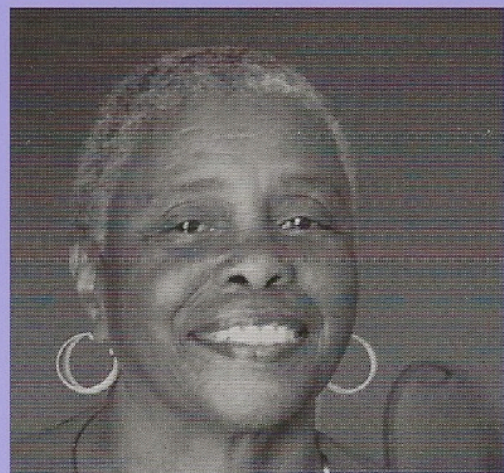
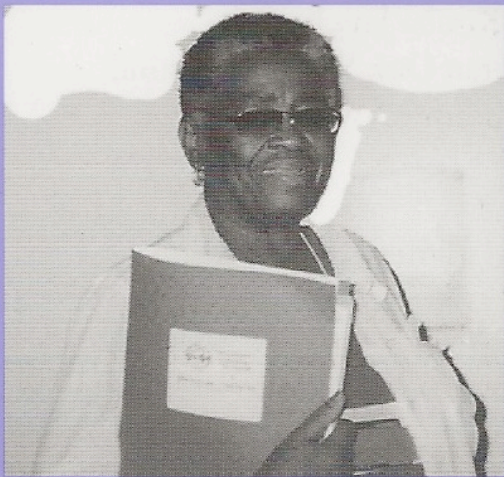


*Sinister Wisdom 78/79*



*Old Lesbians / Dykes II*



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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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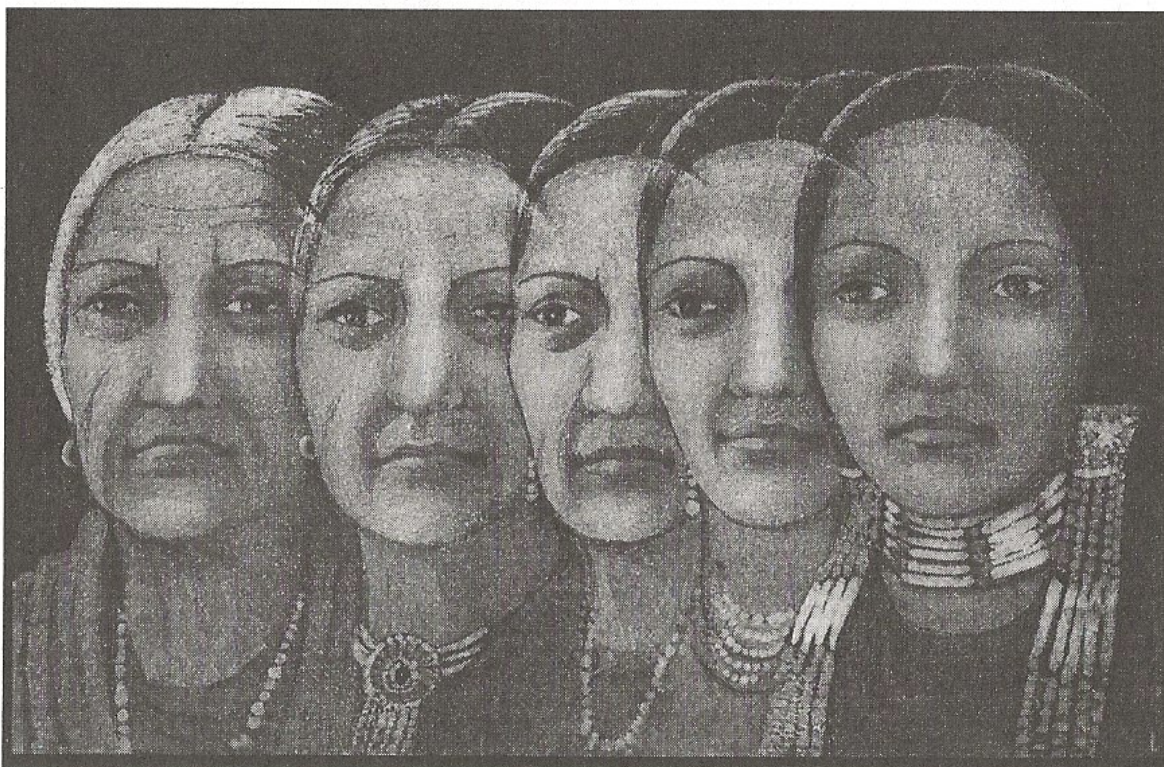
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*Changing Woman, 5x9" Etching by Ruth Zachary.*



