the exhibition and performance, *Community of Selves*, was a small sculpture entitled *Know-all Woman*.

You who cut the layers of learning with your eye
 You whose boat hides behind clouds or is starlit
 You for whom we sing a never-ending cycle of song
 You for whom the snakes and bees dance
 Your sacraments are our lives
 Your river is a necklace of ponds
 You moon-carrier, sky-wanderer
 No weapon is greater than you

I have begun to play with the idea of cow as a metaphor for lesbian. In my collection, *The Butterfly Effect*, I explore how the culture, language and codes of lesbians can be used in poetry. The opening poem, *Strange Tractors*, challenges the reader to think differently. *Strange tractors* is an allusion to strange attractors a term from physics related to the butterfly effect in which small changes can have large consequences. I use strange attractors as a metaphor for lesbian attraction; the butterfly effect as a metaphor for the use of powerful words like "lesbian" which can bring down governments and create chaos in families. One more explanation: *boustrophedon*: a Greek word which refers to a method of ploughing in which two cows retrace their steps in parallel lines; a method of writing in which the words run continuously back and forth across the page. From the Greek words *bous* (ox or cow) + *strophe* (turning).

Strange tractors

It's an ancient method of
 ploughing— more ancient even than
 boustrophedon— two cattle retracing
 their steps in parallel lines

No, here there's not a
 straight line to be seen anywhere— chaos
 in the shape of two vulval wings—
 the butterfly effect

In Indian tradition, there is a group of women or girls called *gopi*. These are the milkmaids of Hindu tradition. They gallivant in the forest, some of them frolic with Krisna, but Krisna is rather preoccupied by Radha and often ignores the *gopi*.

In *Sakhiani: Lesbian Desire in Ancient and Modern India* (1996), Giti Thadani writes:

*at the first of the first dawn, in the cow's home
was born the great eternal* (Rg Veda 3.55 in Giti Thadani, *Sakhiyani*
1996. p. 23).

I want to say a few words about cows. Cow: an ordinary English word, or is it? Cow and its Sanskrit predecessor *gau* are almost identical in sound. The voiced g of Sanskrit has shifted to the unvoiced c of English. The poetic nature of cow is fascinating with as mythological twists and turns as boustrophedon.

the first dawn of the cow (paraphrasing Thadani) my mind turns to galaxies (Gk *gala*: milk), the great cow who must have spilled the milk that has become the Milky Way. The connections between Sanskrit and Greek so very close, not just linguistically but in their mythical structures too. Giti Thadani has an even more radical idea: that the two cows in the *Rg Veda* (and Sanskrit has a dual so there can be no mistake about the number) are metaphors for women lovers.

Here I wonder if Gertrude Stein had knowledge of Sanskrit? She said, *And in relation to a cow.*² She said this in her long poem *Lifting Belly* (1989). The cow, they say, is an orgasm. Germany and France are the European homes of Sanskrit scholarship so perhaps she encountered the idea of sacred fluids: milk, cows and orgasm.

Then there's Suniti Namjoshi's *Conversations with Cow* (1985). A story about an average-middle-of-the-road lesbian separatist who makes friends in a Canadian meadow with Bhadravati — a Brahmin cow.

The character Suniti asks Bhadravati about a bottle of bright yellow pills: 'What's that?'

'An aphrodisiac.' [says Bhadravati]. I can't tell if she's joking or not.

'How does it work?'

'You take one a day. Then you and the world fall in love with each other.'
(Namjoshi 1985: 43)

Suniti Namjoshi's "self-sustaining community of lesbian cows," Giti Thadani's cow associated with sexual desire between women sent me down the path of contemplating a great cow at the centre of the universe.

² Gertrude Stein's long poem, *Lifting Belly*, explores the language of lesbian sexuality, creating a whole new range of metaphors for lesbians. She writes: "Twenty six. / And counted. / And counted deliberately. / This is not as difficult as it seems. / Lifting belly is so strange / And quick. / Lifting belly in a minute. / Lifting belly in a minute now. / In a minute. / Not to-day. / No not to-day. / Can you swim. / Lifting belly can perform aquatics. / Lifting belly is astonishing. / Lifting belly for me. / Come together." In Gertrude Stein. 1989. *Lifting Belly*. pp. 53-4. For more on the cow metaphor see Rebecca Mark's introduction, especially p. xxxi.

I have discovered that it is risky to use a word like lesbian in a poem. When the word lesbian is used one of the following propositions is normatively resorted to:

if a lesbian does something fantastic—
then she ceases to be a lesbian — her achievement is her marker.

if she does something terrible —
then the only tag for her is lesbian.

if something terrible is done to her —
then no one says a word.

But the word cow is free of these associations and it's perfectly fine to use a word like cow or cattle as I did in the opening poem to *The Butterfly Effect* (2005: 3), *Strange tractors*.

Back to the *gopi*. They are the handmaids of Radha, they live in the forest and hang about with Radha while Krsna is gadding about elsewhere.³

My thought: what if there is more to these *gopi* than meets the eye? Could the *gopi* be a kind of girl gang? Are they like Sappho's girls in the *thiasos*, a place of dancing and festivities? Do they have something in common with Suniti Namjoshi's Bhadravati? Having asked the questions, I answered with some poems.

Gopi (*gopi* = female cowherd)
So it's a secret, gopi girl?
You who hide among the cows
who caress her quivering flanks
in secret places where only you
do not fear to go.
Do you too cover your face in
clay, white as the milky way?
You weave light as it bends,
curves along that infinite edge,
kissing eternity's face.

³ For more on this story, see Barbara Stoller Miller's fine translation of Jayadeva (1997) and Bhagavata-Purana, Book 10. Both of these are heterosexual stories but in the tradition of Monique Wittig I read them awry and create lesbian texts by taking not the story between Krsna and Radha as central, but instead the stories of the *gopi*, their relationships with one another and with Radha.

When the gopi lock eyes
 stars meld, collapse in a moment
 of singularity. Don't mess with
 these girls, their curls
 are like steel.

Sent to protect the cow at the
 centre of the universe, gift giver,
 vivifier, they dance to their own tune.
 It's a sham, this flute-playing
 androgyne,

this boy who dances and flirts,
 he has no interest in skirts or skirts.
 Suniti got it right, and Gertrude too,
 the cow leapt the moon for you and me,
 for me and you.

Rohini sees red (rohita = red, roha = rising, rohini –3 meanings: a red cow; the star Aldabaran in the constellation of Taurus; a young girl who has just begun to bleed)

Rohini sees red
 It's not the bull ring and it's
 no matador dancing in the sand
 Rohini's red is of a different
 order altogether — her eye
 is a giant star glinting red
 a galactic trill

I see red
 as my car ploughs into
 the roan flank — she leaps
 onto the bonnet — shattering
 glass splintering my lap
 as the shards swirl in
 galactic thrill

You see red
 my friend as you ride
 the wave surfing the edge
 of yourself calling upon
 Gertrude's favourite

cow of all, a multiple
galactic spill

In addition to the poems about cows and lesbians, I am also working on a new collection, *Earth's Breath*, that explores the consequences of ecological destruction. In the US, the number of destructive hurricanes appears to be increasing. There is Katrina and most recently four in a row hitting the Caribbean and USA: Fay, Gustav, Hannah and Ike. The US is not alone in this phenomenon. Since Katrina there has also been Larry and Monica in Australia (2006), Sidr in Bangladesh, Nargis in Burma as well as two major typhoons in the Philippines (2007).

In 2006 my partner, my dog and I encountered Cyclone Larry.⁴ The winds reached 300 kph (180 mph) where we were located on the cyclone's southern edge. This book begins with a quote from the ancient Indian text, the *Rg Veda*.

Where is the earth's breath, and blood, and soul? (1. 164. 6c)

Earth's breath

Summer has been long
its breath has spanned millennia
and now comes the rain
the storm, the raging
rotten breath of cyclonic winds

Myths are made of such noise
the rampages of Heracles
have filled our childhood ears
the violence of men and gods
he sneezes and we all fall down

Who will be Delilah, brave enough
to calm Samson with a pair of
scissors, his long hair fallen
trampled like old vines that
strangle the biggest trees?
We were not so lucky with
Larrikin Larry, no shears large
enough to make his pate shine

⁴ In Australia we refer to cyclones; in Asia they are typhoons; in the Americas, hurricanes.

but as we watch, the ground turns bald
while he blunders through the undergrowth

A shredder over his shoulder, Larry
larked about turning bark and leaves
into confetti and in his next breath
the graffiti artist is pasting every
wall door and window

But even wind needs to draw breath
a moment's stillness, earth's smoko—
then we heard the trampling across the roof
the flue knocked off, the guttering
torn ripped and discarded

as Larry changed direction, running rings
widdershins, bellowing earth's grief
no longer at play, this brat is serious
his blood has curdled, our souls are rattled
as summer retreats and silence falls

Part III of *Earth's Breath* considers what might yet be in store for us over the coming years. It opens out from my personal experience and the experience of the people of north Queensland and takes in a global perspective. The last section opens with a quote from another Sanskrit text.

Moths rushing full tilt to their ruin fly right into an inferno
—*Bhagavad Gita* 11.29

The book closes with a poem that once again brings me back to my Sanskrit Dictionary. I found this word one day while preparing a translation for a class, it was several words down from the one I was looking for, and it pinged in my poetry brain.

Climate change: *yugantameghah*
(a gathering of clouds at the end of an epoch; a yuga is an epoch and some say we are currently living in the Kali yuga, an epoch of destruction)

At the end of every cosmic cycle,
at the end of a generation — *yuganta-*

meghabh — clouds congregate
gathering souls for the next yuga

cloud breath, soul mist
rasping winds, rattling bones

here come the galloping horses
humans astride their flanks

here come the thundering clouds,
breaking the world apart

the Hercules moth climbs every building
rising upwards through 110 floors

scaling the earth to find the moon
that light in the sky through which

he might escape earth's pull
and melt into the inferno of light⁵

Sanskrit has opened up new poetic worlds for me, and provides me with hours of puzzlement as I decode verbs, figure out the derivations or simply find the right word, the right turn of phrase for a translation.

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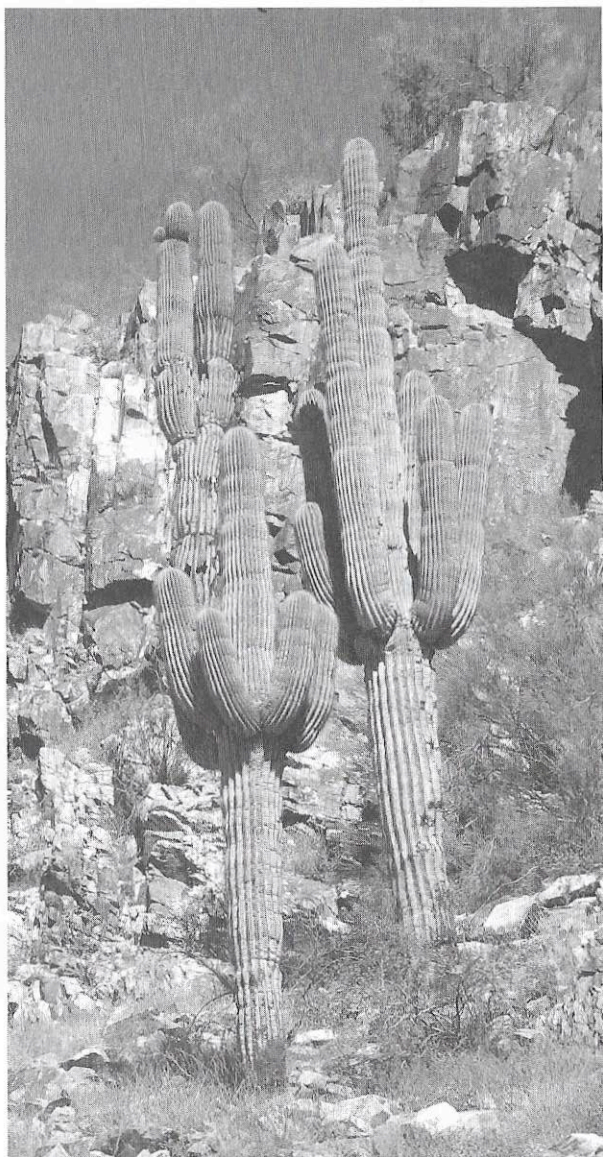
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There are many editions available of the Sanskrit texts in book and electronic form.

Rg Veda

Bhagavata-Purana

⁵ First published, *The Age* newspaper, Melbourne, 11 October 2008, p. 29.



Two Spirit. Photo by Judith K. Witherow.

Julie Marie Wade

Watchword

Dear You, in ubiquity...

Dear Thee, in perpetuity...

Dear Everyone I have ever known or chanced to meet...

Let me say this: I cannot apologize for the inconvenience of my life any longer.

I am not sorry. I never have been. All evidence to the contrary is artifice, veil.

I regret only your awkwardness, your self-righteousness, your pity — by which I am burdened,

by which inflamed and distressed but ultimately undeterred. I must go forward. I am no beggar, no pillar of salt. My life is nothing to be exalted and nothing to be deplored. My life is — as yours is, and yours.

The years of keeping company with water coolers, painting myself into proper hetero-sexual corners, holding my tongue. I didn't want to disturb anyone, you see, disrupt the easy conversation of husbands and children and a woman's place within her home and now beyond it — surfing the Second Wave. I didn't want to cast an ominous shadow. I spoke of myself in the first person singular, as if my beloved were not my own, as if I did not share my home with one such significant other. Yes, I had a word for everything. I was a writer, with rocks in my shoes and a slit in my sail, pleading the wind not to tip my lifeboat over.

Lapping the shore of silence. Soothing the cry of defiance that rose up, then withered and slowly decayed. How does anyone say anything anymore?

But the war is not between speech and silence. Each day a battle is waged between who will speak, and when, and with anticipation of what outcome. An autopsy performed on the living mind, dissecting intention, translating truth into euphemism, then babble. There is no moment beyond that moment. It is all stone, exuberant forgetting, misplacing... Never underestimate amnesia, its close association with destiny, denial.

What I have said: "I live with a woman I love." What they have heard:

When I spoke, just this morning — "Angie made hotcakes for breakfast" — and they shuddered: "Sex! Sex!" Imagined: two naked women splayed across

a kitchen table. Feared: that I would speak again, persisting in this vein of indecency, causing their cheeks to flush, their hearts to roil.

I watch the emergence of a terrifying geometry: these lines I draw between myself and others. This new coat of armor I have grown, which is not coincidentally called a "hide." Thick skin. If I were to stop speaking all together, how long before I would vanish, before even the ash of me would be gone? I am disappearing already: like the dent in dough, like the grave overgrown with grass...

But it was not so long ago I stood on solid ground: sessile creature attached to man, portrait of a pleasant commensalism. This position came equipped with language. "Straight" is my native tongue. And when I began to bend, to find myself drawn to a different light: it was not to disparage; it was not to defend.

My life is — as yours is, as yours.

Not meta-commentary on the patriarchy. Not political trumpeting or lesbian strumpeting or blot on my impeccable record. I did not realize I would have to be recast. I did not accept the revision of my past. Shrinking to fit the glass, to match the size of the eyes that examined me. Because it is much easier to believe the aliens are always among us and never within us: not this outgrowth, not this prickling rose, that twisting vine...the thickets of our own backyards.

In the first raw daylight of my new life, I did not appear different. I had not spoken. Morning comes before mourning: sticky limbs and dreamy kisses and the comfort of being known a new way — more entire, and without apology. We stopped at the Copy Cat to duplicate some pages. I dropped her at class and drove to the grocery store. Still, I believed myself real: worthy of respect, recipient of acknowledgement. Handling the mangoes and papayas, the apples, oranges, and pears, no one dared to intercept me. This contamination I carried, this separatist I would learn to become...none of it visible, palpable in the produce aisle. I caught a young man's smile. I smiled back. Could I not appreciate his beauty? Was I now cuffed to such a foreign truth as not to have words for these: pretty boys and gentle men, whole gender I had studied, loved?

Once, when I stood with a man beside — we were waiting for a bus, heading for the city that would celebrate us, our anniversary of days spent together — a woman paid a compliment. Rather: she offered a commendation. She approved of us, though we had never met, though she knew next to nothing about us. "What a handsome couple you make," and I puffed with pride. I'm almost ashamed to admit it. How I craved that affirmation...How I rejoiced with a stranger's validation...That we looked "right" together and would not be asked to hide our adoration, or select a word to properly contain it.

But the fireflies always died: faint lights gleaming in a mason jar, holes I made in the soft metal lid. I wanted to bring them inside, but I had to collect

them first, delineate a boundary between the whole flung world and the fostered space I could create for them, under my diligent purview. I think of the fireflies now because my ceiling is not only made of glass; a whole aquarium surrounds me. Perhaps I am dangerous, or vulnerable, or both: endangered species not meant to be entirely preserved. Scrutinized? Considered from a safe distance? Pinned down for proper contemplation, then slowly exorcized?

My life is — as yours is, and yours. If I say we are the same, does that make you nervous? Does some part of you protest such a troubling affiliation? I wouldn't be surprised. I have become nervous too. I also have protested my affiliation with you, my guilt by association. The straight path was my Road to Damascus. A conversion took place, or so I've been told. I was either lost or found, depending on the storyteller. Lost to God and grace and righteousness, or found out — discovered to be other than the species I had always called my own. A difficult proposition. How to fold back into the fold? I would have to admit a mistake, make a surrender. I would be asked to relinquish the greatest love of my life, the most complex desire. I would be forced to call myself a liar, to speak now or forever hold my peace. But where, I ask, is the peace in silence?

I watch the emergence of a terrifying geometry: these lines I draw between myself and others. How quickly "emergence" becomes "emergency." How desperate and restless I turn, behind this polygon of "aberrant longings," the many-sided mouths of confessing and sustaining. . .

Lapping the shore of silence. Soothing the cry of defiance that rises up, then withers and slowly decays. How does anyone say anything anymore?

I used to be one of you. Maybe you are one of me. Maybe we are too much the same to recognize each other, like a flash too close to the frame. I cannot apologize for my life, yet I cannot reclaim it. All the words, like fireflies, have burnt out, failing to name and failing not to name. I become the envelope with all its postage paid, and inside, one unintelligible letter.

Rosita Angulo Libre de Marulanda

Young Goddesses in Training

The blue-checkered uniforms covered and complimented the temples that were our bodies. There was nothing suggestive or revealing about the school garment of our adolescence for this was the culmination of the period of self-hood when most of us were still allowed a full sense of humaneness, a full sense of ourselves. I say some of us because, in fact, some of us had been denied this period of innocence, of relief, and had already been drafted into sexual slavery.

During recreation the students made two lines that faced each other. We sang as one line moved forward and the other backward, and then reversed the motion:

*“Arroz con Leche se quiere casar
con una muchacha de la capital
que sepa coser, que sepa bordar,
que ponga la mesa en su santo lugar.”*

It was the call of Arroz con Leche, the gender neutral prince in search of the beloved — a girl from the capital, a learned and savvy one who had precisely the skills the playful teenagers were learning: to sew and embroider and set a proper table. There was some flirting during the singing and the swaying. At the end, each girl selected the one whom she would marry.

The pre- and pubescent girls were only too happy to be in a setting that was all female. An exception was made for the priest because someone was needed to perform religious services and wimmin at that time were not allowed to set foot on the altar unless we went there to clean it. Oh, and there were the men who cut the grass and made repairs and drove the school bus. Somehow, theirs was considered men's work. There seemed to be an invisible line drawn keeping the men away from us — that is why the memory of their presence comes back to me as an afterthought. The staff that came in close contact with us — the teachers, and the cleaning and kitchen personnel — were wimmin. Somehow theirs was considered wimmin's work.

Sometimes the girls would play spin the bottle and kiss the one towards whom the bottle pointed. This game brought about a lot of laughter and fun.

Our teachers, all wimmin of the cloth, wore a woolen habit of many layers that may have been adequate in France where this particular religious order originated and which had a cooler climate, but the thermal fabric was too g'd'm hot for the tropics! They sweated and they smelled mildly of dampened wool. Their bodies were covered from wrist to neck to toe. Only their hands and face were visible. Their headdress looked ready for takeoff like the flying nun's. The wings of their cornets acted, to our advantage, like blinders on a horse; they were unable to see much of what was going on. Wearing the habit was, perhaps, more tolerable than the mandated marriage that would await them should they leave the convent walls.

Decades later doctors would measure the loss on their peripheral vision and the

Pope would prohibit further use of the cornets. Though some in a faraway land would laugh at the hats with flying wings of super starched white linen and even create a situation comedy for television, for those who lived through it, it was no laughing matter.

It was common knowledge that the nuns bound their breasts and that they used a trucha, or a bathing gown, when they showered to prevent them from looking at their very own bodies.

This attitude towards the feminine that was being displayed by the senior wimmin was being absorbed by the impressionable youngsters around them. Clearly not a healthy situation for anyone involved in that Catholic school setting that I grew to love. Clearly it set the tone for my confusion between right and wrong. Loving the works of God was wrong and hating and mutilating the female body was right. It has taken me fifty years to sort this out.

Our Lady of Lourdes was considered the best school in the town of Barranquilla, Colombia, South America. In 1958, it was a school where girls could get the best education that money could buy to prepare us to answer confidently the *Arroz con Leche* call. Academics were taught rigorously, but no one was ever asked what we wanted to do when we grew up; it was an unspoken message the girls were yet unable to decipher: only marriage, homemaking, or a convent awaited us; spinsterhood was allowed on rare occasions if one didn't mind being ostracized. In the meantime, we enjoyed putting out the *Arroz con Leche* call amongst ourselves. Who needed a prince when we had each other?

These were some of the childhood games we played on the *Gave (ghave)*, a long cement sidewalk separating the halls of learning from the high and grey wall that surrounded the Kindergarten through High School mega structure that took up all four sides of a whole city block. The Gave is a river in France, so this indoor sidewalk on which we played was called that in homage of the waters that still witness miracles in Lourdes, France. Yes, it was a Europe-identified school for the daughters of the upper crust. The grey wall surrounding the school was built to protect all that young female flesh from predators (and protect the merchandise?).