## Dedication

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This Issue of *Sinister Wisdom* Is Dedicated to  
the Memories of our Lesbian ForeSisters

Carol Adair	☪	Pat Denslow
Jeanne Adleman	☪	Pat Durham
Paula Gunn Allen	☪	Andrea Dworkin
Karen Anna	☪	Fannyann Eddy
Gloria Anzaldúa	☪	Ruth Ellis
Mary Appelhof	☪	Maxine Feldman
June Arnold	☪	Mary Frances Fenton
Lisa Marie Bellear	☪	Muriel Fisher
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Beverly Brown	☪	Barbara Gittings
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Octavia Butler	☪	Alexandra Grilikhes
Barbara Cameron Nation Shield	☪	Tobi Hale
Pandoura Carpenter	☪	Ethel Hammarquist
Willa Cather	☪	Mabel Hampton
Joan Conlan	☪	Dorothy Hatzinikolis
Baba Copper	☪	Shevy Healey
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Barbara Deming	☪	Winifred Johnson



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Lynnly Beth Labovitz	☉	Colleen Regan
Melanie Long	☉	Mary Renault
Audre Lorde	☉	Diana Robbins
Janet Lubeski	☉	Donna Roberts
Blue Lunden	☉	Betty Rudnick
Lori Maas	☉	Jane Rule
Barbara MacDonald	☉	Pat Rutherford
Carol Mac Donald	☉	Muriel Ruykeyser
Anyda Marchant aka	☉	May Sarton
(Sarah Aldridge)	☉	Vickie Sears
Diane Mariah	☉	Janet Sergi
Marie Mariano	☉	Regina Shavers
Del Martin	☉	Betty Shoemaker
JMax	☉	DJ Shelley
Mary Meigs	☉	Sharon Silvas
Elaine Michels	☉	Shirley "Jody" Skoog
Georgia Middup	☉	Sara Robin Wild Smerud
Ruth Morales	☉	Helen Sonthoff
Shekhinah Mountainwater	☉	Susan Sontag
Marilyn Murphy	☉	Joy Bradshaw Taylor
Arminta "Skip" Neal	☉	Valerie Taylor
Steff Neuman	☉	Marguerite Yourcenar
Maureen O'Connor	☉	Yolanda Retter Vargas
Nancy Palmer	☉	Barbara Vogel
Connie Panzarino	☉	Dian Wagner
Pat Parker	☉	Gloria J. Windell
Pat Parks	☉	Rebecca Wight
Karen Pearl	☉	Gale Wilhelm
Barbara Pyle	☉	Monique Wittig
Yvonne Marie "Pinky" Ramos		And many others*

- Please send names of others to Fran Day at [fran@sonic.net](mailto:fran@sonic.net) and we will include them in a future issue.
- Thanks to Shaba Barnes, Roxanna Fiamma, Rose Provenzano and Senecarol Rising for their help compiling this list.



## Notes for a Magazine

---

WELCOME to this eagerly anticipated 78/79 issue of *Sinister Wisdom*, which celebrates the diverse voices and images of Lesbians age 60 and older. In 1994 *Sinister Wisdom* published *Old Lesbians/Dykes I*, guest edited by nine old Lesbians (Jeanne Adelman, Dotty Fowler, Marge Green, Rosemary Hathaway, Vera Martin, Joyce Pierson, Ida VSW Red, Kate Rosenblatt, and Mickey Spencer). Now fifteen years later, we respectfully follow in their heartsteps.