The high grey wall, however, could not provide protection from the attacks inside. For in the meantime, in our chapel, the Virgin to whom we prayed, the namesake of our school, was being subjected to the Vatican gender bender trends. Whereas Mary had jubilantly nursed her child, Jesus, with open breasts represented in Medieval and Renaissance art, the modern Mary was now losing her breasts. Our Lady of Lourdes, Our Lady of Fatima, Our Lady of Miracles, and Our Lady of Perpetual Help, are all flat-chested virgins of modern deity representation. But the young Goddesses in training were too young to notice the fading away of the breasts much less understand it was a world-wide concerted effort by the Church fathers that was affecting us. We were being denied a representation of us and the dialogue that normally would have ensued had we been properly exposed to breasts. Instead, breasts were being overtly, covertly, and painfully suppressed in front of our innocent selves. Ergo, the much needed dialogue was being suppressed as well.

We have been entrusted by the divine with a pair of breasts; we need to discuss how to care for them, how to wear them, how to use them, how to protect them; their history, their use, and their purpose. How dare they suppress a dialogue about that which is right under our noses? Instead, we were subjected to a subtle and steady monologue that robbed us of the blessings of our holy breasts. Who knows what wimmin can make of our breasts once the harassment stops?

To the senior wimmin the disappearing breasts on the Virgin's chest were a non-issue as they were probably in unholy agreement that flat chests were virtuous (read not attractive to men) and they probably wished for a flat chest themselves so that they could be spared the pain of binding.

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Marjorie Norris

Basket

"It is a day after rain and it is fiercely beautiful...a... strange and stalled morning." Kate Braverman, "The Woman after Rain," *Small Craft Warnings*, Reno, Nevada: University of Nevada Press, 1998.

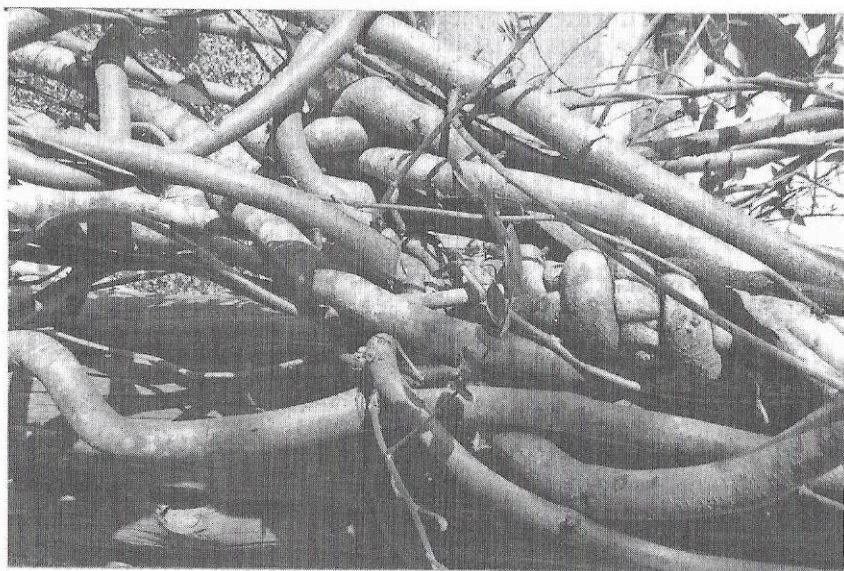
It was a morning quite like this one
The old peat hearth, your sweater
Bunched around you like tropical
Fruit, you smelling of lemon, your lips
Slack, uncertain, your eyes caught
Squinting at the fire

You were near that basket, the one
We'd picked out in our travels, the
One from the farm near the apple
Orchard, that one we filled up and
Brought back with us. I now examine
Its tough weave and rich maple hue,
Its honeyed shine of burnt ochre
Almost seeing it in the place it stayed
So long on the plank table

There's something empty about
This poem: you and I are in it
But not apparent, no words enter
It and little joy, just the gasp of
Remembrance where we ambled
All those years, a series of photos:
Hayfields and walls, conjuring
The drip from the spigot, the scratch
Of the chair

Sometimes a memory is like
That basket, tough and raw, once
Filled with the sustenance of apple,
Its fruity breath, later the treachery
Of isolation, spare and hollow...

Does the basket carry its own
Remembrance? Does it recollect
Being thrown down on the grass
And later, taken, filled? Will it,
After all, remember us, those
Dreamy children, the ones
Who only knew that life
Was prepped for the plucking
Ready to land, full and plump,
In one of our waiting palms?



Tangled Together. Photo by Lilith Rogers.

Heather Springer

The take-no-shortcuts recipe guide: spanakopita

1. Find the spinach.

In the beginning, there are so many choices. Fresh is best, but who can taste the freshness after its baked? Somewhere I decided this would be true of all aspects of my life: the plants that make themselves readily available are never the best choice. That eliminates the woman who works the local deli counter in town — but only barely because she's actually smiled at me the last two times I've gone in. It eliminates my gay boyfriend who likes to snuggle and pretend to experience cramps right along with me. It eliminates my pretty, cheerful, legal aide lawyer, too. (In case you thought I was the kind of person who would put a \$195/hr. leaf in a salad.) The perfect spinach comes from the plants growing on the other side of the ridge. And you have to go on foot and bring something awkward to pick them into so they don't get squashed. And the day you need them, it's raining hard.

2. Wilt spinach in skillet.

I actually own a skillet now — the cast iron kind you never have to wash. Skillets don't have heat resistant handles, and so what do I do every time? I'm so focused on the searing pain that I don't usually hear the woman I'm cooking for say anything. Not, "Wow, what smells so good?" Not, "Did you make that?" And not, "Marry me." No, in my wilting spinach scenario she recedes into a kind of everything about you is a question film montage. She is talking about her boyfriend. I am trying to listen, trying not to panic about the spinach going black in the pan. "Let's untie our shoes and sit down for a while," I say. She's gone fast, you know. And it wasn't even a date.

3. Transfer to a bowl and stir in feta, nutmeg, salt and pepper.

Dishes. There will be lots and lots of dirty dishes and this is the beginning. When I come out of my cooking coma, this is the first thing I will notice. But now, I transfer. I transfer my work time to free time, my pajamas to date clothes. It seems to me that I might say something brilliant at any moment. And I almost do, but I am thinking now about phyllo dough. I am thinking who discovered that nutmeg was an aphrodisiac? It is not something I guess she is thinking about or will talk to me about. She

has perfect eyes and cold, high cheekbones. She doesn't seem like the complicated type, but when I mention the batch of spanakopita, she tells me she prefers dishes with lots and lots of ingredients — different ingredients than I have.

4. Cover phyllo dough with plastic wrap and then a dampened kitchen towel.

Things are still going well at this point. The quietness on her part was only meant to keep up with my own. She's been listening all along. I know this because I hear her repeat a story I've told her. We hang out when it's dark, but it is still not a date. I don't have dates and she doesn't have dates with other women. Her cheeks are still cold, but they flush when she drinks and her neck is all pink and present. All of it is guesswork. Not unlike working with my grandmother's faded and illegible recipe card. If the phyllo dough is already wrapped in plastic, what is the sense in wrapping it again? And is the damp kitchen towel supposed to be damp-cool or damp-warm? If it's all theoretical, how can there be any instructions? She doesn't get my meaning, so I talk to myself for some time about the possibility of being very very forward.

5. Brush phyllo dough with butter. Cut buttered phyllo stack crosswise into six strips.

This part takes forever. Because, for one, the only people who bake with actual phyllo dough (or chase after actual straight girls) enjoy the frustration and the tedium. Or because it passes the love-sticky filled time — time that would have passed anyway — but this way at least I'm in a steamy kitchen, completely focused on something of substance. Let's call it bubbly, yeasty, misery. For every piece of phyllo dough I brush with butter, two pieces stick together. There's no sorting this out, because the stakes are already too high. My fingers — so normally deft — can't grip a single sheet of connection. Failing that, I try the knife but I have no idea how small or large to cut, how to get the desired outcome. Her economy of words now seems entirely unfair in the middle of such a decadent recipe. A long breath, no change in the eyes, and she says, "I'm straight. So are we good?" And that is it. For days.

6. Spoon filling into one end of the phyllo dough. Fold like a flag.

I decide to close up shop, take something strong, turn off my phone, and pass out for a few days. I go over our conversations. Did I miss some signals? Is it my fault? I like to bake, okay? I like challenging recipes with lots of ingredients and a huge mess? Say I come from a long line of Greek

grandmothers with brick ovens out back. Say I feel their duty gathering wood for a huge meal the twelve of them will take hours Sunday afternoon to prepare. I guess where they had basic sanitation problems, I have basic heart problems. It is then that I realize complexity does not equal nutrition.

7. Bake triangles in middle of oven until golden brown.

I used to forget about things while they baked and they'd always burn. Now I check on them constantly. I wander a few more weeks, head bobbing in and out of what I know to be true: it would be easier for her to change than for me to. I am willing this when she calls. Dinner. Something easy and Mexican. This is not my favorite, but I am incapable of saying no. Anything could have happened on her end in the last few weeks. I decide that it isn't out of the questions that she is now in love with me. I wash pans and imagine ways to get the non-date to last beyond margaritas.

8. Transfer to a platter and let cool.

This is something I had not previously considered: she would bore me. High cheekbones, blushing at what? Indigestion maybe. Steam rises from hot phyllo dough. It smells as it should, everything in order, even the burnt patches on the cookie sheet make sense. The dough, unmotivated, desireless, would not seal itself and so its secrets spill out. She is actually unfunny and unsmart.

Alix Greenwood

This Rubbly Life

This rubbly life of mine is quite the mess –
I've sat in the middle of it and wept,
And wept as it's painfully tumbled down,
Bit by bit, and in colossal crashing chunks,
And breathed the dust and poison of its falling,
And sickened from it, and grieved and mourned.

Let the grass come
And the flowers bloom
And trees push through the stone –
Some of it's best unreconstructed.
Let it be a lovely, lumpy landscape
Where the buried shapes,
Not disappeared but well transformed,
Can be reminders and waymarks.

And for the rest, I'll piece together what I can –
Take these as raw materials of my living
And make, not structures, but actions, to be my shelter –
Daily fashion love and carve out integrity –
Sometimes comfortless, it's true,
But, this way, I'll find the door of every moment, and walk through.

19 October 2003

Cindy Zelman

Woman Imagined

When I met Bailey she was 23, a graduate student at the University of New Hampshire, a woman who found grace in obesity and richness in life. She was fat and she was dying. Bailey had leukemia. Neither cancer nor obesity controlled her. It's not that her conditions didn't make her sad or scared or sensitive to the fragility of existence, it's just that she would not let them break her will. And if fat oppression and cancer were not enough to break her will, then neither would be her lesbianism.

Bailey was a dyke, years ago, before it was semi-fashionable, at least in certain cities like Boston or LA; she was a dyke living up in conservative, white New Hampshire in the 1980s, where clean living and clean air were preserved for boy and girl, not girl and girl. A lot has changed in New Hampshire and in New England with civil rights and even acceptance (better than tolerance) for gays, but this was then and then Bailey was a dyke. She described herself as living under a triple whammy: fat oppression, cancer, and lesbianism. What more could a girl ask for? She said it with wit.

She was so strong, so opposite from me. I couldn't even be happy about being thin; I was apologetic about my lesbianism (*can't help it, sorry*); I lived in appalling fear at the very thought that I might *someday* develop cancer. Bailey lived and died in ways I couldn't even imagine.

I try to imagine her life, with her lover Rose.

She'd been with Rose for three years. Rose was attractive and dark, silent and skeptical. She was one of the few people whom Bailey had ever met who wasn't afraid of her cancer. Bailey knew how to love her back. Bailey knew when to give, when to back off. She was a friend to a lover. She talked, she communicated. She never became the emotional burden, the too-needy, crying, whiny, unhappy demanding one. Bailey was too independent, and that was good for Rose, not patient enough to deal with emotional excess.

Bailey stared in the mirror, running her fingers through her close crop of hair.

"Another month, it will be an inch," she said to Rose.

"You ought to spike it, bleach the ends blonde."

"No way." Bailey planned on letting her hair grow as long as it could, every inch meant she'd survived another month among the living. Bailey

looked in the mirror before she turned toward the bed. Her skin was perfectly clear, although it had blotched red at times since the treatments. Tonight it looked good. She reached for a flannel nightgown draped over a chair since morning.

"I want to drive to Cambridge next month, for the rally. Will you come?"

Rose sighed at the request.

"Please come." Bailey pleaded, gently.

"I don't understand why you want to get into all that ridiculous political bull down there." For Rose, it was a long statement, Bailey knew.

"You know I want to speak."

"Speak? Why do you keep on with that speaking?"

"It's what I want to do."

The rally in Cambridge would be a broad show of support for gays and lesbians and other alternative life styles. Years later, there would be rallies on Boston's State House in support (and opposition) of gay marriage and that right would be won in Massachusetts. Bailey would be long dead by that time. For now, Bailey would speak about the general need for tolerance, support, even acceptance, civil rights.

She had asked Rose to go with her to the Gay Pride Rally in Cambridge, where thousands would converge, including hundreds of media and journalists. She'd been asked to speak by the head of the Boston Chapter of the Gay and Lesbian Coalition. They'd heard her speak on campus, impressed with her voice and her charisma. This would be a breakthrough for her, something off-campus, something in the public life, with the media looking on. She wanted Rose with her.

"You know how important it is to make people aware." Bailey sat on the edge of the bed and looked Rose straight in the eye.

"People don't change their minds once they hate you."

"I'm not speaking to the ones that hate us. I'm speaking to the ones who misunderstand."

"Call it what you will. I think you should just stick to the book. That book, that could be something worthwhile."

Bailey's book consisted of six hand-written spiral notebooks: a mess of words, strewn from page to page, almost randomly. *The Lighter Side*, Bailey planned on calling it, the lighter side of death, disease, fear. Bailey had purchased a word processor three months ago with the intention of making "the book" into something coherent and publishable. It seemed like so much work. And part of her was afraid to finish it.

Bailey shut the light and then climbed into bed next to Rose. She lay her head against Rose's shoulder. Rose caressed her back.

"Okay, Bailey."

"Okay what?"

"I'll go to Cambridge with you."

The two women soon fell asleep.

* * *

I remember Rose. Rose, Bailey, myself, the others. We all met at a support group in those days. In those days, lesbians needed a support group just for being lesbians. In those days, society was so bad — worse even than today — so bad that a support group was required for young, inexperienced lesbian women to keep from feeling isolated and alone.

Rose would sit next to Bailey and hardly say a word. I talked more to Bailey during those sessions than Rose did. I didn't know what to think of Rose. I hoped she was good to Bailey. I imagined she was.

We were all connected with the University of New Hampshire back then, and every Tuesday night we would meet in a room in the health center just to be with each other. Sometimes there were as many as 15 of us; sometimes, just five or six. The campus lesbians, the campus queers, the campus dykes. We were trying to relieve ourselves of the oppression of being misfits, yet we worked at being misfits. You couldn't just "be" a lesbian in society; you had to work at it. If you didn't work at it, you didn't meet anyone. If you didn't meet anyone, the isolation could kill you. At least that's how it seemed then; there didn't seem to be any alternatives, no easy ways to fall in love with women. We worked hard to remove ourselves from the mainstream of society, becoming outcasts and the butt of jokes. We did it for identity. We did it for love.

It was hardest for the young ones. Bailey, Rose, and I were grad students, well into our twenties, but many of those in the group were undergrads, some still teenagers. The young ones, the new ones, the ones who had just fallen in love for the first time often felt like jumping out the windows when their relationships broke apart, or worse, when there had never been a real relationship to begin with. Falling in love with a straight roommate — that kind of unrequited love happened to a lot of us just coming out. It was the same old story: I'm so in love with her and I can never have her. Or worse: She threw me out of the room, she called me sick.

There was Kerry.

"I sit at my window a lot, I stare out my window a lot...I look down a lot."

But Kerry didn't jump. We all applauded Kerry's keeping herself from leaping off a windowsill. She had reason. We clung to the hope, no to the

truth, that healthy lesbians could make their way in the world successfully, could find work and love and a satisfying life. Now that Melissa Etheridge and Ellen Degeneres have entered the spotlight, this old lonely dyke story may all seem like ancient history, but *Yes I Am* from Melissa was still six years away, as was Ellen coming out on her sitcom, and so there were few positive role models. But there were some. Like Bailey.

Young herself, Bailey always knew the right thing to say. She may have saved a lot of young lesbians from jumping out of windows or swallowing handfuls of pills. She would say to these very depressed women: What do you need? She might touch them. And they would smile, hope surfacing to their mouths. While I would sit there and think: Thank god I'm not that screwed up, thank god most of us get over that first heartbreak and live. I was always thinking: Thank god it's not me. Bailey was always asking: What do you need?

* * *

Cambridge made Bailey's breath come in short, excited gasps. The crowds extended for miles on all sides, gays, straights, and lesbians all coming together, coming together as human beings with differences to celebrate. Was it a dream or was the world becoming what Bailey had always dreamed it would be?

Massachusetts was on the verge of passing a Gay Rights Bill in 1989, and politically, socially, emotionally, the atmosphere was invigorated. The speeches that day might be what pushed the Massachusetts legislature towards positive closure on the issue. Bailey felt warm, flushed, as if she were a part of history. And her hair had grown two-thirds of an inch in the past month. The hair was even getting blonder, was almost like anyone else's hair, a short cut on a pretty face.

Bailey received applause during her speech. She caught Rose's eye in the front of the crowd and even she was smiling. She knew Rose was proud. Rose was protective and had wanted to protect Bailey from hurt if this had not gone well. Rose had once tried to be an activist and failed—failed because she always presented too hostile an image, too angry at the world. She made people nervous. Bailey knew that was no way to make people listen.

"My name is Bailey, and I'm a lesbian," she yelled out to the crowd. "I'm a lesbian and I'm proud of it." The applause was loud and authentic. Bailey looked out over the crowd, thousands and thousands of heads, the largest crowd she'd ever spoken to. The rest of her speech was the usual, heard for the first time by this enormous swarm of people: the need for acceptance,

for understanding, more than that, for a celebration and embracing of our differences, for legitimacy under the law.

Bailey never mentioned her cancer in her speeches. She didn't think it was fair to throw out cancer and receive an acceptance which might really be pity. In twenty minutes she was done and wished she could do it all over again. She needed that public response and in some way, she sensed, the public needed her. The way Rose did. Bailey was a healer.

After the speeches were over, journalists interviewed Bailey, as impressed with her articulation of the problems and her graceful hopefulness for the solutions, as the Gay and Lesbian Alliance who had invited her to speak. Bailey launched her career that day. She wondered how much she might get done if she survived another ten years, what changes she might be a part of. A flush of red excitement moved her pale complexion to lush. Lush, as it had been.

Then Rose drove her home. Rose listened to her excitement all the way home to New Hampshire, an hour's drive and Bailey's nearly giddy chatter about the success of the day. Rose said little. She smiled at Bailey from time to time. When they were nearing the end of the trip, Bailey stopped talking a moment and looked at Rose. They caught one another's eye. It was difficult for Rose to let down her guard, Bailey knew, but it happened.

Like falling in love again, this wordless understanding. They fell in love a lot that way.

* * *

I talked a lot to Bailey back then, though I never learned enough about her. Death kept me at a distance. I wanted to scream for her. I was angry that she could accept everything so easily: dying, obesity, lesbianism (being the outcast.) She should be infuriated about something, shouldn't she? Was there something wrong with me or was there something wrong with her? Shouldn't she be yelling at someone about how unfair her life was? God maybe? Her mother? The president of the country? Anyone? I would have. I was. I turned away from Bailey as she attempted to get closer.

Bailey wanted me to help her with her book. I was a graduate student in writing. She thought I might be able to help give her ideas. Bailey told me about the notebooks lying under her bed, how she couldn't quite make herself open them up and organize them into a coherent story. In that one respect, procrastination, we weren't so different.

"I know everything I want to say and most of it's there in the notebooks," she said, "I'm just not sure where to begin. Should I just sit down at the computer and start typing or should I use a blackboard to try to organize my main ideas?"

"Just sit down and type it all first," I said. "Feel the words."

"Would you read it? Maybe we could get together and you could read it."

"Oh sure," I said, "I'd be happy to read it."

We were having lunch at the local café during this conversation, and this gorgeous woman I had a crush on walked in and ignored me, even though I looked up at her and smiled. I didn't understand why I was sitting with Bailey, pale and sick, and not with this woman who took my breath away.

"When?" Bailey continued, "When do you have time to read it?"

"Just call me when you're ready," I said distractedly. I knew that Bailey needed me to set a definite time and place, but I wouldn't. She needed me to push her toward completion of her task. She needed me to give her a deadline. But I didn't really want to read her book. She said it would be funny, but I couldn't imagine how a book about dying could be funny. I was afraid of her story.

* * *

That was years ago. Bailey's dead now. She died many springs ago. When it happened, Rose sent me a letter. It said: *Bailey has finally succumbed, she talked of you often; she said you were going to help her with her book, I'm sending her notebooks along to you, HELP HER WITH IT.*

Rose sounded angry.

God, Bailey talked of me often.

I didn't know why she would even remember me, except that she was Bailey.

Those notebooks, I have them all — all six of them. They're under *my* bed now. Rose is waiting for me to do something with them. She's waiting for me to do something for Bailey. I know I'm going to hear from Rose again. Every few months she sends me a note and asks how far I've come with Bailey's notebooks. I write back that the project is coming along. I lie. I have avoided Bailey's notebooks because I have not felt worthy to tell her story. Bailey lived a life of bravery that I have never known. I have lived a life of quiet, a life of turning away.

* * *

Yet days pass. Months go by. Spring turns to summer, summer to fall. I dream about her now, waking dreams: a woman remembered, a woman imagined, a woman missed. Bailey lived and died in ways I could not even imagine — yet a life so well-lived deserves to have its story told. Readiness comes to me like a surprise in the night; Bailey comes to me like a surprise in the night. A first sentence comes to mind:

Bailey was so beautiful, like a leaf in autumn.

I reach under my bed and pull out a notebook.