“We name ourselves “old” to reclaim both the word and the respect for women and age diminished by patriarchy over time....The works published in this issue reflect the lives, interests, choices, imagination, creativity and emotions of many, obviously not all, lesbians over 60, as each one speaks only for herself.”

“We encourage old lesbians to write and speak out—to write about being old, lesbians and dykes, to break silencing of old women. We invite all of you to read this issue with pleasure and curiosity, and for the mirrors of your lives—past, present and future.”

*Sinister Wisdom* 53 (Summer/Fall 1994, pp. 3-4)

Fran Day

Sebastopol, California

### **SINISTER WISDOM NEEDS HELP!**

Sinister Wisdom needs donations to help with the rising costs of printing and mailing the journal.

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Sinister Wisdom

c/o Fran Day, Editor

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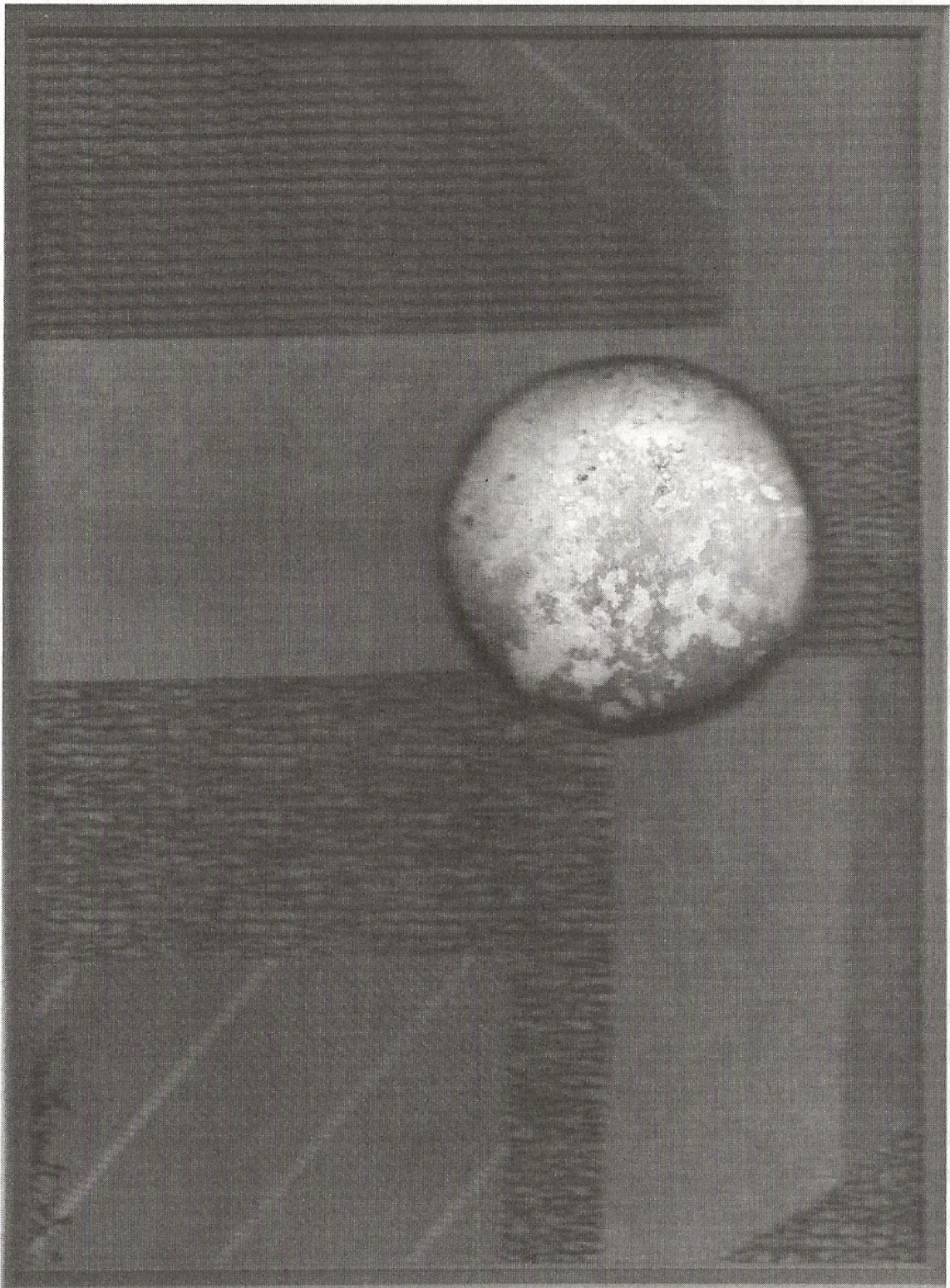


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*Collage by Vashte Doublex*



Arden Eversmeyer

## Meet Our Lesbian Foremothers

What started out ten years ago as a small project to gather information on some very ill old lesbians in my community of women in Houston, Texas, has taken on a life of its own. In fact, it has become almost an obsession with me. It is now known as The Old Lesbian Oral Herstory Project (OLOHP).

Historically, women have been “written out” of history. As I talked with the local women I became fascinated with their achievements and the obstacles they had overcome in their lives. Being born in 1931 myself, and coming out in 1948, I was aware of the lack of printed literature, organizations, and to some extent even vocabulary. How did these women find each other, and what had they done with their lives? The quest began.

At the first OLOC (Old Lesbians Organizing for Change) Gathering in 1996 I had occasion to visit with Degania Golove. At that time she was connected with the June Mazer lesbian archive in West Hollywood. I told her what I wanted to do, and she sent me information on doing oral history work. I credit Degania with “jump starting” me on this amazing journey.

I was serving on the OLOC Steering Committee and in the beginning, they helped me locate lesbians born in the early 1900s. OLOC later became a sponsor of the OLOHP, promoting the project and providing partial funding. My partner and I combined interviews with travel to meetings, conferences, and festivals. And now word-of-mouth referrals make up a big part of finding these wonderful old women.

The oldest woman I interviewed was born in 1916, and the oldest still living in 1917. Most of the women are at least 70 years of age. I have a few stories from lesbians that were still in their 60s but I am still focusing on lesbians born before 1930. Their backgrounds run from high school dropouts to PhD’s, working class to upper class, atheists to devoutly religious—the full spectrum of our society. The collection also includes stories of women of several ethnicities.

Not all old lesbians are willing to talk to me to tell their life story. So many have spent a lifetime in the closet, protecting themselves and their children. It is one thing to be comfortable with who we are, and quite another to say out loud “this is who I am,” and have it in print. The society they lived their early lives in dictated a very schizophrenic double life, which is hard to overcome.



Each life story is supplemented with pictures and documents that cover birth to current times. The recorded interview is transcribed and edited by the interviewee, and put together with the documentation. A contract for the use of their story is included. When complete, each story makes its own book—two are produced, one for the interviewee and one for the collection.

At the present time there are about 150 life stories in the collection. They are currently stored in a climate-controlled storage unit in Houston, Texas. A search is on for permanent housing for the collection. The first book based on these stories is well under way, with a long-time OLOC supporter doing the principle writing.

Frequently, when approached for an interview, a woman will say “but I have never done anything.” And my response to her is, “But you have. You have lived to old age and flourished in a hostile environment.” And once her book is complete she is surprised by the accomplishments in her life.

I am continually amazed by the strength and ingenuity of our old sisters. And I am in awe of the obstacles many have overcome. I am feeling an increasing sense of urgency as the women of this generation are fast disappearing. I am still searching for lesbians born before 1930, but work with many a bit younger.

So, the work continues. Until time runs out.