Lynn Brown

Refresher Course

At this edge of looking outward
where I might draw back
from imagining a difficult motion
to negotiate the chasm before me
I stumble in my mind and body
choosing simplicity in the moment
to navigate my dance from here to there
or inbetween

Calls come from the outside, welcome voices
with queries about my well-being
which I am loathe to express because
the explanations defeat my ambition
to be whole and free from the gravity of my back
this unseen karma holding me in place
upsetting my physical grace and balance
which is what is on my plate each waking
and each stepping out in pride

Often I slip into the mechanical truth of being
and spend the next moment caught in harsh reality
where my grasping turns to gasping as the breath
quickens and falters on a vision of dependence
forever, depending on others for movement and contact
and unable to provide the same gifts for another
is painful and limiting to my way of offering service
and desiring to be useful

Now I must cultivate a smaller garden on this earth
and open the vastness of my mental tundras to possibility
of travel and imagination for acting in another realm
where my thoughts and feelings will be of benefit
to myself and others, where the substance of pain
is transformed into beauty sustained by patience
and a vision wild with delight for what is

Lilith Rogers

la luna

The almost full moon
sits tangled
in the long branches
of the tall, tall fir tree
in my back yard.

I think of her —
my Luna —
that my world
revolves around.

She is so far away
in Africa.

“Hello, my dear
thank you
for coming out
to see me
tonight.

I’ll hold you
in my heart
until
I can hold you
in my arms
once more.”

Laura Rifkin

*Crib Rant (genre- RANT)-
dedicated to the anonymous a.b.*

how can you compare your grief with ours
as we bury friend after friend after friend
after friend after friend after friend
until there are no more grains of dirt that we can put on
these shallow graves,
no more sugar bowls to wrap their ashes in,
no more oceans to swallow up our grief,
no more people to show up at a memorial — secular,
religious, or otherwise,
no more fights over no more things,
and no more things over which to fight

and still you will not know or ever know — not with your
broken knee, your hip replacement, your endless head cold,
your lactose intolerance, your aching back, your discontented
soul, your lack of mothering...

will not know and cannot imagine what life is like inside our
bodies, day in, day out. we don't wake up from this night-
mare, it is not made better by time or perseverance, we do
not win any awards or honors, besides which we'd be too
tired to accept them
besides you'd never think to grant us them, because all we
have been doing is being here,
a pleading but insistent voice,
a limp inside your head that you no longer notice.
two wheels on a chair that you envy and think entitles us to
special treatment, though you stand in your kitchen clus-
tered closely at a party,
even when
we can't get there and must sit on the couch,
and be left out every single time

and even though we can't go with you to the beach,
or take our clothes off and run into the water,
or kneel down and pee beside a car,
or walk a trail that winds high into the woods,
or dance with hips shaking and tits loose,

and even though we will smile and be patient with you,
and even listen to you complain about your pain,
(although it's hard not to just tell you to shut up and get a
clue),

even with all that, we will still bury our dead in whatever is
left
and hope that you don't show up at our memorials
because even then we will be listening
and we will know that you will never understand.

Fabled Asp (Fabulous/Activist Bay Area Lesbians with disabilities) is a multi-media, multi-cultural project whose mission is to document, archive, and celebrate disabled lesbian activism in the Bay Area, California over the last forty years and to continue the queer disability arts revolution. This herstory has not been documented in any archive. We are in need of your support to keep going. The GLBT historical society is our 501c3 and all donations are tax-deductible. Please join our monthly giving program or our founding grove-click the link DONATE at www.fabledasp.com

Learn more on our website. Enjoy the beautiful poem, written by Barbara Ruth, "The Fabled Asp" about the connections between aspens and disabled lesbian community — dedicated to this project. See our memorial tributes and slideshow at www.fabledasp.com. Help declare 2010 the year of honoring lesbians living with disabilities. Thank you for your support of this grassroots effort to correct a stunning omission in the archives and herstory of all people.

Glorya F. Cabrera

A Lesson in Humiliation 'N Humanity

I register for public assistance today at the Dyckman Job center
 Standing behind twelve people crazy thoughts flood my mind
 "How the hell did I get here?"
 "Didn't I pull myself up by the boot strings?"
 a graduate of public assistance long before
 politics reformed a welfare system that creates more poverty
 "I am the American Dream"
 raised by a single mother
 one sister, two brothers
 High School Graduate
 two college degrees followed by
 sixteen years invested in a non-profit career
 means absolutely nothing in these lines
 where people of varying shades of brown/black
 wait to walk up to the counter to file a claim
 with a non-descript person hidden behind a plastic shield
 designed to stop bullets or perhaps that flipped-out-stressed-out client
 overworked Human Resource Administration assistants
 work half-heartedly implying a disdain that speaks unspoken volumes

Dutifully I go to a kennel like space
 institutional beige walls hold us firmly in place
 broken high school desks line the room
 everyone sits fiddling waiting for their name to be called
 "Mercedes Lopes, Felicia Ramos, Miriam Castro... up to the second floor"
 toneless voices drone on in that practiced non-personal way
 ironically the nicest things about this place are the security guards
 each wearing a name badge indicating a private contracted company
 Black & Latino men & women carefully chosen to blend-in
 smile and chat with waiting clients who bear strong resemblance to their
 family members, neighbors and friends in urban neighborhoods
 "Ms. Cabrera..." a detached voice floats barely audible over the great divide
 I rise punctual to my feet taught to obey directives
 ever the friendly professional, I smile eager to accommodate — destination
 second floor

I enter the hallway directed by another smiling security guard walk into a partitioned room within a larger airless room the same institutionalized beige color saved especially for correctional facilitates and

poor people surrounds crying babies, waiting mothers, patient fathers one row of chairs lined against one wall faces two rows of chairs lined up on the opposite wall, left with no choice we face each other discretely, or not, invoking our own private telenoveles.

I sit in a hard plastic orange chair that is never seen outside of public assistance waiting room. And I proceed to wait, and wait, and wait and wait...and wait...and wait...watching people move around the airless room, I practice patience, patiently waiting my turn...I wait so long I notice a young cream skin Dominican mother who tenderly kisses a fussy baby, proud looks of maternal love flicker across her face, a Mexican couple, coco brown, small featured indigenous, sit close together, the father rocks his infant daughter in his arms singing lullabies into her ear, his toddler son smiles with emerging energy at his quiet doe-eyed mother with black sleek hair rolled into a humongous bun, this blissful three year old boy run laps around the row of twelve chairs, racing against his imagination, his laughter bounces around the room, off the nauseating beige wall-divides, suddenly the room is taking care of him, people on the edge of survival smile at his many toddler laps, one lady says his name playing eye games, a aging blond haired women offers him a rich ripe red juicy strawberry. Across the room, a grouchy big bellied scruffy Puerto Rican father cautions una abuela / a grandmother, with streaks of grey in once black hair, to tie her grandson's untied sneaker. *"It takes a village to raise a child,"* Hillary Clinton said so many years ago in the White House. Only in this room, beyond politics and material gain, I see it come alive.

As I struggle with my prejudices of not wanting to be on this side of the room of not wanting to be labeled an underachiever or freeloader It dawns on me that I don't fit on either side of the situation

Three hours later, the worker

My worker

calls my name. I'm exhausted by the waiting and sitting on a herniated disc in my lower spine. Heaving myself into the hard plastic gray chair alongside her forgettable desk, I look in her still-developing womanly face.

The twenty-something worker barely looks me in the eye. *"Where's your lease, your social security, your electrical bill...etc, etc, etc."*

Uncharacteristically nervous, my fingers fumble through my purse searching for papers I can no longer see. I am overwhelmed by her impersonal nature. I summon all my professional fortitude not to cry mortified by this entire process. Only she doesn't see.

*"You'll be notified in thirty days,
meanwhile you'll get emergency food stamps.
thank you, have a good day."*

Disjointed

I pull myself together along with my belongings
walk slowly past more smiling guards down to the street
My face burns, my body aches, my spirit's low
As I wonder for the millionth time how these things come to pass
a middle aged café con leche woman face lined with soft wrinkles
who sat watching me in that airless institutional beige room
passes giving a gentle smile,

*"Aye si manita ahora es el tiempo para descansar
y comer algo dulce"*
*"Yes, little sister now it's time to rest
and eat something sweet"*

My heart splits open as her humanity cuts through my humiliation.
June 17, 2006

Jane Mara

Amber light

We lie, curled
toward each other
talking
our only touches
brief – punctuating
tap on hip,
sparse contact
of boney knees.

The space
untouched
between us
is full. Freedom
lives here, and
Choice.

Impulse begs
to intrude – throw
thigh over thigh
snuggle
head to shoulder –
but Wisdom
cautions
and Patience
restrains.

Oh, who would guess
Caution could
be so delicious,
so resplendent with
nuance,
so full
of warm glow.

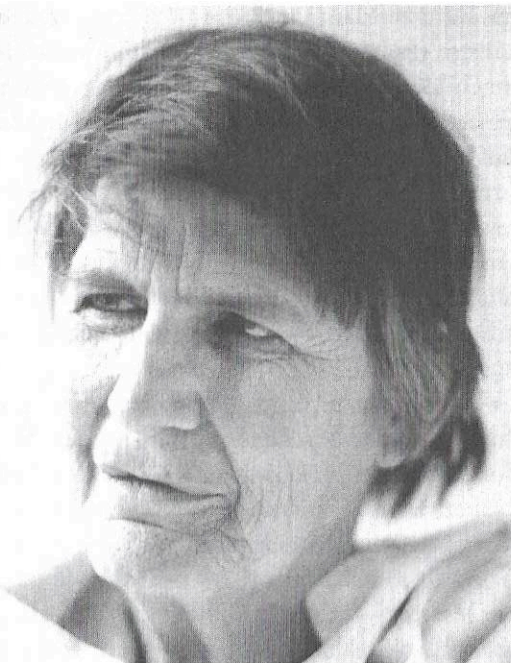


Photo of Ruth Mountaingrove by P.Gar

Ruth Mountaingrove

Spinster

Currently I am a spinster, a feminist lesbian. But I have not always been single. I was married for twenty years, have three grown children. I was a late bloomer as a lesbian and had a thirteen-year marriage with a lesbian. So I don't seem to fit the category except that for the last twenty-three years by my definition I have been single, with lovers but never living with any of them after my thirteen years of marriage, preferring my own space.

I see myself as a spinster having no desire to be in a couple. I am too old for the heartbreak scene. Previous breakups resulted in physical reactions, flu usually, a symbolic burning away of the connection.

Webster's dictionary definition of spinster: 1. a woman whose first occupation is to spin; 2. archaic. an unmarried woman of gentle family; 3. a woman past the common age for marrying, or one who seems unlikely to marry.

Single feminist — what does that label mean? Feminist and single, is that looked down upon? Can't get a girlfriend? Can't get a man? Lonely, old maid

they called single women. Marriage can be a death sentence. Heterosexuality and religion being so strong as to force a woman into marriage even though she might die in childbirth. Also a death sentence for a woman artist, poet, novelist. Where are our creative women? Our painters? Our composers? Our Bachs? Our Michelangelos?

To stay single takes a great deal of courage for a young lesbian. Society still demands procreation. Does not accept independence in a woman. Refusal of marriage is frowned upon in a patriarchal society, which needs cannon fodder. She must earn a living. No one will take care of her, be a provider.

I live in a HUD complex that has sections divided into four, three, two and one bedroom apartments. All of us in this unit live in single bedroom spaces. Depending on whether disabled or more than sixty years of age we may have a cat or a dog for companionship. We need a doctor's certificate stating that it is necessary for mental health. This pet allowance is a California law.

There are cats, housebound, and dogs, miniature dachshunds and tea cup dogs that are taken for walks, owners responsible for clean up.

I've lived here in this complex for twenty-two years. I was gone a lot of the time earning two Masters — in Art in Photography and one in Theatre Arts.

I do not have a cat. Now that I am home I don't really want the bother of a cat box though I'm a cat lover. These one bedroom apartments are not very large making placement of the cat box problematic. So no cat.

So what is a feminist lesbian doing in a HUD project? Being poor if well educated, at least in art and theatre with side trips into Internet, Video. Retired into academia and from it. Living on Social Security.

And what as a single lesbian feminist do you do now? I write a monthly book review, always a woman author, sometimes a lesbian writer, always feminist, for a lesbian newsletter: The L-Word. I produce a half hour monthly radio show on KHSUFM, Through the Eyes of Women. At present I'm on temporary leave. I read a book review over KHSU once a month. I write a column for RSVP, this is sporadically published in the local daily paper. This satisfies my feminist soul.

So as a spinster, what are the advantages and what are the shadow sides? When I miss having a partner is when I do the laundry. When I'm folding the queen size sheets just out of the dryer. The other time is making the queen-sized bed.

Mostly I like living my own life, not having to share the asparagus, not having to report in when I'm late. No one frantic at home thinking I've been in an accident, and in the hospital.

Getting to watch what I want on TV — not having to compromise or

trade. Having meals whenever I want. Going to bed early or staying up late. Spending a lot of my time with my computer without feeling I'm neglecting a lover. Reading in the middle of the night if I can't sleep.

What am I missing? Hugs, though I get them from my friends. Kisses, though that may be because I am an old lesbian. Back rubs but I can always pay for a massage.

Being single doesn't mean celibate though I am my own best lover. It means living alone, not sharing an apartment.

Another time I miss a partner is when I am sick, though at that point some partners fall apart and are just additional trouble. An understanding, sympathetic, caring partner can be worth gold.

On the other hand my friends can be just as helpful checking in, bringing food if I can't cook, shopping for food, filling prescriptions at the drugstore.

True they are not there 24/7, but in order to get well I have to sleep which can be pretty boring to someone who is just being there. When I'm going through an illness I am not very entertaining and crave quiet and being left alone. It's nice to have friends sit with me for a short while but hours would just be draining.

Having a partner with a car would be nice but my friends will take me to the COOP; I can walk to the nearby grocery store. They will take me to the drug store, to medical appointments when necessary. My one-bedroom apartment is a couple of blocks from a small mall.

If I did have a partner she might not be willing to drive. We could be having arguments. When I had a lover we lived in separate houses, saw each other weekends. I was going to college, she was earning a living.

I asked my friend, who is retired, how she liked being single. She thought about that and said what she liked most was being irresponsible. All her life she has felt responsible — raising children, taking care of a house, a husband. Being single, children out of the house, not living in a couple she feels great relief. She is not responsible to anyone. She can do whatever she likes, or not do anything at all. Just sit and read all day if she likes. Her life is her own. She is only responsible to herself.

And that seems to me to be one of the benefits of being single. I don't have to pull out my cell phone, as I've seen coupled women do, assuring their mates that they are running late but will be home.

What don't I like about being single? Lack of companionship — sharing joy and pain. Someone to share ideas, to hug, to cuddle. But I can walk with friends, get good hugs, I do miss the cuddling. Sharing cooking and cleaning — that's all my responsibility.

It's true that while I can enjoy movies, walks, shopping, sharing food, concerts with a friend, it doesn't have the continuity that can come from living with someone who is compatible.

When I lived in the country for thirteen years I lived in a commune for two years and then on gay men and women's land for five and finally on my own land with my partner, Jean Mountaingrove.

We had a business publishing the magazines *WomanSpirit* and *The Blatant Image*. We traveled together, we did construction work together, we had wonderful talks developing ideas together in a feminist environment. Jean was my partner for those thirteen years.

Before that I lived for six years, not as a single exactly but as single mother working full time and raising four children in a suburb in Philadelphia. I was an only child and during my growing up I was single.

So I think what I like best about being single is the independence I have in my life. This may be what I will lose when I am no longer able to make my own meals, dress myself, take care of the laundry, keep myself clean, or handle my finances.

I am, at 85, in somewhat good health with a heart problem. I could possibly live another fifteen years, at which point I would be 100 but by that time a lot of people, while alive, are being taken care of by others.

Who will take care of me? Is there a community for me? Lesbians are talking about taking care of each other but I don't see old lesbian homes. I do know that lesbians rallied around a lesbian dying of cancer and have done that a number of times. And they took care of my ex, Jean Mountaingrove, after she had a hip operation. So it's possible that an informal network will provide when I no longer can. As one did recently until I could take care of myself.

I can only hope, and I'm sure that I'm not the only one, that I will be independent as long as possible.

An earlier version of this piece was printed in *Rain and Thunder* (Summer Solstice 2007).

Nancy Nau*Opalescent October*

to october
golden month
of golden days
of many golden years

golden plains
swept by silver winds
golden seeds
harvested by silver tears

someday to become platinum
after 30 more octobers
only a jewel
only the gem of october

its your golden birthday
but always remember
wednesdays child is full of woe
and
if you cry on your birthday
you'll cry all year

october's opalescence
swept by years
of opalescent tears
and rainbows
wiping away the tears

Erin O'Riordan

Soaked

The air was thick with electricity. I'd been out once that morning, for my early Philosophy class. Since then, the little bit of sunlight I'd seen as I crossed campus had evaporated, and it was hammering rain. Rain bounced off the tennis courts like a piano player's fingers bounce off the keys.

I love a thunderstorm. The vibrations of the thunder, the palpable crackle of the lightning excite me, making me feel alive. Rain is romantic, but a thunderstorm is erotic. I live for a good, hard, soaking thunderstorm.

At the opening chords of "Jenny (867-5309)," I turned off the radio. The 80s flashback show was too lame for the gorgeously dreary day this was shaping up to be. Besides, it was time to go to class again anyway.

I heard the first roll of thunder as I neared Weiss Hall. It was also the last; the thunderstorm was not to be.

Still, by the time I got inside Weiss, my entire body was soaked with rain. I slipped into the restroom to grab some paper towels. At least I could towel off my face and arms. By some miracle, she was there.

First thing this morning, when I should have been paying attention in Philosophy, I'd been studying her instead. She was sitting next to Lucy DeLuca today. By any traditional standard, Lucy should be the more beautiful woman. Lucy is petite and feminine, with long red hair and neatly made-up fingernails. Granted, ink-blue is not the most traditional of colors for a manicure, but still, her nails were neat. But she's too thin. Her face is skinny, and she has tiny little thighs. Bailey has very short hair, and she bites her fingernails. She has lovely round cheeks, even lovelier rounded thighs, and a deliciously round derriere. She's athletic. Strong, not skinny. And I'm not attracted to Lucy at all, but I love Bailey.

And by some miracle, there she was, in the ladies' room. Drying her soaking-wet hair with the automatic hand dryer. Her white t-shirt clung to her, and her blonde hair was matted down against her head. She looked like someone had tried to drown her, but she was still cute.

"Hi, Beck," she said.

"Hi, pretty girl."

She giggled. "Quit teasing me," she said. "I look like a drowned rat."

"Then you're the prettiest drowned rat I've ever seen," I said, reaching out to brush a strand of wet hair away from her eyes. She returned the favor, brushing drops of water from under my chin with a paper towel.

"You're so sweet," I said. She stood there in front of the mirror, smiling, and I saw my chance. I kissed her cheek, in a purely friendly-playful way. I watched her face to gauge her response.

She winked at me, then grabbed my hand. Looking around to make sure no one was looking, she pulled me into the last stall. She locked the door behind us.

"What are you doing?" I asked, laughing.

"Shh," she said. She pulled me close to her and whispered, "I've been wanting to do this for a very long time."

Now she tells me, I thought as she pulled her wet t-shirt up over her head. She hung it on the hook on the door. She put her arms around me, grabbed the bottom of my t-shirt, and pulled it over my head.

"I don't quite understand," I said. My confusion was almost as strong as my urge to reach out and feel her damp skin, the skin I'd been dreaming about since last semester. Dreaming, and nothing more. I had always been afraid to make the first move. And now my dreams were coming true...although honestly, I'd pictured our first kiss in a locale a little more romantic than the first-floor loo in Weiss Hall.

"You don't need to understand," she said softly. "Just feel." She backed me up against the door and brought her lips to mine. I put my hands on her shoulders. She had the softest skin I'd ever touched, softer than I'd dreamed. She kissed my neck, and the warmth radiated through my rain-drenched body. I couldn't help but make some slight noise, some little squeals of joy. Her fingers traced their way down my collarbone. Just as she was about to explore the outlines of my wet bra, we heard them. The footsteps. Another girl in the bathroom.

Bailey pulled away, and just like that, it was over. We put our wet shirts back on. Bailey exited the stall. I stood alone for a moment, experiencing undreamt-of loss. So this is what they mean when they say that a taste of honey is worse than none at all.

And yet somehow, despite the frustration, my first kiss with Bailey was perfect. So sublime, so...imaginary.

The truth is, I got to Weiss Hall, got soaked by the rain, gave myself a perfunctory once-over with a handful of gritty, cheap paper towels, and went to my Religion and Psychology seminar. I sat across the table (there's only one table in the classroom) from Bailey and dreamt.

Bailey was wearing a multicolored choker of trade beads, the one that matches what must be her favorite orange t-shirt, the one she wears at least once a week. Freud says that orange is the color of insanity. I drove myself

insane dreaming of the moment my fingers would glide over those beads on their way down Bailey's neck, as my eyes took in the sight of Bailey wearing that choker, and nothing but.

I drove myself insane dreaming of how Bailey had looked the night before, when we have Sociology for Women's Studies Majors, our one evening class together. She'd come in late because of intramural basketball. She was slightly sweaty and totally cute, in a red button-down knit shirt, jeans that beautifully showed off the curve of her thighs, and dirty, barely-there white sandals. I'd never looked at Bailey's feet before. Somehow I'd imagined big feet, like a guy in the NBA would have. But really, Bailey's got tiny little girl feet, just like me. I've never been into feet, but if there were any toes I could worship, they would be Bailey's little piggies, with their chipped coat of shiny lavender nail polish. I could plant my lips on them as pilgrims kiss the toes of a stone Virgin Mary. Better still, a Pagan goddess. Bailey is, after all, Aphrodite to me, a goddess I approach with raging hormones and a heart swollen with pure love.

I couldn't tell you what Religion and Psychology was about that stormy day. To me, it was about Bailey Rose Hutchins.

I thought about her as I went home for spring break. I spent the week waiting tables (my summer job, always there when I need it) and secretly checking out customers with Bailey's short-short blonde hair, her laugh, her long legs. Even when I wasn't around her, I was obsessed. The first day of classes after spring break, I again had Religion and Psychology in Weiss Hall. Philosophy had been called off, so I hadn't had any morning classes, unless you count Aerobics. I had a good work-out, and came back up to my dorm room in the mood to dance. I turned on the radio and let the 80s flashback show blast.

All that dancing made me thirsty, though, and I was having so much fun, so I decided to have a beer from the back of my mini-fridge. And then another. And then another.

I felt fine at the time, but in retrospect, I was a little tipsy. Okay, so by the time I got to the Religion & Psych seminar, it was obvious to every girl in class that I'd had a liquid lunch. Lucky for me, Fate intervened, and Professor Huang was not there. Instead she left instructions: we were to decide on a class project for the following week. She left four options for us to discuss. I'm sure my classmates made a decision, and I hope they wrote it down for me, because I wasn't paying attention. My attention, as always, was reserved for Bailey. As we got up to leave, Bailey put her hand on my shoulder. Warmth radiated through me. "Are you all right, Beck?" she asked me.

"I'm never all right when you're around, Bailey," I blurted out. Oh, would that this had been the end of the conversation. Alas, I went on. "I see you, and my stomach twists up in a knot. I can't eat. I can't sleep. I can't even listen to the radio anymore because, shit, every song's about you, and how I don't have you. I am totally knocked out by you."

That may not be the exact verbiage. I don't know that I'm that coherent after three beers.

My memory of Bailey's reaction to this is sketchy. (That's probably a good thing.) I was told afterward by someone who witnessed the incident that I said this quite loudly, and that the whole class heard me. I excused myself and went back to my dorm room, for a short but fruitful nap before my Acting class.

Later, I called Bailey's room to apologize for my outburst. I got the answering machine. I myself cannot live with other people, but Bailey — outgoing, athletic, artistic Bailey, the popular kid, my opposite— has three roommates. I left a message: "Hi, this message is for Bailey. Only for Bailey, all right? Because it's kind of personal. Bailey, this is Beck Levinsky, and I'm sorry about what I said in seminar today. I'm...just really sorry, okay?"

Afterward, I had horrible visions of Liz, Kaye and Tina listening to it and cackling at my utter patheticness. But what could I do? The damage was done.

So, to take my mind off my mistakes, I grabbed a couple of books and headed over to the student center. I was delighted to find that it was set up for open mic night. Ah, a chance for someone else to be the center of attention and make a complete ass of herself. I ordered an extra-large cappuccino, got a decent seat, and read until the first act came on. Two girls with guitars began a set of Indigo Girls covers. In between the music and my studies, I was pleasantly lost outside my own head.

Midway through the second-to-last act (a large group of guys, questionably sober, attempting to harmonize on Boyz II Men tunes), I looked up from my Abnormal Psych book, and there was Lucy DeLuca, clutching her Philosophy text in her ink-blue-tipped fingers. Lucy's a Philosophy and Women's Studies double major.

"Hey, Beck," she said, "how's studying going?"

"Oh, great," I said.

I waited for her to follow up with, "Great, because I heard you totally lost it in a Theology course and confessed your lesbian love for Bailey Hutchins," but she didn't. Instead, she said, "I'm about ready to head back to the dorms. Want to walk with me?"

I shut my book. “Okay,” I said. In truth, I hadn’t been ready to go home yet. The open-mic performances had energized me, the way Aerobics and the flashback radio show had earlier. Only now I was hyped up on sugar and caffeine instead of depressed by alcohol.

So, as Lucy and I started across the quad, I had a mad idea: I was going for a swim in the fountain at the center of campus. The night was warm and muggy, and I was overdressed in my jeans, so why not?

“Come on,” I said, throwing my books.

“Where are you going?” Lucy dropped her backpack where I’d dropped mine — far enough from the fountain to be out of splashing range.

“Into the fountain!” I said, racing toward the center of the quad.

“No!” Lucy shouted. “You know we aren’t allowed to play in the fountain. The sign says so. Besides, the bottom is all dark and slippery and icky.”

“I’ll be careful,” I assured her. I already had one sneaker in the fountain. I almost slipped then, momentarily thrown off-guard by the shock of the cold water. I caught myself, then brought the other foot in. “It’s cold, Lucy, but it’s very refreshing. Come on in!”

Lucy shrugged, sighed, and stepped gingerly into the fountain. “There,” she said. “Now we’ve played in the fountain. Can we go home now?”

I whooped with glee. “I’m having fun!” I let the fountain’s jets spray me. My wet hair fell in my eyes, making a temporary curtain between me and the world.

“Breaking the rules isn’t fun,” Lucy said, deflecting the spray from her own face with her hands. “It’s just a bad idea.”

I deliberately splashed her, right across the front of her pink flannel shirt. “Which course taught you that?” I splashed her again. “Ethics?” Splash.

“It’s common sense,” she said. She waded back over to the edge and stepped out. Just then, a security guard began shouting at us. I could tell she was security by her walkie-talkie. Her red jacket made her look more like a movie theater usher.

“What do you two think you’re doing?” The security guard pointed at the “No Swimming, Wading or Diving” sign. “Can’t you read?”

I flicked a green penny off my shoe as I joined Lucy on dry land. “I’m sorry, ma’am,” I said. “I know we shouldn’t have been in there. I was just hot, and the fountain was cool. I told my friend to do it.”

The security guard rolled her eyes, but overall, her face was kind. “Go on home now,” she said, “and stay out of the fountain. It is a memorial to the school’s founders, you know. Have some respect for the dead.”

“Yes, ma’am,” I said again. “I’m sorry.” I wasn’t.

As the security woman walked away, Lucy said, "What course teaches you to jump in fountains?" She rung out her red ponytail. "I didn't know there was a course called Misdemeanors."

I smiled. "I just want to live my life with passion," I said. "I want to make mistakes and take the consequences for them."

"Oh, so that's what this is about."

"Oh, so you heard about my outburst in Religion and Psych after all."

"It's a small campus, after all, and news travels fast." She had that right.

I spilled my guts. It's a lot harder when you haven't just slammed three beers. "I told Bailey that I'm crazy about her, in front of an entire multidisciplinary seminar." That was only twelve people, but still. "Bailey's a straight girl, and I made a pass at her in front of everyone. Why? Because I was drunk."

Lucy was aghast. "You were drunk, too?"

"Of course. I can keep my feelings to myself when I'm sober. I'm not normally *that* uncool when Bailey's around."

She was thoughtful for one long, slow moment. Then she said, "What did she say? Did she say anything?"

"I didn't give her a chance," I said. We stopped in front of Lucy's dorm, and she said goodnight. She hugged me.

"Bailey will get over it," Lucy said. "Bailey is very cool."

Bailey is very cool was the mantra at the center of my universe, the precept on which I based my life. I didn't want her to get over it, though. I wanted Bailey to lie awake, thinking of my face as I lay awake thinking of her. In the morning when she woke, I wanted her thinking of me, and longing. I communicated none of this to Lucy, though. Instead, I said, "Whatever. It is what it is."

I took the long way back to my dorm, down the avenue. The wind blew the leaves of the tree gently, in eerie slow motion, giving a strange moving effect to the street lights. Even my shadow flickered. I was looking down at it when I heard my name.

"Beck!" the voice said again. I turned around, expecting to see Lucy. Instead, there was Bailey. She ran to where I stood, dripping and befuddled. "Why are you wet?" she asked me.

"The school fountain attacked me," I said. "I was innocently minding my own business when it jumped me."

"Hm," she said with a certain healthy skepticism. "Listen, Beck, I got your message."

"You did?" I said. "I mean, *you* got it, and not Liz or Kaye or Tina?"

“Well, Kaye was there, but she tactfully ducked into the bathroom before she heard anything —.”

“— Incriminating?” I offered. I gave my wet t-shirt a squeeze. Suddenly I felt very chilly. “Humiliating?”

“Beck, it’s no big deal,” she said. “Think of it this way: by the time we reach the age of twenty-two, three quarters of the population will have gotten drunk and blurted out their feelings to someone. You’re not the only one.”

“Thanks.” I kicked a rock from the sidewalk.

“We’re closer to my dorm than we are to yours,” she said. “Why don’t you come up? I’ll get you some towels.”

“No, thanks.” I was thinking of how little I wanted to see Kaye, or Liz, or Tina, whether they’d heard my answering machine message or not.

Bailey seemed to pick that thought from my brain. “Are you sure? My roommates aren’t around. Kaye’s older brother took them to a bar in Rockport.” She was rapidly advancing toward her building. Seemingly against my wishes, I was following.

“No kidding? How come you didn’t go?”

“I have an art review in the morning. I’m here working on my unfinished drawings. I never finish the hands and feet on time. I’m no good at hands and feet.”

“Nobody is,” I said, “except Art majors, and that’s why they’re Art majors.”

“You could help me,” she said. “You could take off your wet shoes and socks, and I could draw your feet.”

I just laughed. We went up to her room, which was as dirty and colorful and funky as I’d imagined Bailey’s room to be. Next to the art prints and clippings from fashion magazines on the walls, there was sports stuff. Bailey really loved the Detroit Pistons and the Red Wings. I knew it was her, too, because no one else was from Michigan. As a Blackhawks fan, I tried to hide my natural revulsion.

“Sit,” she said, pointing to a futon under a loft bed.

“I’ll leave a wet spot,” I objected.

“Sit on that sweatshirt.” She pointed to a gray lump on the floor. I picked it up, stretched it out and sat on it. She grabbed some towels out of the closet and handed them to me.

Bailey’s towels were orange. “Do you know what Freud says about the color orange?”

“It’s the color of insanity,” she said, “and it’s my favorite color. What does that say about me?”

I didn't have an answer that I could put into words for her. I dried my hair with one of her orange towels and wrapped the other around my wet clothes. Next I took off my shoes and socks, and shoved them off to the side.

Bailey opened her cardboard portfolio, selected a drawing, and put it on the drawing board. She grabbed one of the artists' pencils that were scattered on the floor.

"Your feet are small," she said, "like mine."

I looked down at them and wondered when I'd last cut my toenails.

I don't know how long it took for her to complete the sketch, but when she was finished, she showed me the result. I didn't recognize the face in the portrait. I wouldn't have recognized my own feet if I hadn't watched her sketch them. They weren't perfect, but the drawing was better than what I could have done. And it was endowed with the magic of having been touched by Bailey's hands.

"Do you like it?" she asked me.

"Yes," I said. "You'll get an A."

And then it happened. Quick as a flash, Bailey's hands darted out and took mine. She pulled me to her, so that we stood in front of the futon, and she kissed me. Her soft lips were as warm and sweet as three shots of honey liqueur. I shivered.

"I knew I'd be wet the first time I kissed you," I said as I caught my breath. "This wasn't exactly what I had in mind."

Marva C. Edwards*Bein Me At Forty*

When I came out
on a long distance
call to my very best friend/family/sister/friend,
Bonded since 12 years old
grew up in the same church,
and she told me
she would pray for me
I responded,
You don't have to pray for me
God/spirit/godess
loves me.
I will pray for myself.
and so that is when I figured
out that folks I had known for many years
and who I loved deeply
might not understand
how I now LOVED a woman
hard and without end.
and then one of my sistah friends
who was a lesbian
way before
I figured it out
that I loved a
woman,
she told me
there will be no red carpet
rolled out for you—
really get that,
the road will not be smooth
or easy.

8/8/08

Merina Canyon**Dangerous Calling**

My phone rings. I answer. The voice at the other end of the line makes me reel for a moment as I search back in time. It seems to reside in the middle of my heart, and yet it is distant. How long has it been since I heard that voice?

And what is it saying now? "How are you? How are you?"

I'm not sure what I can say. *How am I?* Does she mean after twenty-five years how am I when I hear the unchanged voice of that blonde woman who loved me like a perfect seashell and then tossed me aside to go back to her husband? Remember — I was devastated for a year — no, three years. How could someone who desired me so much drop me so coldly?

"Are you there?" the voice is saying.

And I say "Yes" without meaning to. I'm not sure I'm here or not. That voice just sent me tumbling backward. I'm rolling around in my memory banks as she says something else.

"I need to talk to you."

Oh really? I want to say coldly, but I don't. After twenty-five years she wants to talk to me? I wanted to talk to her so many times that it sounds downright desperate. But I couldn't just call her. It wasn't allowed. I was the *demon lesbian* — isn't that what her church counselor called me, *a tool of Satan* — and then they deposited her in the psychiatric ward out of my reach. When she got out she looked like a block of ice until I warmed her up in one loving embrace, and her breath came out warm and sweet saying, "Please, darlin'."

"Will you listen to me?" she asks.

I say "Yes" against my better judgment. Maybe it's a trick. Those church loonies may have put her up to it. After twenty-five years they might have enough power to round up all the devil lesbian witches and burn them at the stake.

"I need to tell you something," she says. "Will you let me tell you something? Please."

The way she says "please" knifes into my throat. I remember that "please" under different circumstances, her arms folding me down deep into her heart. I knew better. I was warned by friends: *Don't get involved with straight women, especially married ones.* But that irresistible "please" — so love soaked, so...

"I understand this is hard for you," she goes on saying. "It's hard for me too."

I ask her to hold on as I grab a pen and a tablet. If she's going to say something after all this time, I want to get it down in writing — proof that this voice spoke to me, gave me a message. I tell her to go ahead, pen poised.

"I want you to know that no one else has ever loved me the way you loved me."

I wonder: *Is that good or bad?*

"I mean, my whole life, only one person ever loved me just the way I am, and that was you."

My pen isn't moving. It's hovering over a blank page.

"I owe you so much," she says. "Without you, I wouldn't have known love — true love — and lots of times the memory of you is all that has kept me going."

My pen point meets the page but does not move. Strands of ink begin to spread.

"Are you there?" she asks.

I whisper "Yes" too lightly. I clear my throat and say it again. "Yes." Even that one word — my saying that word — takes me back there. Now she's looking down into my eyes, her long blonde hair falling down around our two feminine faces,

"I'm sorry," she says. "It must be a shock to hear from me, but I've meant to do this for a long time." She pauses, and then: "My husband died."

I don't know whether to laugh with glee or say I'm sorry to hear that. Instead I say, "Well, my dad died."

"I'm sorry to hear that," she says kindly. "When?"

"Ten years ago." There's bitterness in my voice. I don't like it. What's the matter with me? This woman who once loved me is now calling to tell me something important and I act angry, vindictive. She wasn't there for me — why should I be there for her?

The phone line is silent. Then: "Are you ok?" she asks softly.

God damn it, I've missed her. We were so good together. Her voice always melted my defenses against straight women. I remember that at first I had been strong — kept myself remote, but how could I have been stronger than that cosmic magnet pulling us together? Then she had to go and say, "*What shall I do with my feelings for you?*" and against my better judgment I said, "*Come here.*"

"Are you ok?" she asks again snapping me back to the present.

"Yes." Of course I'm ok. I'm professional and spiritual and respected and I've had the same sweet love partner for fifteen years. But I'm not twenty-

two like I was then. I'm forty-seven, and I notice the changes in my face, the way my body is spreading out. I wonder what she looks like now.

"That's all I really needed to tell you," she says.

The word "Wait!" leaps out of my mouth.

"Yes," she says.

"I'm sorry," I say. I think I hear a bird fluttering in the background on her end of the phone line. Does she still keep birds?

"I know," she says. "It's hard."

"Are *you* ok?" I ask, really meaning it.

"Well, yeah, I'm ok. I needed to tell you what I said. I felt like it was the right thing to do — to tell you."

"Tell me what?" I honestly can't remember the words. My pen has dropped to the floor and both my hands are clutching the phone.

"No one has ever loved me like you loved me."

"I still love you," I say. My eyes are squeezed shut.

"I believe you," she says. "I've never stopped loving you either."

"What are you going to do?" I manage to say.

"I've got three kids. Two in high school and one in college." I hear her draw in the smoke from a cigarette. "They still need me," she says.

I want to say *I need you I need you*. But I can't say that. I said that twenty-five years ago begging her to stay with me — before those kids were even born. She could have chosen me over him — but "*I want children*," she said. And "*I need to protect you from my church*." Those crazy church people. Why was she so chained to them?

I say, "You still smoking?"

She chuckles. "I just started up again. After, you know — Lonnie died."

"Sorry," I say.

"He wasn't a bad person, you know."

"How'd he die?"

"Heart attack. Sudden. Me and my youngest found him in the garage doubled over his work bench."

"Must have been awful."

"Look. I gotta go."

"Please," I say. I sound desperate. I don't want to sound desperate. "Please, don't hang up yet."

"I'm sorry, darlin'," she says. The word *darlin'* breaks my heart and I gasp for air.

And then I hear the *click*. She has hung up her phone. She has cut me off. Again.

She is somewhere back there a couple thousand miles away sitting at her kitchen table or maybe she has a lovely inviting sun porch with a large uncaged bird — a parrot or a cockatiel, one that can talk. She always loved talking birds and sunshine. And maybe she has lovingly set the phone back into its receiver with the pain of longing in her heart, and maybe she is filled with memories of my smile, the texture of my long brown hair, the way I always knew exactly what she wanted.

I imagine her sitting there now with me on her mind, knowing that our secret love has kept her whole. I press the phone to my ear, not wanting to let her to go.

Mary Meriam

For Sally's Sake

She drives the empty country lane
Singing about her Sally Jane.

She turns the wheel and taps the brake
Singing a tune for Sally's sake.

Around the bend and up the hill,
Sally can't sing, so Mary will.

She taps the brake and turns the wheel,
Singing inside her automobile.

She drives the empty country lane,
Singing about her Sally Jane.

Mary Meriam

Prayer for leaf

The last old leaves have blown away,
and I'm alone, undressed, and lost,
shivering in a new spring breeze
beside the lake that laps the shore.

Blossom me slowly, bloom me good,
and draw my fancy flowers nigh.
Maple me softly, oak me strong,
and let my close – green clothing grow.

Giovanna Capone

High Strung

It feels like needles are going through me, piercing my skin. I imagine them positioned around my body, pricking me everywhere like I'm a pin cushion. I can't tolerate the pain. They're not real needles, but emotional needles. A fight with my lover and I'm a wreck. Her words are like needles, poking me. It's not the first time. In fact, all week, we've been fighting and fighting.

I flip open my cell phone looking up the phone numbers of friends. No matter how small or large our fights, I always worry. Maybe we're just not right for each other. Maybe she's too high strung. Maybe I should leave now, just get myself out of this deal. Or: what if she leaves me? Just dumps me flat, waltzes out the door and doesn't look back? I can't tolerate the pain of these conflicts. But I know that conflict is a part of intimacy, that's what our couples' counselor told us.

I'm confused. I've never been good at tolerating pain. Our counselor calls it self-soothing and I can't do it. Thirty-eight years old and I can't do it. Instead, I call fifteen friends and spill my guts. Then later I have fifteen people who assume I'll report back to them when the needles have been removed. Not real needles, of course, imaginary ones. But they still hurt like hell, and my friends still want to know that I'm no longer in excruciating pain. I appreciate their concern, but it's exhausting calling them all back later. I hate this pattern of mine. But, like nail-biting and buying cigarettes, I can't seem to stop.

I scan down my list of phone numbers and choose one to make a call. It's 10 pm on a Sunday night and thanks to modern technology I get a bunch of cell phone messages and answering machines. Nobody's home. "Nobody's home 'cause nobody cares," a mocking little voice inside me whispers. I hate that little voice. Where did I get it? It's evil. "You might as well shrivel up and die. No one would even notice," it tosses in for extra measure.

That's how my mind talks and that's how I end up calling my mother in New York. God knows, she wasn't my first choice, but I need immediate relief and I know she'll be home and I know she loves me. Besides, she's getting older and you never know how long old people will be around. For all I know, this could be my last chance to talk to her.

"What!" she yells, after I tell her my woebegone tale. She's a little high strung. Plus, she's heard about this particular woman in my life and she's beginning to form an opinion. "Whadaya doing with this woman? She sounds like a nut."

Maybe it's my sobbing and my tears that lead her to such dramatic conclusions. Maybe it's because of my own extreme reaction that she's reacting extremely. But even as I'm walking her down that path, knowing what the results will be, I can't stop. The more I spill my guts, the worse I'm making it for myself, because I know that someday I'll want her to meet this particular woman, whom I love deeply even though at the moment we're having a fight, but the more I blab and complain, the less she's gonna wanna meet her. So here I go shooting myself in the foot even as I speak. But, like cigarettes and nail-biting, I can't stop.

Somewhere in my malaise, it occurs to me as I'm talking that my mother gets a very slanted view of the two of us. She rarely gets to hear the good stuff that happens between us, and there is some. But she knows a lot more about our conflicts than our joys, because when things are going good, I don't need to call her or anyone else. Really, when I think about it, I'm not painting the fairest picture of us, or my partner, to my mother. Yet somehow I can't shut up. I barely have any toes left. All shot off.

"You manage to find every nut in California," she says, referring to my last partner and the fights I had with her.

"Oh Ma!"

"Well! What the hellaya doing out there?" she says in her Bronx Italian accent. "It's been fifteen years and you've been miserable ever since you left New York."

"Ma. That's not true!"

"Look at these nutty women you end up with, the whole lot of 'em. I don't know why you stay in California. They're a buncha kooks out there!"

"Ma, I'd find the kooks in New York, too. Believe me, I'd find the kooks in New York."

"Why?" she says. "I can't understand it." And then I'm thinking, wait a minute! Why am I agreeing with her that I'm with a nut? I never said I was with a nut. *She* said I was with a nut. *Am* I with a nut? Maybe *she's* the nut. Or maybe I'm the nut for calling her at this late hour. I don't know anymore. I'm confused, and the more she talks, the more confused I get and the more I realize this conversation is going down a path I never wanted to pursue in the first place. My mother is painting a reality for me that's not mine. It's a parallel reality that's even more awful than mine really is. It's similar, but it's not mine, yet she keeps painting it anyway. With every stroke of her brush, I'm one inch closer to completely fucked up. I can't blame her. I'm the one who started this conversation in the first place.

"Didn't you tell me last time she said you were shallow?"

“No, Ma. She never said I was shallow. She said I was shy. And I am shy.”

“Well, why do you let her criticize you like that? Why don’t you fight back? You sure know how to fight back with us. You never hesitate with us.” I can hear her breathing more heavily. The electrons in the phone wires are sizzling as we speak. “Why do you get with these women who criticize you? It’s like women who stay with abusive husbands. Women who love too much,” she says, citing examples she’s heard on The Oprah Winfrey Show.

“No Ma, it’s not that bad. You’re making it sound horrible. I just needed a place to vent because I’m upset. I needed someone to listen to me who cares. That’s why I called you. In fact, some day I’ll take her back to New York with me. I want you to meet her.”

“New York? *What* New York! I don’t wanna meet her. Forget it! I don’t want that woman in my house.”

“Ma!”

“Why do you get with these nuts who criticize you? Because you’ll tolerate anything, that’s why!”