Arden Eversmeyer - Project Director; P.O. Box 980422, Houston, TX 77098; arden1931@yahoo.com; www.OLOHP.org

Janet Lubeski

## **Breath**

*Listening to the waves hitting the shore—lapping or crashing, following the tide. Sunset muted by fog, creating a fusion of clouds, moisture, sun sitting on water, green tinge to surrounding sky, peeking through the water, the rays lighting up the area around the waves with invisible energy pulsing thru. Just as my heart is pulsing in my chest. Open to the sounds, sights, smells of water, blood racing thru my body. Breathe in, breathe out. Breath grounding me, creating a stillness, creating openness in my mind to recognize possibility, following my body to relax as my breathing slows the anxiety I have been feeling. Breathe in, breathe out, breathe in and follow your breath into your belly. Inhale the ocean. It is one with you. The waves are constant, as is the breath. Breathe in, breathe out. Your belly expands, relaxing your diaphragm. Don't hold your breath, allow yourself the pleasure of relaxation. Breathe slowly, feel your body relating to the rhythm of the waves. You can relax with the endorphins smoothing the tightness. Freely breathing now. Trance-like. Nothing else is relevant. Breathe . . .*

2006



Janet Lubeski

## *Peace*

*I am overwhelmed with gratitude, recognizing grace. More than an attitude of gratitude, it is an opening up of my heart. To what life is to me now, almost 74 years old, in a body that has been nurtured and traumatized by past experiences yet able to reinvent itself physically in the process of healing. In the meeting—as Buber would teach me—I am touched by grace, by love given and received, by an acceptance. This period of grace reverberates all thru me onto the universe and provides positive energy, surrounding me. Touching me, touching you. All becomes one. There is no other way for peace to occur.*

2007





Photo of Jewelle Gomez by Diane Sabin.

Jewelle Gomez

## Old Lesbians Organizing for Change Keynote speech

*Friday, August 1, 2008 Los Angeles*

I am honored to be celebrating my first OLOC gathering and I moved up my 60th birthday a month so I could celebrate it here. I don't want to feel like the youngest kid in the class telling the teachers the lesson so this is a sharing of how I came to be an old lesbian and how I hope to live up to the examples you all set.

Isn't it ironic that the keynote speaker writes vampire stories in which the main character never ages?

My novel, *THE GILDA STORIES*, was not written because I was unhappy with aging. I grew up with my great grandmother and grandmother. I knew the many different ways that being old looked and being old was something to live up to.

My novel is a feminist story using the vampire mythology to explore the struggle for those of us on the margins trying to find out what our real powers are; the work it takes to create the family of choice that will nurture



and support you through the long years; the journey we make as we try to change the world. This to me is the eternal story of growing old, even when the character doesn't.

Lesbian feminist poet, Adrienne Rich, says that:

“The moment of change is the ONLY poem.”

And change is what each of us, in our own way has strived for; what this organization is named for. Both change within ourselves so we can find our own power and find our families and change in the culture so we don't remain on the margins.

And as we age, keeping the act of change a natural part of my life hasn't always been easy. Feeling the world evolve, feeling my body age isn't a simple thing. A lot of TV ads try to make it look smooth and clean...just a slight softening of the chin line and dramatically handsome gray hair. That's on TV. How we grow old is neither smooth nor clean.

It's annoying and surprising.

And everything in my body and in history and in the popular as well as traditional culture is telling me with a snarl: you're old, too old to change.

Or telling me slow down, settle down, calm down. Notice how it's all a downer.

Making the act of change a natural part of my life is what I strive for. I think it's what we must all strive for or risk leaving selves behind.

Who is that self we leave behind?

- She's that young energetic dyke who knew who she was at 8 years old.
- She's that housewife who broke out to find her way to lesbians.
- The teacher who made it through her career without being fired or even if she was fired still created a life for herself.
- She's the girl who figured out wearing plaid shirts or green on Thursdays was the way to let others know who she wanted.
- She's the one who for years only listened outside her window to the Pride Parade too afraid to take part, then one day ran into the street.
- She's the one who hopped on her motorcycle and raced to the head of the march.
- She's the neighbor who had a crush on her son's best friend's mother.
- She's the tomboy who refused to wear dresses.
- She's the wives who lock themselves in the restaurant bathroom as the husbands sit at the table.
- She's the munitions factory worker who never parted from the woman who worked beside her during the war;
- Or never stopped loving her college roommate;



- Or who never gave up on finding someone to love her;
- Or who gave up drinking in the bars to really find someone to love her.
- She's the one who drove a taxi even though her brothers didn't want her too;
- Or who threatened to kill her sister's husband when he hit her
- She's the one who sat up all night when her best friend had an illegal abortion.
- And the one who danced all night in somebody's finished basement when the bars closed.