“No I won’t! I won’t tolerate anything. And I know why I get with nuts. I know *exactly* why. Because you yelled at me and criticized me when I was little.”

“*What?*”

“Because you yelled at me.”

“Whadaya mean I yelled at you?” she yells. “Now you’re blaming me? I didn’t single you out. I yelled at everybody,” and by now her breathing is so hard I worry about her high blood pressure and her heart and I realize I never shoulda called her in the first place. She’s so high strung. Yes, she loves me, in her New York Italian mother way, but right now she’s getting too upset and it’s making me feel worse. I never should have called her. And goddammit, what about *my* heart? What about *my* blood pressure? I remember one night after a phone conversation we had, my mother actually got out her blood pressure kit and tested herself. Of course, her blood pressure was high, and it made her so mad; that I should cause her such aggravation. She actually got out her kit and tested herself after she talked to me. Then later my sister yelled at me for upsetting Mom. “What the hell did you say to her?” she interrogated.

Right now I can hear my father who died a few years ago laughing in the background. He’s rolling on the floor laughing, saying something he always used to say to me: “It’s your own goddamn fault, *strunz’*, (it’s Italian for turd, or inept person). You’re the one who called her up,” he’s saying. “Why’d you open your big mouth?”

Yeah, Dad, thanks for the empathy. I'm the one who called her, forgetting that her level of emergency for my life is always several notches higher than my own, and sometimes the reality she reflects back to me makes me feel weaker, not stronger. But I brought it on myself, it's true. So who else can I blame? Look at this! Bullets right into my own goddamn foot. Jesus fucking Christ!

Now she's telling me I ought to move back to New York and she'll send me the money. I could get a job there and sleep on the couch blah blah blah, and all I can think about is my father laughing in the background and my own goddamn stupidity for bothering my poor mother at this late hour with my over-reactive panic.

Five days later, I'm driving down the street with my lover. Our angry interactions have subsided and we've been calmer again. We're learning how to tolerate conflict, says our couples' counselor. Is it that simple? So she asks me, remembering I recently called home for my brother's birthday, "How's everything going back in New York, hon?"

I take a deep breath, reflecting on the most inoffensive news to report. "Well, Dominic just turned 34 and he's doing pretty well. They had a cake for him and a party. And then I had kind of a hard talk with my mother."

"Oh really?" she says, zeroing right in on the juiciest information like a homing pigeon from hell. "What happened?"

But this time I can see the pile of dog shit a mile away and I choose not to step in it. I consciously walk around it. I have some new skills that I paid dearly for in therapy and I'm trying them out. Maybe some day I'll walk down a street that doesn't have any dog shit, but right now, all I can do is side step it. Because I know if I ever breathe a word about that recent conversation with my mother it will set off a whole chain of events with my girlfriend that I'll have to contend with and I'll end up in a whirlwind of misery. Misery I never wanted in the first place. She's already heard a few things about my mother and she's beginning to form an opinion.

No way do I wanna get into that conversation right now, I tell myself. I want that topic of discussion like I wanna stick a hot poker up my ass. "No fucking way! Forget it," I say to myself. "Why should I tell her? Just because she asked? I ain't nobody's goddamn pawn. Nobody's ventriloquist dummy. That's right. Nobody jerks me up one side and down the next. I ain't that dumb."

My resolve not to talk about it with my girlfriend deepens the more the self-talk in my head continues. My inner voice says, "In fact, they could hang me out a fucking ten story window upside down naked and shake me for five minutes by the ankles before I'll tell her that fucking

story. The conversation I had with my mother. No way. Forget it. She's too fucking high strung, just like my mother. She'll take it the wrong way. So fuggedaboutit! I AIN'T FUCKING TELLING HER, SO FORGET IT!" the voice finally shouts inside my own head.

"Maybe I'll tell you later," I say in the car. As we drive, it's so quiet we can hear the engine hum. I rummage through my backpack for my Marlboro Lights and a match.

"OK honey," she says, and we continue driving down the street, moving down the road in relative calm. We turn the corner and stop at a red light and suddenly I remember I have those fifteen phone calls to return. I roll down my window, light up a cigarette, and suck the smoke deep into my lungs.



One Last Try. Photo by Judith K. Witherow.

Marva C. Edwards

Flowers in the kitchen sink

After a long real life day
full of work and errands and duties
I came home and
I noticed some of my flowers were
dying.

There were still some
among them that lived—
so I threw the dead ones
in the kitchen sink
and cleaned
the vase
and added clear water
and the flowers danced again.
and leaned toward the light
and what I had was

A new beginning.
In a time so desolate
it is a good thing
to find beauty
in the small wonders
of the world.

3/2008

Robin Carstensen

Stillwaters in the Heartland

Children flap their nearly naked bodies
under late afternoon sun
like brightly crafted quilts

as mothers look on.

Two families are having a picnic – hotdogs and burgers –
on the fading green grass.

They watch us – two graying-haired women
in our t-shirts and swim shorts,
unfold from a jeep, stride to the lake's edge.

Dare you, they must hear you shout,
and me laugh, as we dip our whole bodies slowly
through the first cool shock

until we can absorb the lingering warmth of summer
far out from shore, me on my tip-toes. Usually it's perfect
here, a quiet water hole on the planet,

yellow finches and cardinals flitting
between light dogwood rustle and sycamore.
Normally you wrap your arms around me

and we buoy one another, perfectly,
light as leaves and lake pebbles.
Today though, between butterflies

and backstrokes, I'm eyeing
the man on shore, a father I think.
His hand on hip, hairy belly

curving slightly over the waistband
of his trunks. He tends a small fire,
surveys us and the lake from time to time,

while he drinks beer from a can.
The mothers are doing busy things;
their voices carry as if we are all in the kitchen

with the stove vent on, so I can't quite hear
 what they're saying. They lie on folding chairs,
 watch the children and us under their straw hat

and cotton cap. A mother wades in with her baby.
 Dare you, I whisper while we float around
 smiling shyly at each other. Nine years in

and we still play this game, just to feel
 the soft lick of each other's palms.
 Like at Piggly Wiggly's, golden oldies

blaring, our bodies dangerously close before I brush
 my face past yours in the instant someone appears.
 We've no idea how else

to touch among these aisles
 your strong hands always find mine
 beneath the surface and you swirl me

round and round until I forget the man
 and his belly and the baby and the shadowed faces.
 I shout watch this, see if I can swim

 past the rocks, watch me.
 You look on as always
 I plunge in to the spearmint lake,

 my hands stroke
 for a long time, until I reach the last red rock,
 wave wildly to your thumbs up,

 scoop my way back, come up
 gasping,
 my arms dripping heavy,

 you grinning baby you did it.

 I soar like a silver fish in its habitat, the way it flips
 up to meet the azure light, stretches urgently into full

and prodigious joy. I leap, weightless, to kiss your wet lips,
 like blue water thanking blue sky.
 I hear a woman call a name.

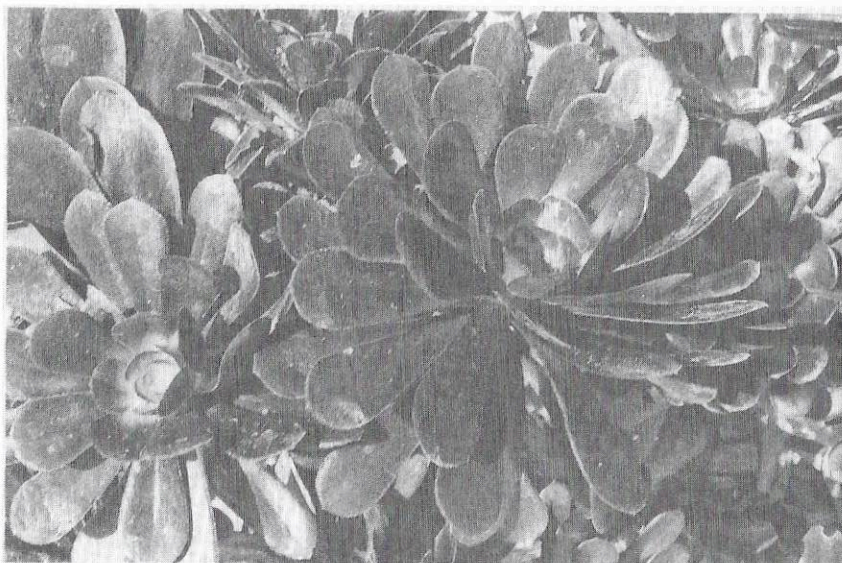
A father his son. My chest beats
fast, like when one hits the brakes hard
on a neighborhood street when a ball rolls out.

I crash in front of you — my torso glazing your breasts —
slide into the water, watch your face sink
into relief, then do a mine sweep

with just my head above the ripples:
mother gazing into her baby,
angelic coo; children picking orange-pink

shells; man wiping brow, stoking fire in his grill;
two women talking under their hats.
Could be watching us or not. Too far away to tell.

Water turning slightly cold and murky.
A quiver, like autumn leaves, falling.
Fear, like rippling water, passes.



Untitled. Photo by Lilith Rogers.

Lilith Rogers

Love and Art

Love is the substance that informs art.
Love infuses art and gives it life. — Judy Grahn

Love is also the substance
that informs life —
that makes life an art —
that makes a life's work
a work of art
makes work
art
causes art
to work.

What is art, work
or life
without love?

And yet —
the art of love is sometimes
hard work
that must be
re-infused with passion
from time to time
for it to work
at all
to keep that love
lively
to make life
more than mere work
but also
art.

April 10th, 1987

Kelly Coqwell

Corona Chronicus
On Chronic Fatigue Immune Dysfunction
Syndrome and Other Ills

for Ana

1.

What's waking? Resurrection? Not this.
I fall asleep like an opossum falls
beneath some rattling car and wake a ball
of road-kill with a sour mouth, cracked lips,
and unforgiving limbs that cramp and rip
their way from sleep. Now, I'm thrall
to fevers, better call it flesh, that walls
you out, me in. It kills me being sick.
Outside the rippling window, screaming kids
retreat and scramble, little apes recalling
trees, lost green, lost wind, the dazzling fall
and bright trajectory before we hit.
Do you still love me? It's habit to endure
beyond the gates of Paradise. Your hands cure.

2.

Beyond the gates of Paradise, your hands cure.
I beg a kiss and with it, a caress
that pulls me from the bed to face the mess
we call a kitchen and the coffee maker
daily, saving things, a cup, your fingers
sink their heat into my heart, less
as sex, than love. One simple touch, a blessing
I'm a phoenix winging towards rebirth —
when I remember, or you do. I endure
alone mostly, a Baptist in the wilderness
or an amnesiac found lost out west
without a dime. You're all my wealth, pure
loss to leave you out, and for who's sake?
This flesh is fire and weight. With need comes hate.

3.

This flesh is fire and weight. With need comes hate
and fear. Cars burn for less in Paris, France.

The Bastille attracts young anarchists who mask
 their faces, put on tee shirts bearing Che's.
 and blow up things in simulated rage
 the cops adore. They grab their clubs, advance.
 while suburbs smolder on the brink. Boys blast
 their way towards manhood, hasten change in ways
 to bury us. Skin's a flag that waves
 demanding war, or ground to till, or dance in.
 It's not just jobs, and schools. Where's joy? The last
 requirement of the soul goes up in flames.
 I'm careful what I ask of you. Say no,
 retreat, I couldn't bear it. I'd explode.

4.

Retreat? I couldn't bear it. I'd explode
 into a million quaking pieces on the ground
 unless the terms were good, of course. I've found
 I'm something of a coward. Is it low?
 No doubt I've sunk there once or twice before.
 like going back to doctors that made fun
 of me, a woman, waiting for salvation
 in the waiting room, but getting Prozac.
 "Get a load of her. She brought a list.
 Ha ha. Must be sick. Upstairs." Bound
 by love to see what no one does around
 me, what suits? An Emperor's old clothes? Silk?
 I'm naked. Should I force the question?
 Do you believe? I'm getting desperate.

5.

Do you believe I'm getting desperate?
 Do you? Are you kind from love, or credo?
 Do I accept the kiss and let you go?
 Do I demand you understand? Betray
 myself to you while buildings flame, my brain
 goes up in smoke, my body burns? Oh,
 why bother trying to explain? A crow
 is more articulate than me. A gate
 that swings and creaks has just as much to say.
 You translate flesh with flesh. and bone with bone.
 Violence says it best. Leave me alone
 to loathe myself. Go. On the bad days
 your hands are not enough, I pray to die.
 I think about the crucifixion sometimes.

6.

Think about the crucifixion sometime.
 Where would God be if his son refused
 to die? The Red Sea had been used to death,
 like crickets and the other plagues. The Nile
 running blood, puhlease, too theatrical, like
 the dead first born, the bloody door, all effects
 he piled up like bodies as he wrecked
 the Middle East. Vengeance, he said, is mine.
 Until he didn't. It was love that let God shine
 like Cary Grant with Hitchcock, cleared the decks
 for something with a little more finesse,
 For extra staying power, he stuck to kindness.
 You could say that by submitting all
 the son redeemed the father from his fall.

7.

The son redeemed his father from the fall
 by swapping vanquish with submit, though
 sometimes, as with moneylenders, blows
 remain in order. Is love enough to start?
 I dream I take a razor to my arms
 and cut vast swathes like grain in sheaths of grief
 no gleaner wants to glean. Tell me,
 should I sow salt? Is there an Eden of the heart
 where we can climb the tree he dropped from, part
 the branches, stargaze, flee this bruising flesh?
 If I relinquish understanding, rest
 maybe, will come. Your light hands know their art.
 Where faith grows, hope is planted with a kiss.
 This is waking, resurrection, bliss.

Judy Lightwater

History Old and New

Romantic rhododendrons bloom in March on my west coast island, no matter what the weather, their deep red markings an exotic invitation delivered on snow white petals. The blossoms' interiors remind me of a woman with whom I'm dancing to big band music, the orchestra tiered behind us. My black tuxedo and her perfect cleavage shine at the end of the spotlight; cream cheese sculptures and purple roses in huge bouquets around us.

I've been foolish in the past when love wasn't working, and stayed for too long a time. I've had to choose between being with someone and being with myself. Even the most stable of liaisons has its bumps along the way. I've learned to steer around them. Based on this rich experience, a sunny morning in April brings with it a startling insight. Barring a natural disaster, or one of us entering a religious order, my current beloved and I could be a long story with many happy endings.

We both want a permanent relationship — an oxymoron these days; we're also introverts who get very unpleasant when denied our solitude. Books and beaches are the quiet we adore, and when there is room for words she reads me poetry. At verse's end, she turns, sleek shoulders beckoning me to reach for her again.

I know so little after years of loving, and have so much to learn. How to ask for what I want and cry when my heart demands it, instead of holding my tears until my heart's too tight to touch. My new love asks me to stay when life gets difficult, to trust that my needs will be met, and that time is a precious friend.

I fly to Winnipeg a few weeks later to visit my father and announce my marital intentions. We lunch at Norm's Deli, eating the same barley soup and pastrami sandwiches we've been ordering for years. Dark rye and hot mustard make my meal a holy thing.

"Mazel tov. This is wonderful," my wrinkled dad smiles. His whole face says he means it. It's Friday lunch time and we're the only customers. The front display case is empty, not even a jar of Strubb's pickles to take home for the weekend.

"Will you come out to the coast for the wedding?" I ask hopefully.

"Of course. Your mother, *alava shalom*, I wish she were here. She wanted you to be happy." The North End and the deli are both in a state of decline.

Seven-up and grape sodas have been replaced by diet Coke, but the cans are still kept in the old cooler with the sliding door on top. Norm's red plastic tablecloths haven't changed for twenty years, and neither has his apron. He still sells *perishkas*, the tasteless dumplings my mother-in-law used to make and send over in shoe boxes lined with wax paper.

I prefer the delicate *blintzes* of my childhood, the ones my grandmother spent the day constructing for our family. We devoured them in fifteen minutes on a Friday night, smothered in sour cream and apple sauce with cole slaw on the side. That was a *milchek* night. Usually we had chicken, potato *knishes*, and broccoli cooked 'til it was limp, with applesauce for dessert. Home is food, it seems, and I gain five pounds in two days of letting my father feed me.

I'm home for a week when my sister calls to tell me my uncle has died. Pancreatic cancer. He carved the turkey every Thanksgiving from 1950 to 1970, happily drove my aunt to the hairdresser on Saturday afternoons, and encouraged me to make my first car an Oldsmobile. He worshipped my aunt, a nervous woman unsure of everything except how much she loved her children. She loved me fiercely, too, and her rec room was a perfect escape when my parents misunderstood me.

"Don't die because Unc did," I sob to her on the telephone. "Don't follow him." My grandfather died three weeks after my bubbie, and my fiancée's grandmother followed her husband by a month. I won't rest easily until my aunt outlives my uncle by at least a year.

"I won't," she promises. "I'm selfish. I still have things to live for." I can't imagine life without her checking my cuticles and asking if I need any money. My uncle remains an unsolved piece of our family puzzle, a quiet player in the feuds and secrets my cousins and I spend Passover visits trying to decode. Where is his brother, the one who brought us Mars bars on Sunday afternoons? Why did my uncle and my mother sit as far from each other as possible at every holiday meal?

They're lowering him into the ground tomorrow, but my uncle is with me constantly today. I picture us walking around the golf course after his heart attack in 1985, and remember his patience when my cousins and I interrupted his football games on Sunday afternoons. The Super Bowl, the Rose Bowl, we just wanted him to play checkers with us and he almost always did.

Love flowed between him and my aunt as they looked across the table at each other long after their children were grown.

"I'm eating like there's no tomorrow, Isaac."

"Me, too, Loretta." They finished their tiny salmon patties and baked potatoes with no-fat sour cream, and offered me another piece of pie. If I refused, they badgered me until it was easier just to eat.

Can't get away from memories of Winnipeg. Main Street, snow-covered fields glowing in the sun, and North End synagogues that smell of old men with numbers on their arms, mumbling stale-breathed prayers to get them through the week. Few of them are left now, and it's up to us, with our modular furniture and world beat music, to make sense of what they've told us.

The pogroms of 1900 drove my grandfather's family from a Russian farm to the homesteads of Manitoba. Decrees and death camps killed my grandmother's family when they refused to leave Warsaw with the others. My siblings, from their suburban houses and country clubs, send money to Israel for trees, assuring themselves and their children a safe haven. I attend peace vigils, make *seders*, and carry a sign each week with the other dykes at Women in Black demonstrations.

I journeyed to Winnipeg for my mother's funeral only a year ago. Grief fell on old cemetery stones while cold winds blew our prayers to the sky. I stood alone at the end of the service, listening for a message. Would I continue to hear the voices of my relations so long departed from the world? Would they guide me in a life so different from their own?

I flew home to the Island and began my days again. White-capped ocean, purple mountains, and huge red tulips waved for my attention, the living and the dead in every gust of wind. Now we have a wedding to plan, with a *chuppah*, a canopy, made by my loved one's aunt. This honoring of tradition, my mother would say, was a good thing. The tuxedo, the cleavage, the roses and champagne, this she would shake her head at. "Don't make such a fuss. Save your money. You're not youngsters anymore."

On the beach at low tide, I cry for my uncle, my mother, and for the grandmothers whose black dresses and thick-soled shoes I haven't thought of since they died. I long for a chopped liver sandwich to eat at the old wooden table where my grandpa made his prayers. Looking up at the clouds, I'm certain that all my relations will be with us at the wedding. They remind me that fear is healthy, part of the sadness and joy that shape all of life's events. "Make sure there's enough lox," says my mother. "Have the rabbi, not some justice of the peace," my grandmother chimes in. Their stories are part of my memory, their advice my comic relief. I'll walk the sand each morning and listen for their wisdom.

Finola Moorhead

Monstrous Tale

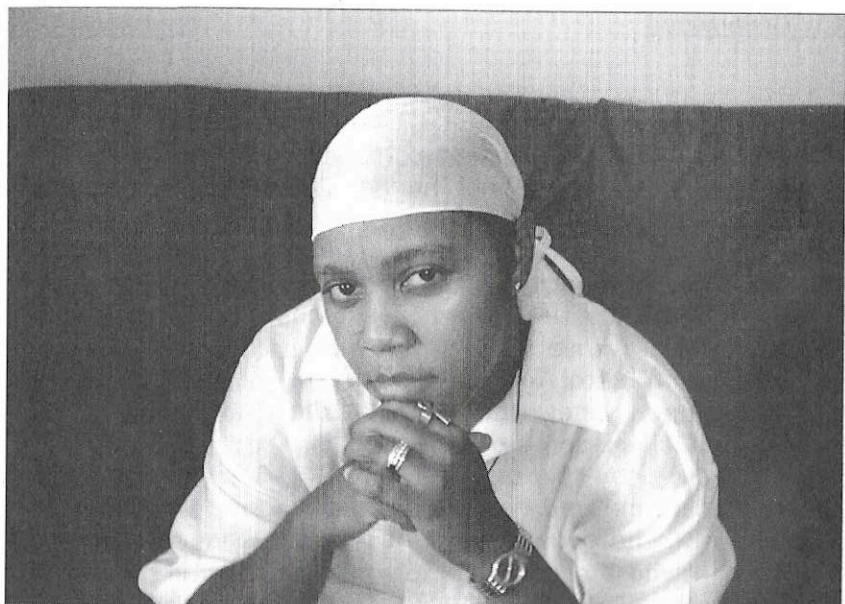
i am wondering what monstrous tale
to bring to the table
it is two thousand and eight of the christian era
millennia full of one monstrosity followed by another
more today even though predicted yesterday
in the seventies, my twenties,
(reading frankenstein on the screen)
steeped in gothic plots
which move along at a cracking pace
escaping from this place, now,
when gothic sci-fi is horrid reality
oh my oh me oh my
i cannot invent a monster
anymore than i can create a saint
for these times in fiction
so
i am wondering what could i write
or ever again

Alix Greenwood

I Did Not Die

Girl-Child, I was not left on a cold hill — I did not die.
 I did not die of dysentery or hunger
 Or agent orange. I did not step on a land mine.
 I was not sold to die a prostitute,
 Nor has a man killed me.
 I did not die exhausted from a sweatshop.
 No cancer, yet. I have ridden
 In the hurtling metals of cars and trains
 And buses and planes, and I did not die.
 By luck, not by wisdom or betterness,
 I did not die — by skin and body,
 Class, place, time and chance, I did not die,
 And by right, that was their right too,
 But it was I who did not die.
 Fifteen thousand days I've had,
 And did I live them well? — Untaught and badly taught,
 I scrabbled through the years — learned
 Painfully and wastefully how to live,
 When still I didn't die — the life that's mine,
 But why, when every day they die?
 I know the explanations — how some deaths
 Serve profit or power or are rubbish in the way;
 But there's no answer, no redemption —
 They didn't have to die I know
 That I am clothed in death, in theirs and mine,
 In all that deaths have brought me
 (Food, fuel, shelter, shoes)
 And in the death that they have met, but I not yet,
 But I know that I will die; and will
 I meet them there, and will they ask,
 What did you do, all those days you didn't die?