These are our inner, deepest strongest selves. We must not leave them behind just because we're moving slower.

But paradoxically the only way to keep them alive inside is to learn how to accept the act of change and to imagine those girls as old. To imagine those girls as us.

By this I don't mean accept all that is new as good or assume everything is an improvement over what has gone before.

By change I mean to learn how I take in new information, and shift it around in my body and my head until I can see how to make it useful.

If we can learn to make the act of change a part of our daily lives we can more easily remember the fresh, versatile, flexible self that is at our core. Then she won't get paved over by repeated habits and routine ways of thinking that are no longer useful.

One example of a change that almost stumped me:

Before computers became commonplace around 1989 a writer advised me to start using one, but I couldn't imagine it. I'd developed all my little quirks that helped me to write on the huge old clanking typewriter

The feel of throwing the arm on the carriage at the end of each line defined my success as a writer and each time the little bell rang it was like someone cheering me on.

I cut and paste—literally cut and paste—my pages with scotch tape using the mechanics as a way to understand sentences and the flow of paragraphs.

Then came time to work on my novel, *THE GILDA STORIES*, and I knew I would never be able to type and cut and paste more than three hundred pages and get it done.

So I had it entered onto a computer and I learned new ways to create the rhythms that I'd come to depend on. I sometimes print out more pages than someone who was 'raised' on computers but it works for me. Having a physical relationship to the words on paper, using a pen to draw lines and insert words works for me.

I accepted the act of change once I tried it on and could figure out how



to make it work for me. I didn't need to learn everything there is about computers, just to learn how to type in one end and get the paper to come out the other.

Change is the only poem.

That did not, however, lead me to sympathize with students' who whined: "But my spell check wasn't working!" when I gave them a lower grade on assignments.

I said as gently as I could: "Unfortunately 'spell check' is not getting the C—you are.

Getting old is one of the biggest changes I am learning to appreciate. Getting old is quite different from 'getting older.' Getting older is what happens when you're a kid, which is traumatic enough. But as a kid everybody is cheering you on. Everybody is talking about how cute you are. People who barely know you smile and praise how tall you're growing, how smart you are, how beautiful you've become, what a great job you'll get.

Everybody—parents, aunts, the woman on the bus—pours their own ambitions and dreams onto you. Encouraging you to embrace the change that is the approach of adulthood.

Today nobody ever says to me: Gosh, don't you just love the way those wrinkles have developed around your eyes? Or: I just love that extra thirty pounds you can't get rid of. Or won't it be great when you need to have a pair of glasses in each room.

Getting old is a special kind of change that we need to learn to appreciate in ourselves and keep reinforcing that appreciation out in the world. And there are a lot of us changing.

The estimated number of LGBT people over 55 is currently 2 to 3 million. In San Francisco they guesstimate 17,000 to 34,000 Queer old people. The fastest growing segment of the older population is those aged 85 and older.

The statistics are all for the LGBT community in general, not specifically for lesbians; as you'd expect the stats don't look good for us. We can assume they are much worse for us lesbians and much worse if you're an us of color.

A Metropolitan Life study shows that only 44% of gay people my age and older are out. Even if they were out earlier, they're back in the closet now. That is not good news.

The hopeful news is that already the LGBT population has a commitment to caregiving that is sometimes triple that of the general population.

As a woman raised by independent old women I know I started out with an advantage. And I believe that lesbians from my generation and the generations earlier have several advantages: We've already seen what it means



to be on the margins, to live our lives underground. Early on we mastered the art of gender pronoun dissembling, cross-dressing and averting our eyes in the high school locker room. Everything that lesbians lived through back in the day has given us a fuller perspective. We know what bad is.

Today the prime question is which chat room has the most likely lesbian date material? My question at 18 was did I have to join the military to find another lesbian?

Another advantage is that we came of age when we had to create our own culture—it didn't come to us in a glossy magazine or on the LOGO channel. These are wonderful things but it is different when the primary place available to turn to and see your reflection was Webster's Dictionary.

And we took the little we had and we made culture. Whether it was bar culture or potluck suppers or sodality circles—lesbians from the turn of the century to now organized activities like our lives depended on it...and they did. One reason lesbians were able to respond so effectively to the AIDS crisis was our experience at caretaking with each other and creating systems for survival.

A third advantage is that culturally lesbians have cornered the market on addressing 'quality of life' issues. We know what real quality is. We have more jewelry makers, tee shirt designers, carpenters per capita than almost any other segment of the population. And we make food out of nothing in the middle of a field in Michigan. Who knew that peanut butter could be its own major food group? In that old adage that tells us what to do with lemons lesbians are the mistress of making lemonade. We can make anything especially out of nothing.

Added to that is the fact that we have irrepressible nerve. We will start up literary presses and magazines at the drop of a hat and then figure out how to get the publications distributed to the hinterlands. May the goddess always provide for *Lesbian Connection*! Send them money.

We'll take off our shirts in the middle of a parade. We'll bare our mastectomy scars, wheel through campgrounds on motorized chairs over snow fences that have no magical adhesive or traction qualities and read every lesbian detective novel passed on to us. We have nerve. That thing that many men mistakenly believe they have solo claim to and think it only takes place on a battlefield. The world is our battlefield. I've watched how the lesbians before me not just survived; you thrived and I've learned from the path you cut through the bushes...figuratively and literally.

My generation is the first, statistically, to have such a large number of out queer people who are politically active and open. That means numbers that are becoming a critical mass.



Knowing what we know, having seen the changes we've seen in the society around us, we are poised to truly embody the words that the acronym OLOC stand for. We can make embracing and agitating for change a vocation, a quest, a passion because many of us have been doing it all of our lives.

Sitting w/my great grandmother watching Neil Armstrong land on the moon in 1969 showed me a quality I knew I wanted to have. She'd been born on an Indian reservation in Iowa in 1883. But she was paying close enough attention to the political world of today to be suspicious. She asked did I really think he was landing on the moon? This was a woman who made learning and change part of her life until the day she passed. That included skepticism and questioning authority. That's who I wanted to be when I grew to be old.

And as I, and my generation, grow old with our skepticism and our questioning it effects our entire LGBT movement; and our LGBT elder movement will have to change to accommodate the new OLD.

Being 60 is not necessarily the same as being 70 or being 80. Not simply the physical or mental differences but the most significant: experiential and political differences. In addition, being a 60-year-old lesbian in 1950 is not the same as being 60 in 2008. Being 60 in rural Georgia is different from being 60 in San Francisco or Sydney.

In 1970 while in undergraduate school in Boston I read the free paper, and each week I turned to the classified to see the notice for the Daughters of Bilitis meeting. I was too shy, afraid they didn't look like me, afraid they were too old. I never went but seeing their notice each week sustained me. But even though I knew I was them, I couldn't envision who those women were.

And we would have been different from each other. We're all together here in this same room but that doesn't mean we do old in the same way.

So our need will be to recognize our commonalities and recognize those differences and grow our movement to encompass them.

Being old is, of course, both a physical state and a mental state. What I think OLOC has helped me to recognize is that the mental state—the idea of being old—is what we each say it is, NOT what the larger society has said it is, as it lumps us all together in a flowered schmatte.

Growing old is going through the most comprehensive and challenging changes of a lifetime. And the only people cheering us on will be the ones in this room or rooms like this.

I was that young woman in New York City in 1976 who was too afraid to go down and join the Pride March in the West Village and before that I was too shy to go to DOB. I was shy and alone. But that changed. Because of



the Lesbian Feminist movement that nurtured me and helped me find the power within myself to grow and to go out even when I was afraid.