1 March 2004



Self portrait by Azaan Kamau

Azaan Kamau

Through African Eyes: The Story of Eva Georgia

I met Eva Georgia one evening at the United Lesbians of African Heritage (ULOAH) Sistahfest Retreat back in 2000. When she addressed the group, she stated she was from South Africa! At that moment I had no idea this woman speaking with such conviction was a civil rights activist, journalist and leader in her community! I had no idea Eva Georgia had successfully conquered racism, discrimination and homophobia! I had no clue that this woman, at a young age became a voice for her nation.

Today Eva speaks of same gender American couples, walking, hand-in-hand, hugging, kissing in public without being accosted, persecuted and prosecuted. Eva spoke of African American Lesbians, fitted in double breasted suits, fems in long sexy dresses, many styles of braided, and twisted hair. Eva said she was shocked as sexy well built brathas open the doors of expensive motor vehicles as their mates emerged. Brathas draped in tailor made suits, leather and boots as expensive cologne hangs in the air.

When I was finally given the opportunity to speak with Eva, I found her to be a political powerhouse and revolutionary in her own right. In our conversation, Eva reflects on life, love and the challenges she has faced.

I told Eva, she is the first African Lesbian I've ever had the pleasure to meet. I wondered do her experiences mirror ours and when did she realize her attraction for women was something deeper than platonic friendship?

Eva added, "At age ten, I knew I was different. I felt different, I was affected by things, and responded differently. I realized my feelings for my best friend, who was female, were more than platonic! I was always with and around boys. I was such a tomboy in the midst of finding my true identity."

I told Eva that in my youth I struggled with my family and their religious stance as have many other Lesbians. I asked her could she relate to the many stories of neglect, abandonment, confusion and exile that binds African American Lesbians?

Eva's response was, "I can definitely relate! As a young person, I felt very confused. I felt isolated knowing if my true feelings were exposed I would suffer a terrible fate as did other gays. I was confused in Capetown's Christian society where divorce and homosexuality were not permitted. I grew up with the understanding that I would eventually marry a man! My family was all about the Christian Church and the laws that governed it. The Church made it clear that homosexuality is a sin in the eyes of God and it treated gays accordingly! Homosexuality was the ultimate sin worthy of a life in prison. At a young age, I taught Sunday school, I was prominent in the church. I, like everyone else, was expected to fulfill my vows, and deny my true self. It was extremely difficult and painful to hide what I felt and who I was.

"But not only that, my family is a mixture of African, Dutch & German. My family was considered colored or light skinned. That set us apart from other people. The colored people were affluent. The whites of Capetown respected them. I was taught by my mother to be careful when I went outside. Be careful around the Black man! I did not understand such separation. At a young age I began to speak out, to challenge, and be an activist for change. I spoke out against the injustices around me. I became a well-respected young activist in my community. Soon I became one of many young voices against apartheid! As I look back, my family never spoke of politics. I learned of politics outside the doors of my home. There was no anti-apartheid government mentality.

Nelson Mandela, Mahatma Ghandi, and Martin Luther King were my heroes!"

I told Eva from my experiences in this country fear and discrimination based on homophobia is a standard practice. It's commonplace. I asked Eva had she as a lesbian ever experienced homophobia? How did she respond, and how did she rise above it?

“At twenty one I had a huge birthday party, complete with caviar and gifts. A month later, word traveled to my mother that I was gay! My family turned on me. They locked me up and would not let me have one moment alone. I couldn’t use the phone, I had no privacy. They beat me up thinking I would change! They beat me for being different, being gay, and for finally being me! My brother was so angry with me. He said he would make me pay for what I have done! They tried every harsh abuse they could think of, which included therapy and the bishop! The Bishop humiliated me by demanding and lecturing that my emotions did not exist, and that according to Christian belief such thoughts are a sin. The Bishop also relieved me of my Sunday school teaching duties. According to him I was no longer good enough to be a Sunday school teacher. I did not understand why everyone, including the church, was discriminating against me. I was devastated.”

“For eight or nine months I had no contact with my family which was a devastating blow. In the midst of all that, gays around me were being exiled, thrown into prisons and murdered. I was estranged from my Christian Church at a young age. Because of these experiences I stayed away from church for many, many years. I didn’t return until I came to America and found Living In The Light Ministry and Agape!”

“I lost weight, became ill, and emotionally exhausted. I decided to call my mother. She was extremely happy and relieved. My mother said she would rather have a gay daughter instead of no daughter. She stated she was willing to learn, but not willing to lose!”

“I eventually moved to another state. I was my mother’s dream child, the young activist surrounded by crowds listening to the message. I felt as if I had messed my mother’s dreams up and brought my family shame. I stayed away from my family for five years. In that time I lived in Johannesburg and Soweto working as a journalist. In those years, I helped change the face of a nation with the vision of freedom. Today my family accepts me completely and have opened their home to gay people.”

Curious, I asked Eva what was South Africa’s punishment for homosexuality?

Eva said, “According to the law, it’s an illegal act. You could be legally prosecuted. Many gays were exiled and fled to Britain & Europe in the eighties. Those who killed or murdered gays were not prosecuted. According to the law they were well in their right! Currently, West African Gays are being prosecuted because of sexual preference!”

I asked Eva in the years she was away from Capetown, what type of

journalism was she involved in, what did she experience? "I was involved in political investigative journalism in Soweto. My focus was children, drugs and gangs. My political influence helped provide schools, outreach programs and sports programs. Instead of gang involvement, the children have turned their attention to soccer. Because of the positive turn around, many businesses and corporations invest in soccer gear! Lots of kids didn't make it, but those who did are examples for the future."

Eva often speaks of freedom in her journalism. I asked her did she feel that we as same-gender-loving African Americans take the freedoms that we have for granted according to what she has seen, lived or experienced?

"I would have to say yes, definitely! The media plays a powerful role in education, negative and positive reinforcement. Gays here have to be willing to utilize their art and creative gifts to make positive change. There is so much artistic talent in the gay community!"

"I also see the African American people as being the most homophobic people. They push their people away instead of embracing them. African Americans can do more for the African American Gays of this country if they choose to. African American Gays are exiled and isolated from their own people."

"I am shocked concerning the amount of drug use, the level of disinterest in African American youth. I am shocked that there are so few African Americans in government! I've noticed most African Americans live under race classification. They think they are better, she thinks she's better, or he doesn't like her for this or that. Blacks of this country often limit themselves."

I told Eva I have heard so much about President Mandela's support of gay rights. I asked Eva in her opinion, what has South Africa done for its gay citizens? How have they progressed or benefited?

"Mandela has always supported and fought for gay rights. He fought for domestic partner benefits, AIDS awareness and education. He fought to pass laws to protect the employment of gays, their families and overall right to life. Today the laws are on your side, they cannot discriminate. South Africa has made huge strides in a short amount of time. Just a few years ago if you looked gay, you couldn't get a job. You were not allowed to go to church, you weren't treated as a person."

"The perception of being gay has changed in the eyes of religion. Not necessarily the Christian religion, but in New Thought teachings. This is another huge step for the gay people of Africa. Because of this, I'm sure marriage is not far behind."

In the last few years Eva has experienced how we live, what drives us and what our passions are. What can we as African American Gays learn from South African Gays, and what can they learn from us?

“First and foremost the biggest culture shock was American values and moral standards. African Americans must learn, the very fiber of African existence is that we are willing to die for who we are. No one of any culture, creed or orientation should ever give up. African Americans must see their freedom through my eyes. American Gays can be examples of political strength. When the rights of American Gays are affirmed, Africa will see American Gays as positive role models for change.”

Being a writer, journalist, and speaker, I asked Eva what keeps her grounded? What or who completes her and makes her whole?

“Because of my political outspokenness, women and children had the courage to come out. I am a role model in South Africa. I am accepted as being gay and no longer in a derogatory stereotypical light. The overall perception has changed. That’s what makes me whole. I have had an incredible life. I hope my life is an example for others to stand and be counted.”

I asked Eva, is there something she would like to tell America as a whole?

“Yes, definitely! The world often assumes America is the home of the free and liberated. This is not the case! America must place ALL of their focus on ALL of their people, not just the affluent! America’s technology is extremely advanced, but they have left their people behind.”

As an African American Lesbian, I have learned much from speaking with and befriending Eva. Our levels of freedom may be taken for granted. According to Eva, education or the development of the arts for women in South Africa are not encouraged. It remains a dream. Through her eyes our true freedoms and conscious choices are revealed. Amidst the backdrop of talented writers, musicians, and those politically aware, I know there is nothing and no one who can stop us. We as African American Gays are a force not to be ignored.

Ronnisha Crawford

My Dear Lady for Eternity

My Dear Lady
Who is passionate and sweet
The world you carry on your shoulders, and my heart you
hold and keep.
You keep the flame within me
burning as time passes on.
With another woman I know not what to do...
For she cannot own my heart
because it belongs to you.
The love I have for you my Dear Lady
cannot be harmed.
For it was you who desired to love me with open arms.
The days, months, and years keep getting longer,
but there isn't a doubt in my mind every day
my love for you grows stronger...
You are "My Dear Lady" and always will be.
Yes, that means for eternity.

Laura Rifkin

How old is old — some thoughts on aging and lesbians with disabilities

I was excited when I saw that an upcoming issue of *Sinister Wisdom* will be dedicated to old lesbians. I emailed Fran and asked her who is included in “older lesbians.” She informed me that it is for lesbians over sixty. Oh, I thought, and felt a familiar sadness. Most of the lesbians I know who have been living with disabilities for all or much of their lives will not be in that issue. Why? Because they are dead. Unfortunately, for many of our disabled lesbian sisters “60” is the end of the aging process. It seems that “older” has an unwitting able-ist bias in it. It is not that aging lesbians do not get sick or experience the bodily changes that come with aging (perhaps a decrease in memory, or a slowing of pace, increased fatigue, or body parts that wear out and need replacing, etc). It is not that “older” lesbians do not get ill, or sometimes perhaps become disabled older lesbians.

It is that lesbians living with disabilities get old sooner. If we make it to age 40 we have begun our senior years. Now, I’m not saying that some of us might not live past 60. And certainly a few of us do. But statistically speaking the odds are not in our favor. When I look around at my cohort of disabled lesbians, there are only a few survivors. Though we were politically active when we were younger, we now meet at memorials and are often too tired for parties. My 60 as a paraplegic is the equivalent of an able-bodied person’s 90. I know all about what it’s like to have your body fail you. I know all about what it’s like to age. Perhaps not in the traditional sense that people think of it. But aging with a disability is not traditional in any sense. I am turning 50. My father who is 87 can outdo me on everything. His favorite refrain, whenever he bends down to get something is, Oy, don’t get old. I think, I am OLD. I cannot do 1/50th of the things he is able to do. I have been “old” in the way he means it since I was a teenager and broke my back. Still, even then, I was not as old as I am now. No more wheelchair basketball games, no more hobbling around the dance floor, or popping wheelies, no more working, no more weeknight dates, no more meetings that I can attend with ease, no more scooting around without shock absorbers, no more riding over bumps, no more things that require major energy, and nothing where I can’t just lay down in the middle, recline, or take a nap. No more working for a living. I tried to hold on until 50, which would have been early retirement in my line of work, but couldn’t quite hold on that long.

So here I am retired, 50, old by disabled standards, and an elder in my community. Still you will not see me at an OLOC (Old Lesbians Organizing for Change) meeting or find my pieces in an issue dedicated to aging. Because for you, of the able-bodied world, aging somehow signifies a life-span that will extend into the 60's, 70's, 80's and perhaps beyond. You are worried about retirement housing, and who will take care of you, and what will happen when you are no longer able to do certain things, or get injured, or are less self-sufficient. We, disabled lesbians, have been worrying about those things forever. We however do not get the complimentary services at the free clinic set up for women with cancer. No, we have to pay for our bodywork although we cannot afford it. We do not receive the dotting attention given to our able-bodied friends who are temporarily disabled by illness, injury, or body part replacements. And although many of us are at the end of our life expectancy and life span, we will not be able to write about our aging process in our lesbian journals. After all we're already disabled, and therefore invisible.

We would certainly like to grow old among you and contribute to your "special issue" by and for older lesbians. Trouble is, you'll have to lower the eligibility standard. How about 40 for disabled lesbians? Some of us have made it that far.

Vicki Garcia

Excerpts from Have You Ever?

Have you ever met a flower? Have you ever met someone who takes your breath away? Just the thought of her, your chest constricts, you can't breathe, and rational thought escapes you?

Have you ever loved someone so deeply that you feel her pain, not like empathy, but a pain like I haven't seen her in months and I don't know what she's doing but I can feel what she's feeling?

Have you ever loved someone so much it makes you cry?

She is my joy, my spark, my music. She brings out the best in me.

Have you ever loved someone enough to let them live?

Jean Taylor

How Writing and Producing a Lesbian Book Can Web Friends and Influence Community

It all started when Anah ran a lesbian workshop in March 2005 to propose that we might consider producing a book about burials and cemeteries and other related issues for the lesbian community. I was all for it. We were not getting any younger, indeed some of our friends had already died, and while some of us had wills and knew about powers of attorney many of us were still fearful about the subject of death and dying.

As Anah puts it in *Germination* to introduce the book: "The idea for this book grew over time from my own experiences and from witnessing other Lesbians being disempowered when they became terminally ill, or when their partner dies. We have many heartbreaking stories in our community of mistreatment, denial of rights and lost opportunities when the time comes to finally farewell our loved ones."

I started attending the meetings to lend my support and enjoyed the sociable aspects of getting together once a month in our respective homes, which necessitated quite a bit of traveling as half the collective lived in Melbourne and half in country Victoria. We began by discussing the cost of cremations and the legal necessity of writing our wills and how important it was to organize a funeral that reflected the interests of the lesbian who had died.

Claudia took on the job of researching some of the very necessary information as she mentions in *Better Safe Than Sorry*: "It seems there are a lot of papers to fill out and yes, it can be tedious and exhausting to think all this through... No Lesbian wants to be in a situation where her wishes are disregarded or silenced. Filling out these documents and forms is one way to prevent this from happening."

By about the sixth meeting we were somewhat daunted by the enormity of the task we'd taken on. However, once we'd reaffirmed that we were definitely writing a book which would include factual information and anecdotal stories about death and dying as well as graphics and poems that would be written by the eight members of the collective and primarily for the benefit of lesbians, we were encouraged enough to get on with it.

How to go about organizing our affairs was explained by Cathy in *Where There's a Will There's a Cuppa*: "If you are procrastinating about writing your Will (and many of us do) invite some friends around and use the best tool women have for planning and plotting — the kitchen table."

By the end of July 2006 we had a timeline and chapter headings, had our first application in for funding as well as the promise of a short-fall loan (which came in very handy when our grant application was unsuccessful) and had agreed on using Lorraine's photo of her sculpture, *She Who Sails Into the Wind*, for the front cover.

Lorraine describes the idea behind this particular art work thus: "As someone who has sailed, I know it is impossible to sail into the wind, but this gal is going to anyway."

We also agreed that publishing the book ourselves would be relatively easier than approaching publishers. So we met with a cost-effective printer and amongst other decisions too numerous to mention began calling ourselves Long Breast Press. All this time we were still researching, still working out our options and coming up with some interesting information.

Rosalinda wrote about her experiences with cremation in *Dykes in Space*: "One of the wonderful things about cremation however, is that options do not need to be limited to memorial parks and cemetaries... Ashes are rich in potassium of course, so a keen gardener might want her ashes to feed a favourite flowering plant just before each flowering season."

We still didn't have the eventual name for the book but towards the end of this long and detailed process we divvied up the respective chapters according to our particular interests and inclinations and started writing. In communication with members of the Aboriginal and migrant communities we began to include relevant and specific cultural information.

After communication with Lou Bennett, Yorta Yorta Dja Dja Wurrung woman, I wrote *With Respect*: "For non-Aboriginal Lesbians who want to support their Aboriginal and Islander friends when someone in their community dies, it is a matter of respect, of listening to and taking notice of what might be required, not making assumptions, and being prepared to offer support in the way your friend feels is culturally and personally appropriate."

The process of researching and writing each article and bringing our work back to the collective for editing, then taking it away for rewriting and making decisions about where each poem, essay, story and song was to go, was drawn-out and somewhat painful at times, especially when two of our lesbian friends died during 2006.

Ardy was one of those who expressed her grief by writing a poem, *Lisa*, which ends with the words:

"Gone with a smile and a wave.

Then

"Gone."

In the meantime, we also had to work out how the book was to look, what graphics and photos we wanted to include and where they were to go and which fonts would be most suitable. By the end of the year everything was ready to be formatted, another enormous job in itself. And we knew the book was to be called *Willing Up and Keeling Over: A Lesbian Handbook on Death Rights and Rituals*. We then did all the proofreading and corrections, handed out our publicity leaflets at every lesbian gathering, organising a few other admin details like incorporation, the ISBN and the barcode and did a huge mailout out to publicise the launch before getting the finished product off to the printer.

Barbary listed some of the more memorable ideas and interactions during our many meetings which are featured as part of the Afterword: "Building a lasting legacy with love for the Lesbian community... remembering those who are gone, and some pretty inspiring funeral ceremonies...expressions on friend's faces when we tell them we're writing a book about Lesbian funerals... fantasising about a logo of eight pairs of breasts... determination to make a beautiful book."

The finished product made all our hard work worthwhile and the book launch on 8 July 2007 with all our lesbian friends and female family members was a celebratory event in itself. With barely time to congratulate ourselves, we began selling the book to all and sundry and shipping the orders interstate. We figured we needed to sell 300 copies to cover our costs. The first print run of 150 were all sold within a month and by dint of some more hard work we sold all of the second print run by the end of March 2008, three years after the idea was first mooted.

Willing Up and Keeling Over was of great benefit to the lesbian community here when a dear friend died in October 2007. We cared for her at home, kept a vigil over her body, painted her coffin and organised her funeral and burial all with reference to the book and according to her wishes. As I learnt, once again, in the writing and producing of this significant book, the more we confront our fears about death and challenge our dread of dying the better able we are to live our lives for the benefit of ourselves and others.

Willing Up and Keeling Over: A Lesbian Handbook on Death Rights and Rituals. Editors: Anah Holland-Moore, Ardy Tibby, Barbary Clark, Cathy Wheel, Claudia Huber, Jean Taylor, Lorraine Le Plastrier and Rosalinda Rayne. Long Breast Press, Melbourne, Australia, 2007.

Barbara Thomas

A Brief "Dear Johanna" Letter

An exile I have loved tells me she's going home
—Cheryl Clark

A full-moon swells into my
hips while a rock hollows out my back.
I didn't choose the moon moving
into me but I couldn't let go
so I pushed back with all my force until
The rock dislodged
and left my stroke.
I remember from time to time —
the depth of its uncomfortable presence,
the rough face designed by mother
nature, the cool contact of its constrain.
I sometimes miss its pale demands
and look for retreat in its silent weight.
But can only find my moon
So I swing away and sing
Good bye, good bye.

Diane Germain

10 Words Left Out of Webster's Dictionary

- 1 DYKE-O-RAMA any place where there are lots of lesbians.
- 2 LESBIANARCHY after the Amazons evicted the government.
- 3 LESBIANISETTE kissing a dyke who tastes of licorice.
- 4 LESBIANITY state of being totally lesbian and loving it.
- 5 LESBIANTIBODIES dykes who revile nudity.
- 6 LESBIANTICS capricious escapades by female homosexuals.
- 7 LESBIANTHURIUM a large red flower from Hawaii with no stamen.
- 8 LEZBEEON-R-WAY HOMO it's time to go back to our abode.
- 9 LEZBIANEST the most lesbian of all: lesbian to the max.
- 10 LEZBIONEST two dykes agreeing to tell the truth.

Diane F. Germain © 1989

Win Weston

Wicca 101: Art and Craft of Ritual

It all started with a toy helmet — a molded black plastic replica of a Viking headpiece that someone found in the markdown bin at a local store. There it was — just begging to be used in a ritual.

It was September. Spiderwimmin were making plans to celebrate the Fall Equinox, a time of reckoning when day and night balance each other. As the farmers gather in what they have sown and tended in the fields each individual takes time to reflect on what their ideas and actions may have produced in their lives. This is the time to cast out all that has outlived its usefulness and to store the best ideas for future use.

This was the first time I would play a major role in planning a public ritual. I was excited and sure that a helmet symbolized something magical. I didn't know what that was until I researched Barbara Walker's *The Woman's Dictionary of Symbols and Sacred Objects*. The English word for helmet came from the Norse Goddess Hel, queen of the dead and the underworld. Northern shamans believed that by wearing a special hat, a helmet, they would be invisible and be able to move between the underworld and paradise unharmed. "Wow," I thought. This would fit right in with the site we had rented for the ritual at a regional park. There was a large meadow and a two-level barn. We could use the lower level for the underworld, and could cast away the old in that space. The upper level could be used for focusing energy on those seed ideas we wanted to manifest. I could envision the ritual. Someone could portray Hel, wearing the helmet and giving materials to everyone to weave into a magical garland to be worn on their heads. Hel would lead us into the barn first, and then to the meadow to dance. Later we would have a potluck around a fire.

I remembered the day when we had gone to visit the site. The sky was bright blue, the grasses of the meadow were aglow with the illumination of the warm afternoon sun and there was a green barrier of trees blocking any view of the road and creating a sanctuary of privacy.

Nokomis agreed to portray Hel and we began to create a costume for her. A tie-dyed bedspread became the Goddess' gown. To the helmet we added some feathers and heather. A tree branch wrapped with a silk scarf became a staff of power. I clipped pieces of suede into triangular shapes and tied them to her feet to represent Viking footwear. The result was not what I had envisioned and she now appeared to be wearing Daisy Duck's shoes.

Annie was taking over creating paradise in the upper level of the barn. She was bringing body paint, healing stones and herbs.

My task was to welcome the womyn and have them begin to make garlands.

The day of the ritual arrived and with it a foretaste of winter. The temperature plummeted and gales of icy rain battered the trees and pounded the grass. I feared there would be no ritual, but about mid-morning the rain stopped. The wind did not abate. About an inch of standing water covered the meadow. Wind shook the tree branches, sending cascades of water everywhere. We thanked the Goddess for the barn and its shelter. The ritual would go on.

I had been advised to plan as carefully as possible and then let go once the ritual had started — not to be concerned with the outcome — and to always remember that “whatever happens is what is supposed to happen” — but sometimes things just get blown out of your hands.

Womyn started to arrive. I was surprised at how many would travel out of the city on this rainy day. There were familiar faces and also new faces. They were ready to celebrate the shift of energy from summer to fall — but Spiderwimmin planners weren't quite ready. Nokomis was dressed as the Goddess Hel, but Annie hadn't yet arrived. Womyn were getting restless standing around in the sodden grass. Nokomis and I decided to begin the ritual and trust that Annie would soon appear. The quicker we moved the group into the refuge of the barn the better we would all feel.

“Welcome to Spiderwimmin's Fall Equinox” I said, holding up materials to make garlands. At that moment a blast of wind ripped everything out of my hands. The raffia, flowers and feathers soared like kites out over the meadow. A woman screamed and chased off to gather them. The rest followed. The wind playfully kept everything aloft until it was snagged by tree branches. Some blew out of sight. I expected the womyn would soon exhaust themselves and calmly return to be led to the underworld. But that was not the case. They ran wildly all over the meadow, working themselves into an orgasmic frenzy screaming at the top of their lungs. I hoped the sound did not carry to the park headquarters across the road.

I looked at the Goddess Hel, resplendent in her wet bedspread and Daisy Duck shoes. The crown of power still rested securely on her head by means of a magic chin strap that had thwarted the wind's assault. “What should we do?” I asked.

“There is nothing we can do. Just wait until they are done,” the Goddess answered.

Just then a station wagon appeared. Annie and Sage had arrived. “What’s going on?” Annie asked. I explained what had happened, as we stood and watched the spectacle in the meadow. “Looks like they’re having a really good time,” Annie said. Then she sighed and said: “Oh, I suppose I should get busy and set up.” Taking one last longing look toward the meadow she picked up a box and headed toward the barn.

“I don’t know what to do,” I said to Sage. “They just won’t stop running around.”

“Just what did you want them to do?” she responded.

I explained how we had planned that Nokomis would lead the group to the lower level, but the wind blew the materials for garlands away and womyn began to run and they didn’t seem about to stop.

Sage looked around the meadow and then looked up into the sky. Stepping out into the center of the meadow she raised her right arm toward the west and said: “Behold!” Everyone stopped in their tracks and looked up. At that moment the clouds veiling the sun pulled apart and sky brightened. Two rainbow sundogs appeared. As the sun filtered down unto the wet grass a million drops of liquid light sparkled across the meadow. I watched in awe as the womyn docilely lined up behind the Goddess and followed her to the underworld.

I looked up at the sundogs. The circles of rainbow colors were beginning to fade. I had never seen anything like this before. I watched Sage as she walked toward the barn. How in the hell had she done that?

The rest of the ritual ran as smoothly as a Swiss watch.

* * *

The next morning as I crawled out of the tent someone drove into the camp area in a truck. The rain had stopped but everything was wet and felt very cold. I pulled my cold boots on and walked over to the truck. Two local womyn who had been at the ritual got out and greeted me with: “Hi! We knew everything would be too wet to start a fire and we thought you would like a hot breakfast.” They had brought a kettle of scrambled eggs and a thermos of hot coffee. I was touched by their thoughtfulness. I had never seen them before the ritual.

“Thanks,” I said as I accepted a cup of coffee.

“Oh, thank you for yesterday. That was a great ritual. You know what was the best part?”

“The sundogs?”

“Oh, that was cool, but the really best part was having that field to run loose in and feeling free enough to scream as long as we wanted to.”

“Yah — right,” I responded. I was thinking — “plan as carefully as possible, and let go of the outcome.” The Goddess works in strange ways.



What She Saw. Photo by Sue Lenaerts.



Toni Brown. Photo by Janet Mason

Janet Mason

Portrait of a Friendship

In memoriam

Toni P. Brown

11/4/1952- 4/17/08

A true friend is hard to lose. The loss is palpable — like some previously unknown core at the center of you is suddenly ripped out, howling and empty. This is how I felt when my good friend, Toni Brown, died on April 17, 2008. She was 55 years old.

As her Philadelphia memorial service — standing room only at The Painted Bride Art Center — confirmed, Toni was many things to many people. She was a writer — of poetry and fiction, well known in the lesbian, the African American, and the larger literary communities; she was a writing teacher to college students; and she was a teacher and a mentor to the “at-risk” teenage girls that she worked with for the last ten years in her position as director of education, training and outreach for Girls Inc.

Toni and I were close friends for nearly 20 years — we met several years before she moved to Philadelphia. At the time, she lived in Amherst, Massachusetts and was a member of a Northampton lesbian writers group. We met through a mutual friend, who was in the Philadelphia feminist writers' group with me, at the Outwrite Conference, an LGBT writing conference held, at that time, in Boston.

A year or so later, my Philadelphia writing group went to Northampton to give a reading. I stayed at Toni's house in Amherst and took her large gentle German Shepherd, named Zen, for a walk. Zen led me into the garden at the Emily Dickinson house — where I made a reservation for the two writing groups, now one large group, at least for the duration of our stay.

I remember all of us sitting in the large, Victorian sitting room. The drapes were drawn and there was a hush surrounding the words of the tour guide who carefully left out any mention of Emily's lesbian passions. We didn't contradict her, but the room was bursting with our silence. Now, reflecting back on that afternoon, I see that there was something prophetic about it. We were surrounded by the ghostly presence of Emily Dickinson even as we laughed and posed for pictures. At the time that the pictures were taken, in the Dickinson garden, some 20 years ago, Toni had a short Afro. A year later when she moved to Philadelphia, she began locking her hair — always, it seemed, twisting the tiny nubs, until they grew down below her shoulders.

After Toni moved to Philadelphia — to be with the love of her life — the two of us became closer. We took Zen for long walks in the Wissahickon. Zen, the dog, as we called her, would chase sticks and squirrels, the occasional deer, as Toni and I walked and talked about our writing, our lives, our loves — walking and talking, talking about everything.

Our writing group was a kind of tribe — bringing us together in the trust that we shared through our work and in the knowing of each other through the years. Toni and I did readings together — sometimes with the writing group and often just the two of us giving readings together or with others. Toni also performed with my partner, Barbara McPherson, a percussionist. Every now and then, Toni and I would decide to spend time together — one on one — setting aside time to critique each other's work. During this time, I read a number of Toni's lesbian vampire stories — some of which would later be published in such places as *Night Bites: Vampire Stories by Women* and *Night Shade: Gothic Tales by Women* and *Out for Blood: Tales of Mystery and Suspense by Women*.

Toni went on to focus almost exclusively on poetry and eventually the vampire stories faded. Toni, however, was always at least as complex as the

vampire stories she had written — and, true to her Scorpio nature, she was always a mystery. When I think of Toni, I think of complexity and identity but most of all I think of love. Toni had come of age as a lesbian feminist in the Northampton lesbian community in the 1970s — lesbian feminism was new and there were some hard rules to live by. There were many aspects of this culture that were not easy for Toni. The times were different, fierce and separatist. Toni was raising her son who she had given birth to during her young, college years.

The irony that many of the women who then were identifying as separatists and later — after her son had grown up — were partnering with younger women and giving birth to boys (artificial insemination is more likely to result in the birth of boys) was not lost on her. Still, these were the times and the community in which Toni had shaped her lesbian identity.

In the early days, Toni was adamant about being identified as a lesbian writer.

Then things began to change. Toni would often say that when she lived in Amherst and Northampton she was African American (meaning that she was asked to do poetry readings to Black History Month) but in Philadelphia, she was just a woman — proven by the fact that she was asked to do readings in March for Women's History Month.

Toni came to Philadelphia to connect with her other identities. She was a Cave Canem poetry fellow in the years 1998, 1999, and 2,000. Cave Canem was begun in 1996 as a weeklong summer workshop/retreat designed as a "safe haven" for black poets. Toni and I read together when she returned from one of these retreats — and in her poetic voice I heard a new level of sophistication, a continuing involvement of her work that had the feeling of a gust of air under her wings. Consider her poem *Dreadlocks* (published in *Gathering Ground: A Reader Celebrating Cave Canem's First Decade*, University of Michigan Press, 2006).

Dreadlocks

See
 these ropes of hair
 This is how
 It would have grown
 on my head
 In the bowels of a ship
 long ago

Understand
 we dark still living

who crawled or
 were dragged
 hair matted flat
 into this New World
 would have been
 dreadful

Toni's work was published in *Sinister Wisdom*, *Prairie Schooner* and the *American Poetry Review*, among other places. Her words are the quiet hush around the storm; a keen and often painful observation of detail, insight into injustice in its many forms, and at the same time a testament to love, to all that is good in the world. Her work is transcendent, just as Toni was in her life.

Toni was in the prime of her life and a lover of life. She was healthy — until the end. She was hospitalized in February with a flu and severe respiratory problems. My partner and I saw her after she had gotten out — and then she was hospitalized a second time (still having difficulty breathing) when she was diagnosed with a pulmonary embolism and was treated with surgery and blood thinners. Several weeks later she sounded so much better, I was convinced she was on the mend. But then — a week later, she was hospitalized again, and died in the Intensive Care Unit when hospital staff tried to insert a breathing tube. There are conflicting reports about her diagnosis.

Some things make no sense. Still, I cannot stop my mind from trying to search for answers — or for meaning. One thing that I am certain of is that I was fortunate to have Toni Brown for my friend. Several summers ago, we spent time together in Provincetown, Massachusetts, a favorite place for both of us, and especially for Toni who grew up in Boston. One night we found a karaoke drag bar — the audience filled with primarily straight couples, for some reason, and the two of us got up to sing “California Dreaming” as we stood back to back, our shoulders touching as we turned our heads to look at each other as we sang. Later that year in the fall, we gave our last reading together, with women from Toni's old writing group, at an art gallery in Northampton, Mass.

When I reflect back on my friendship and literary association with Toni — encompassing the past two decades — I see that she had achieved all that she set out to do when she came to Philadelphia. Toni had left a well-paying secure job in Amherst to come to Philadelphia — to be with the love of her life and to live in a city where she could connect with a large and vibrant African American community. She wanted to pursue her writing in a more public and dedicated manner. Now and then, over the years, Toni had also mentioned that she wanted to buy a house.

Just last summer, Toni bought the same house that she had rented for several years. The house is a beautiful, large, old home in the Germantown section of Philadelphia with dark polished wood, high ceilings and a stained glass panel above the outside front door. Toni loved living there — she loved living alone as she did with her newly adopted dog, Max, her office full of books, and her stone fireplace with a Godzilla doll sitting next to it.

Toni had achieved everything that she set out to do, but I do not accept the fact that she was ready to go or that this was her time. The outpouring of grief that came from so many communities — so many different groups of people coming together — was an acknowledgement that her life was unfinished.

Still, even in her death, Toni did what she always did best. She brought together everyone who had loved her. This was in keeping with her philosophy of writing that was re-printed on her memorial booklet: “I shape words on the page, send them to be published or read them aloud. There is something about the words going out, bouncing back, the possibility of the shared experience. The hope that somewhere, someone will nod and say, “yeah,” and a piece of their puzzle will fall into place.”

The week after Toni’s memorial service — an extremely moving event held at the Painted Bride Art Center — my partner and I spent almost every evening with friends who had also known her. We were a “we” — friends of Toni. The members of the Philadelphia writers group had gone our separate ways — falling out of touch because of our busy schedules. But suddenly we are back in each other’s lives. With Toni’s death, we realized how much we loved each other. We realized that there is still a connection between us and that we need each other.

We tell the old stories and look at the old photos — of our trip to Northampton twenty years ago when we stood in Emily Dickinson’s garden, so happy with ourselves and with each other. Now when we look at the photos and see our younger selves with a younger Toni with her short Afro, we are looking at someone who is now absent. She is the part of our laughter that is gone.



Marjorie Gayle. Photo by Linda Bacci.

Linda Bacci, Laurie Rennie, Jan and Stacey Shade

Marjorie Gayle

September 14, 1945–March 16, 2008

Marjorie was a wise, strong woman who sat firmly in her chair. She passed her sense of independence on to her children, Laurie and Tom Rennie, encouraging their growth in whatever direction they chose.

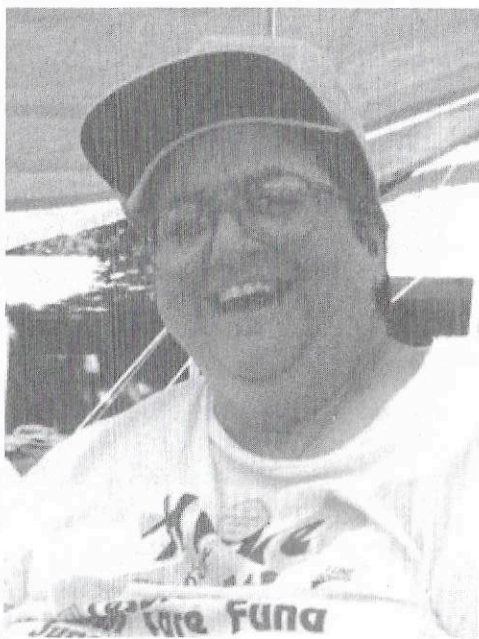
One of her life's passions was offering her knowledge and experience to teach and nurture others. As a result she earned her Master in Social Work and was able to reach out to lost, ill, and frightened people offering creative ideas for positive changes in their lives. Her enduring delight in mothering her two children defined and enriched her life, and added great depth and insight to her work. Later she found added joy, as grand children became a part of her life.

A supporter of The Elephant Sanctuary in Tennessee (www.elephants.com), Marjorie was much like the elephants she loved: social, sensitive, passionately intense, playful, complex and exceedingly intelligent.

Unfortunately, in an inexplicable paradox, Marjorie was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis, and eventually became a woman in need like those on whose behalf she had worked so hard. Finding the love of her life, Linda Bacci, was the gift that most diminished her suffering. Margie was suddenly relieved of her struggle on March 16, 2008. She was a force to be reckoned with and will be missed mightily by many.

Her memorable piece, "Seascapes and Other Enchantments" was published in *Sinister Wisdom* #63, *Lesbians and Nature*.

Dorothy Hatzinikolis (photographer unknown)



Holly Rast

Dorothy Hatzinikolis

1945 – 2008

Dorothy Kaliopi Hatzinikolis, age 63, Columbus, Ohio, after a long illness, went to be with her awaiting friends and family on the other side, on July 13, 2008. She passed peacefully surrounded by friends.

She was born on September 25, 1945 in Toledo, Ohio and was preceded in death by her parents Nicholas Hatzinikolis and Helen Sfakianos, her sisters Georgia Brown and Bessie Gunter and brother Steve Hatzinikolis. She is survived by her siblings, Mary N. Korogianos (Lorain, Ohio), Theodossia “Lucy” Hatzinikolis and Ken Hatzinikolis (both of Toledo) as well as numerous nieces, nephews and many friends.

Dorothy was the co-founder and editor of the *Lesbian Health News*, a bimonthly newsletter she launched in November 1993 to bring awareness to the lesbian community about women’s well being. It still publishes information about health issues specific to lesbians.

While living in Toledo, she was extremely committed to LGBT activism, volunteering countless hours for this cause. She received her Associates in Applied Science in Recreation Technology from Owens Technical College in January 1986. She started the Owen's Technical College women's softball team. She thoroughly enjoyed both playing and umpiring for many years. She won multiple billiard tournaments. Dorothy was a board member of Lavender Triangle and Personal Rights Organization and was the co-founder of WomynshelF Feminist Library, all in Toledo, Ohio.

A memorial scattering of her ashes occurred on the shore of Lake Michigan, the Michigan Women's Music Festival and at Frontier Ranch (site of the Ohio Lesbian Festival).

In lieu of cards or flowers, memorials may be sent to Cat Welfare, 741 Wetmore Rd, Columbus, OH 43214 (614) 268-6096.

A memorial service is being planned for July 2009 in Columbus, Ohio.

Books

The Blacksmith and the Doctor

by LaVerne Gagehabib, Her Thang Publishing, 2008

Roshima is an African-American/Lakota Indian woman living on a lesbian land community in Oregon in 1982. She travels back in time to Post Civil War Missouri, when women were making progressive moves toward their independence and when Native Americans and newly freed slaves were being sold, killed, or removed from their land to make room for the America we live in today. Against this backdrop, Roshima and her past-life self, a blacksmith, fall in love with a woman physician who turns out to be her soul-partner.

The women of the American West in 1870 were noncitizens, and viewed as dependents in their homes and in society. Yet many, like the characters of this novel, were fully independent and not reliant on men to chaperone them, make decisions for them, or control the wealth that was rightfully theirs. They lived their lives as they chose to, and not as society, family, or friends would have them behave. Because opportunities for them in the work force were limited, some went to the extreme of passing as men in order to support themselves and survive. As you will see in the pages of this novel, the dangers associated with gender identity were as prevalent in 1870 as today.

To order this book mail \$16.95 + 3.50 shipping to:

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About the Author

LaVerne Gagehabib is African American/Lakota Indian. She lives with Jan her life-partner of 27 years in a small rural Oregon town on seven acres, with their three dogs and two cats. LaVerne received her M.S. from the University of Oregon, and Lane Community College, where she taught Sociology. She is retired from teaching. She is featured in several anthologies edited by Tee A. Corinne; *Intricate Passions*; A Lambda Literacy Award Winner, *The Poetry of Sex*, and *The Body of Love*. Other Published works include, *Lesbian Bedtime Stories 2*, edited by Terry Woodrow, and *Lesbian Lives: Lesbian Personal Writings*, edited by Francis Rooney. LaVerne also co-authored *Circles of Power: Shifting Dynamics in a Lesbian Community*, with Professor Barbara Summerhawk from Tokyo, Japan. *The Blacksmith and the Doctor* is volume 1 of 5.

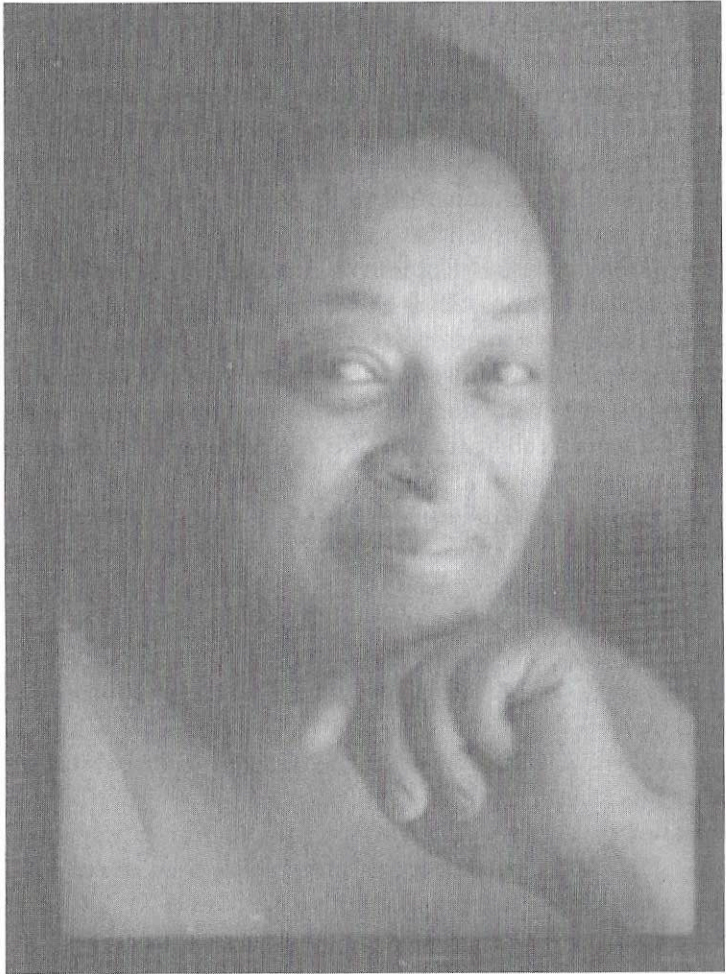


Photo of LaVerne Gagehabib by Tee A. Corinne

The Countess of Flatbroke

by Mary Meriam. Modern Metrics, 2006.

Afterword by Lillian Faderman

Mary Meriam's poems are queer and quirky, funny and poignant, bold and brave. Her eponymous *Countess of Flatbroke* is a witty contrast to Mary Sidney, the Countess of Pembroke, who shadows these poems. Sidney — granddaughter of a duke; Renaissance mistress of a castle; celebrated by the likes of John Donne, Edmund Spenser, and George Herbert; one of those who "from birth to death [was] connected, pampered, lucky, rich" — had the wherewithal that permitted her to become the first British woman to enjoy literary repute. In Meriam's tragic-comic poem, "The Bitter Side of Flatbroke," the Countess of Flatbroke laments her own very different lot. Countess Flatbroke is engaged in "this constant jungle fight to get a sip of water, find a place to rest, too hot, too cold, too worried, hungry, lost, alone." She feels deeply the deprivation of what Virginia Woolf characterized as the "500 pounds a year" that, along with "a room of one's own," was the sine qua non of a woman's ability to write. Yet the poems in this collection belie the putative inimical effect of penury on poetry.

Meriam's queer poems are sometimes bold strokes of subversive wit. In "Something Good" she affirms her lesbianism by appropriating the figure of Julie Andrews, a Hollywood icon of wholesomeness: The fantasy of waltzing with Julie Andrews "in her blue desire dress," of losing her youthful self "inside of Julie's sound of music," melts the speaker's confusion about her sexuality as "Julie guides my coming out." Sometimes these poems are poignant, such as the "Earth" section of "Queer Elements" which depicts the familiar alienation of a youngster who does not yet know what it is that makes her different from others.

The humor in many of Meriam's poems often gives way to stirring emotion. Her persona is something of a Pagliacci, most comical when she is most in pain. "Sometimes it takes a glass of milk to heal/ a soul that's been reduced to shredded rags," she flippantly declares in "Frozen Banana Milkshake Sonnet." Meriam makes us understand this persona's plight, her poignant knowledge that one must be brave and learn to survive — and we can't help but admire the considerable wit and acute perceptions that emerge from that difficult knowledge.



Unsettling the Land

by Suzanne Bellamy and Susan Hawthorne
Spinifex Press, 2008. www.spinifexpress.com.au

Spinifex Press is proud to announce the release of *Unsettling the Land*, a glorious synthesis of poetry and art works by author Susan Hawthorne (*Bird*, 1999, and *The Butterfly Effect*, 2005) and artist Suzanne Bellamy. *Unsettling the Land* is a reflection on the plight of the land in these drought-addled times, conjuring through both text and illustration the complex relationships that create and sustain our unique Australian landscape in all its majesty, tranquillity, and its present suffering.

This project is a celebration of a marvellous thirty-year friendship between Suzanne Bellamy and Susan Hawthorne. They have produced many combined performance works in Australia and overseas, combining image, music, circus and text. *The Drought Project*, curated by Lella Cariddi, opened up a new way of joint production with Susan's poem taking visual form in Suzanne's art which in turn created additional poetic text.



Nancy Nau

Top of the Mark

watching the sunset
before another round birthday
going behind mt tamalpais
to die another day
to live another year
watching the sun go down

the lights are dimming now
the sun is
rounder and more orange
with every moment
as another birthday begins

before the sun goes down
watch the little grandfather
standing by the ocean
with the little grandmother
and the tiny you

together
we watch
and we wave to the sun
going to her bed
going going gone
upon another glowing decade

Contributors' Notes

Gaye Abegbalola: Blues Music Award winner and a founding member of Saffire – The Uppity Blues Women, plays guitar, harmonica and is a composer. She has recorded twelve CDs which are in national/international distribution including her recent CD, "Gaye Without Shame." A former Virginia State Teacher of the Year, Gaye is also in demand for workshops, seminars and motivational public speaking. A long time activist, she is presently involved with issues of diversity and is committed to the struggle for GLBT rights. For more information visit: <http://www.adegbalola.com>.

Rosita Angulo Libre de Marulanda was born in Colombia, South America and lives in Brooklyn, New York. She writes vignettes of the mosaic that is her life.

Linda Bacci: In 1980 Linda earned her Master's Degree in Pastoral Counseling. She has had many life teachers in her work as a battered women's advocate, as a Director of Social Justice, and finally for twenty years in hospice care and as a hospital chaplain. However she feels she learned more about strength, courage, truth and love from being partners with Marjorie Gayle for the past thirteen years. Their life together (although it had many challenges) had even more blessings and this is what carries her through today.

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

Glorya F. Cabrera: Born in Hanford, California, Glorya Cabrera grew up in the Bay Area and relocated to New York City fifteen years ago. She believes the power of words, built upon positive intention, heals trauma and nurtures inspirational growth. Glorya's work, which includes short stories, personal essays and poetry, speaks to growing up Chicana, the value of defining and nurturing cultural and sexual identities to create authentic voice/authentic power. Her work has been featured in community publications.

Cathy Cade has been photographing women at work, union women, lesbian mothering, and lesbian feminists in the San Francisco Bay Area since the early 1970s. She has a business helping people tell their stories using their

photographs. She lives in Oakland and is working on an East Bay Lesbian Herstory project. Visit www.CathyCade.com.

Merina Canyon resides in the Pacific Northwest. She has earned an MFA in Creative Writing and is currently at work on a Lesbian romance novel, a collection of short stories about growing up gay, and a Lesbian/spiritual memoir. You can read another story by Merina Canyon in *Best Lesbian Love Stories of 2009*.

Giovanna Capone is a San Francisco bay area poet and fiction writer. She was raised in New York in a strong Italian American neighborhood whose flavor still resonates in her life. Her work has appeared in numerous publications, including *Unsettling America: A multicultural poetry anthology* (Viking Penguin); *Curaggia: Writing by Women of Italian Descent*, (Women's Press); *Queer View Mirror, 2, Lesbian /Gay Short Short Fiction* (Alyson); and *What I Want From You: East Bay Lesbian Poets* (Raw Art Press). Her *Kiss*, a play, was performed to sold out audiences in San Francisco by Luna Sea Women's Performance Project. Giovanna also co-edited *Hey Paesan: Writing by Lesbians & Gay Men of Italian Descent*. Most recently, she compiled a book of teenage poetry and art, entitled: *Words on Fire!* (Wordrunner Press) She lives in Oakland, California.

Robin Carstensen: My poetry is published in *Runes* and the *Comstock Review*, and is forthcoming in *Puerto del Sol*, *National Bridge* and *Many Mountains Moving*, where I received MMM's 2007 poetry award. I have received a collegiate Academy of American Poets Prize and twice received the Creative Writing Scholarship in Poetry from Oklahoma State University where I am an associate-managing editor for the *Cimarron Review*, a national journal of arts and letters.

Lenore Chinn began painting when she was growing up in San Francisco's Richmond district, focusing on portraiture to explore the super-realistic depiction of a wide spectrum of people of color, lesbians and same-sex couples. Employing a coded iconography rooted in a lesbian/gay cultural perspective, these images fuse an Asian aesthetic of sparseness and clarity with visual narratives that counteract the "magic-truth rituals" of racial and gender construction. Chinn's 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. The artist has been a founding member of Lesbians in the Visual Arts and Queer Cultural Center and is affiliated with the Asian American Women Artists Association. For more information visit: <http://www.queerculturalcenter.org/Pages/Chinn/ChinIndex.html>

Kelly Cogswell is an independent journalist, columnist for *Gay City News* in New York, and former editor of *The Gully* online magazine. Her poetry has appeared in *Cincinnati Poetry Review*, *Now & Then* – the Appalachian magazine, *xxx fruit*, *HarpStrings*, and *Sinister Wisdom*, among other venues. She lives in New York and Paris.

Tee A. Corinne (1943 - 2006): A regular contributor to *Sinister Wisdom*, Tee Corinne's artwork has been identified with the journal since her cover and poster for issue #3 in 1977. Tee was 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. A gifted and versatile artist, Tee worked with photography, line drawing, paint, sculpture, ceramics and printing, and she also published erotic fiction and poetry and reviews. Favorite cover artist for lesbian publisher Naiad, Corinne's work is found on bookshelves across the Lesbian Nation.

Ronnisha Crawford: Hi. I'm a nineteen-year-old Poet, with an old soul. I'm a Black Female from Nashville, Tennessee. I have never put any of my work out in the open for others to read so I'm a little nervous, yet excited that someone will be able to read my work. I am currently incarcerated here in Nashville. I am from a family of nineteen kids. (Yes, 19 kids.)

Marva C. Edwards has been a lover of books since she was eight years old. She started writing poems in her diary at the age of twelve. Marva is an African American feminist/womanist/lesbian/poet/activist. She is a native of San Francisco, California. She has been a Social Worker for many years. Marva's first love and passion has always been words and the songs that find her. She will be sixty on her next birthday and still the songs come.

Lillian Faderman is an internationally known scholar of lesbian history and literature, as well as ethnic history and literature. Among her many

honors are six Lambda Literary Awards, two American Library Association Awards, and several lifetime achievement awards for scholarship.

Vicki Garcia: I'm 31-years-old and incarcerated in Oklahoma; I'm a writer and tattoo artist. I'm the happy wife of Eloisa and mother to our two sons and three daughters.

Diane F. Germain is a French-American Feminist-Lesbian psychiatric social worker who created and conducted a strength group for Women Survivors of Incest and/or Childhood Molest for five years. She was arrested and jailed for protesting the objectification of women in the "Myth CaliPORNia Kontest" in 1986. She was a staff cartoonist for *Hot Wire: The Journal of Women's Music and Culture* of Chicago and for *Lesbian News* of Los Angeles from 1987 to 1995. She was a collective member of Califia Community, a feminist education retreat. She creates humor as a hedge against the heterosexist phallogocentric patriarchy and to tickle the Lesbians.

Alix Greenwood: I am an english lesbian, white, middle-class, 45 years old; I came out at 25. I work as an organic gardener.

Susan Hawthorne is a lesbian activist, writer, publisher, aerialist and theorist. Joining the Women's Liberation Movement in the early 1970s, she often reflects on how it probably saved her life. Her books include *The Falling Woman* (novel, 1992), *Wild Politics: Feminism, Globalisation and Biodiversity* (2002) and three books of poetry, *Bird* (1999), *The Butterfly Effect* (2005) and a chapbook with Suzanne Bellamy combining Suzanne's artwork and Susan's poems, *Unsettling the Land* (2008).

Azaan Kamau is author of the best selling book, *In The Midst of My Blackness*. She is an award-winning nationally syndicated journalist, poet, self-publisher and photographer. Azaan is the former Editor of *Gay Black Female* magazine and the Creative Director of the new *STUD* magazine. She uses her art and writing as tools for the empowerment of all people. Azaan is also in the process of publishing her next two books; *The Memoirs of Madlyn F. Glover*, a colorful biography about her Mother's life and romance with the legendary Ray Charles Robinson and *STUD, Poems and Rants!*

Sue Lenaerts captured most of her "Back Studies" series at national demonstrations and marches in Washington, DC. Her photos have been

published in print and on the web. In addition to tending databases for a living, she tends websites for *Sinister Wisdom*, *Welfare Warriors Mother Warriors Voice* and FAAR-Aegis.org.

Judy Lightwater's poetry, fiction and nonfiction have been published in the U.S. and Canada. She studied poetry at Three Schools in Toronto, fiction at Women and Words in Vancouver, and novel writing at the Victoria School of Writing. She can be found walking the beach and talking to herself in Victoria, B.C., where she works as a nonprofit management consultant.

Jane Mara is a psychotherapist, mediator, and writer, among other things. Her poems have been published recently in the We'Moon Calendar '08 and in *Sinister Wisdom's* Death & Dying issue. Two prose pieces were in *Sinister Wisdom's* Lesbian Mothers and Grandmothers Issue. She lives in Ashland, Oregon with her sweetie, not because Caution was thrown to the winds, but because the light turned green.

Janet Mason last wrote for *Sinister Wisdom* #70 30th Anniversary Celebration issue. Her literary commentary is regularly featured on This Way Out, an international LGBT radio syndicate aired on more than 400 radio stations in the U.S. and also in Australia, New Zealand, and throughout Europe. She teaches at Temple University in Philadelphia and more of her work can be found at www.amusejanetmason.org

Mary Meriam's first book of poems, *The Countess of Flatbroke* (afterword by Lillian Faderman), was published by Modern Metrics; her poem in *Sapphics*, "Lesbian Studies," was selected for the *Windy City Times Pride Literary Supplement*; and her sonnet, "Something Good" (first published in *Sinister Wisdom*), was a finalist in A Prairie Home Companion's Bed of Roses Love Sonnet Contest and read on National Public Radio.

Finola Moorhead has had some critical success in Australia and won a major fiction prize in 1991. She wrote and had published her first poem in 1965; then short stories, plays and three novels: *Remember The Tarantella*, *Still Murder* and *Darkness More Visible*. Now she is 61, looking forward wondering. More information at www.spinifexpress.com.au.

Ruth Mountaingrove: I am always a visionary, part of being a pisces I suppose. I'd like to live in my Utopia. It would be quite a difference from

the world I live in, always aware of who is around that might mean me harm and I don't mean women. If you want to know more you can google me Ruth Mountaingrove.

Nancy Nau: Since her accident last year, Nancy has become hearing and mobility impaired and legally blind. Nevertheless, in order to keep body and soul together, she continues to write and paint. This October she celebrated her 70th birthday.

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

Erin O’Riordan lives in a small Midwestern city, where she writes compulsively. Her favorite topics include the intersection of sexuality and spirituality, something she studied at a Catholic women’s college. Her fiction, articles and essays have appeared online in webzines including *The Erotic Woman*, *Clean Sheets*, and *Oysters & Chocolate*.”

PGar: I am Pat Gargaetas — PGar — photographer since 1967, working nearly exclusively in black and white until 1990, making portraits, landscapes, urbanscapes, shapescapes, bodyscapes. Using color, I photographed lesbians’ home altars, the subject of a Masters thesis in Anthropology completed in 1993. In 1996, I escaped urban environs with my life, if not my health, and for the next nine years photographed my cat, the birds, my garden/shrine, the daily-changing views from the Ledge on the Edge, 1600 feet up on Kaluna Cliff, Lost Coast, Turtle Island. In 2001, I began learning PhotoShop which gave me back direct access to photography, lost to chemical sensitivities in the 90s. I came down from the Ledge in 2005 and am Loose on Turtle Island, gleefully gleaning images from my files of numerous and often never used negatives, scanning projects including the Altar Project and my archive of lesbiana, creating Photo Blogs and CafePress image and commentary shops, practicing new technical skills with a digital camera, and generally trying to fulfill a mission to remain a practicing social irritant.

Laura Rifkin is a retired college teacher. She is lead project director of Fabled Asp: Fabulous/Activist Bay Area Lesbians with Disabilities: A Storytelling Project, whose mission is to document and celebrate 40 years of disabled lesbian activism in the San Francisco Bay Area. She is passionate about passing on this legacy to the next generation of activists and visionaries.

Lilith Rogers is a long-time poet, photographer, gardener, lover of women and Mother Nature. She has a CD-Rom of her book of poems *Persimmons and Other Lesbian Erotica* and a DVD of her one-woman show RACHEL CARSON: HER LIFE AND WORK. Contact her about these and other matters at Lilithrogers1@juno.com. Aloha.

Heather Springer lives in Chico, California where she teaches college composition. She is a fan of doing her business by bike and making food grow out of dirt. She has lived in China, Greece, the Czech Republic, New York, and Arizona. Originally from Oregon, she was glad to return to the West Coast in 2007 and work on this, the first piece of fiction in years that kept it close to home.

Jean Taylor had an interesting time working with Long Breast Press on *Willing Up and Keeling Over*. She has now decided to revive Dyke Books Inc. to publish her own book in 2009, *Brazen Hussies: A Herstory of Radical Activism in the Women's Liberation Movement in Victoria during the 1970s*, to mark the 40th anniversary of the WLM in Australia.

Barbara A. Thomas attends the University of Washington Bothell full-time, works as a part-time Caregiver, and writes poetry in her spare time which translates to not often enough. She lives in Everett, Washington with her son Nicholas, sister Dusty, girlfriend Cate, and their two dogs Hugo and Vita.

A three-time Pushcart-Prize nominee, **Julie Marie Wade** has received the Chicago Literary Award in Poetry, the Gulf Coast Nonfiction Prize, the Oscar Wilde Poetry Prize, and the Literal Latte Nonfiction Award. She completed a Master of Arts in English at Western Washington University in 2003 and a Master of Fine Arts in Poetry at the University of Pittsburgh in 2006. She lives with Angie and their two cats in rural Ohio, where she teaches humanities at a college preparatory boarding school.

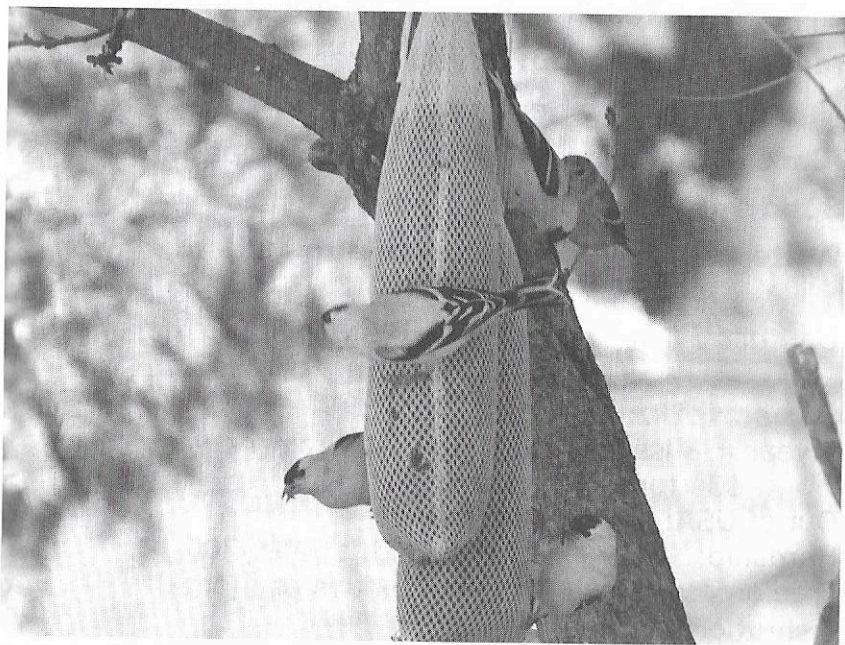
Jean Weisinger is a self-taught African American photographer based in Oakland, California. She has traveled to Africa, Cuba, India, Mexico, Jamaica, Australia, New Zealand, and Europe and throughout the United States. She has exhibited in one person and selected group exhibitions in the United States, Cuba, Africa and India. Her photographs have been published in numerous films, books, and a wide range of publications as well as posters, post cards and calendars. Her photographs are in collections throughout the world.

Win Weston is a spinner of tales and a teller of stories. She is a life-long resident of Minneapolis, Minnesota. She has performed at: Vulva Riot, Amazon Book Store Cooperative, Patrick's Cabaret, Celebrate Yourself!, Wild Yam Cabaret, and OLOC (Old Lesbians Organizing for Change) National Gathering held in Minneapolis. Her short stories have been read on radio stations WTIP, Grand Marais, MN and KFAI, Minneapolis, MN. In addition to writing she is an artist and photographer. She is also a sustaining member of Spiderwimmin, a womyn's ritual group which celebrates the year's quarter days.

Ellen Williams is a poet and fiction writer. She has been published in *Kuumba* (a poetry journal for lesbian women), *Gay Black Female*, *Poetic Hours* in London, *Short Stories* magazine, *Collage*, *Christianity and the Arts* magazine (Chicago, Ill.), as well as other magazines and journals — sometimes under pen names. She currently resides in Albuquerque, New Mexico. She is also an artist whose work has been displayed in galleries. Some of them were also featured and sold in Detroit, Michigan at A Woman's Prerogative under the name Cello. Presently, her agent is shopping her novel, *The Rock That Age Built* to publishers.

Judith K. Witherow: Two Spirit American Indian. Writer, photographer and artist. Continues to discover the boundless opportunities photography offers. Writing and photography are now at one with her outlook on race, class, gender, sexual orientation, disability and numerous political issues. At present she is working on turning metal cans into recycled art. Awarded "Community Builder for Decades" Pacifica Radio In Our Voices 2007. Board Member: *Sinister Wisdom*. <http://www.jkwitherow.com>.

Cindy Zelman: I live outside of Boston and have published work in *Feminist Studies*, *The Lesbian News*, and *Bay Windows*. I'm currently an MFA student in the Solstice MFA at Pine Manor College in Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts.



Goldfinches. Photo by Judith K. Witherow.

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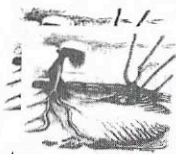
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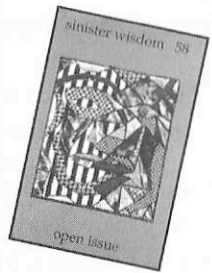
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Upcoming Issues: Call for Material

Please read the submission guidelines on the inside back cover before sending material. Please check our website www.sinisterwisdom.org for updates and details.

Two Spirit Women of First Nations

This issue will be printed when we receive enough material.

Guest Editors: Chrystos (Menominee) and Sunny Birdstone (Ktunaxa)
3250 S 77th #8 Tacoma, WA 98409. Email: creep toes@yahoo.com.

#77 Environmental Issues/Lesbian Concerns Forthcoming

Guest Editor: Diane Foster

#78 Old Dykes/Lesbians II

Due March 1, 2009

Editor: Fran Day fran@sonic.net. P. O. Box 1180
Sebastopol, CA 95473-1180.

Open issue written by Lesbians born in 1949 or earlier. Interviews and photographs taken by Lesbians are encouraged. Please read the guidelines on the inside back cover very carefully before sending material: ARTISTS should send B&W photos or drawings (duplicates) of their work (no slides). Images sent electronically must have a resolution of 300 for photos and 600 for line drawings. Please do not send large files electronically — send each photo separately. Include a 3–5 sentence autobiographical sketch written exactly as you want it printed. **Special Request:** Please send donations to help cover the cost of printing and mailing this issue. Make checks payable to *Sinister Wisdom*, Inc and mail to Fran Day, P. O. Box 1180, Sebastopol, CA 95473 –1180.

#79 Willing Up and Keeling Over: A Lesbian Handbook on Death Rights and Rituals

Editors: Anah Holland-Moore, Ardella Tibby, Barbary Clarke, Cathy Wheel, Claudia Huber, Jean Taylor, Lorraine le Plastrier, Rosalinda Rayne, Long Breast Press, Melbourne, Australia 2007.

Lesbians are discriminated against legally and socially in Australia. This book has been written and published to redress some of the inequities Lesbians face in our daily lives and in particular when it comes to our deaths. *Sinister Wisdom* is pleased to announce that we will reprint this important book.

#80 Theme to be announced

Due October 1, 2009

Editor: Fran Day

#81 Call for Guest Editor(s)

Due February 1, 2010

Submission Guidelines

Submissions: See page 128 for themes. Check our website at www.sinisterwisdom.org for updates on upcoming issues. Please read the guidelines below before sending material. Material should be sent to the editor or guest editor of the issue. Everything else should be sent to *Sinister Wisdom*, POB 3252, Berkeley, CA 94703.

Writing and Art Guidelines: Please read very carefully.

Material may be in any style or form, or combination of forms. Maximum: five poems, two short stories or essays, or one longer piece of up to 2500 words. We prefer that you send your work by email in Word. If sent by mail, material 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 Lesbians. 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 300 for photos and 600 for line drawings. TIFFs are preferred. Please do not send large files electronically – send each photo separately. Include a 3-5 sentence autobiographical sketch written exactly as you want it printed.

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. Because many of our readers are in prison, we cannot include erotica, explicit sex, obscenities, or art with frontal nudity. No sado-masochism.

Please contact us if you have a new theme you would like to see explored. We are looking for guest editors for future issues.

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.