Now, more than 30 years later, friends are emailing me pictures of myself and my partner, Diane, that were on the cover of the New York Times because of our involvement in the marriage law suit. I know the steps toward that change were small and sometimes imperceptible between that girl huddled in the window listening to the cheers of the Pride Parade and the woman at the California Supreme Court doing her own cheering. But they were steps toward change within me and in the culture around me. And I keep that girl with me so I don't forget those who are still afraid and so I can see how far I've come.

A word about marriage since I brought it up. Most of us never imagined marriage as a possibility and as a feminist I've always had and still do have major issues with marriage as a patriarchal institution. But two important points: The marriage equality fight is just one of several strategies for winning full equality. We should fight on more than one front for our civil rights. This is just one of them. If we look at failure in other movements we see often it came when differing factions insisted there was only one way to win.

In looking at other movements we can also see that often it is some peripheral activity or event that becomes the lightning rod for change. I've often said that the Civil Rights workers who risked their lives to sit in at Woolworth lunch counters did not do it because the food was good.

And finally the major significance of the ruling by the California Supreme Court is not simply their support of equal marriage. It is that the ruling elevated LGBT people closer to the legal status of a protected class, making it harder for anyone to get away with discriminating against us. That's a huge step in our movement nationally. I may not have chosen this path for that particular step but it's a step that is working for us.

So that said—I now stand before you, older than I ever imagined myself to be, trying to live up to the standards set by my great grandmother and grandmother and by you all. I'm old and still new because each day there is something I'm working to change. And I'm about to be married.

I am in what mystery writer Agatha Christie called the 'second blooming.' That place where the blossom is familiar yet new at the same time.

I grew up in Boston where everything old is good. So being old is like a fine antique. Both sturdy and delicate. It's a chair that's seen wear yet has graceful lines still. That's who I feel I am: sturdy and delicate and as I age it's easier to claim both sides of my self.

I know the importance of words so calling ourselves 'old lesbians' is no accident and it holds within it an incantatory power. That's why people get



nervous when we say it. 'Old lesbian' makes people answer back: Oh, you're not old! Or, Why do you say that?

And if we understand the power of words we know that phrase makes people anxious and they don't even know why. So we keep saying it so they can start to sense the power of the phrase 'old lesbian.' And then we too can take in and accept that power.

Old is remembering the past and still imagining the future

Old is doing what frightens you or pleases you because who's going to tell you 'you can't.'

Old is knowing that it often takes two hands to lift something and if you can get more hands it's even better.

It's knowing that working together is the lesson we learned as young lesbians and it's even more important as old lesbians.

You put those two powerful words—old lesbian—together with the idea of organizing for change and you've got the government going into Orange Alert. And they should be on alert because old lesbians can crack things open.

We have some tasks ahead of us. And given where we've been I've no doubt we'll tackle them so I created a To Do List for myself.

We have organizations already working at some of these tasks so hooking up with them should not be that difficult.

- Make sure municipalities address our needs. More programs for aging baby boomers are being developed every day. But there is a lack of support for social support; the emphasis is usually on physical health. Or funders have a different program for mental health w/no focus on elders. Integrating what old people need in total remains a mystery to most funders and service providers. The lack of integration is frustrating.
- Service providers need help learning how to provide for us. Our job is to be certain they address our needs. To put our experience to work coming up with social solutions.
- Two of the most debilitating things we face as we become old are isolation and accessibility issues. I see the same old lesbian at the Gay film festival in the same seat each year. Each year I plan to ask her how she gets there and I haven't yet. But I hope this coming year isn't too late because I must ask her. She needs to know that somebody is paying attention to what makes her life worth living and my knowing more of her is knowing more of myself.

Lesbians are the people who turned the bathroom line waiting to go into the women's room in the 1950s into a social networking system—we can surely create opportunities for connecting our lesbian sisters to each other so no one is sitting at home alone unless she wants to be.



– Stay connected to our own individual creativity. A life of habit and passivity with no sense of surprise or creation is a seven by three by six foot hole waiting to swallow us up. There is no art or craft too small whether it's making quilts or rhyming couplets, archeology or theatre or book clubs or facebooking...if we don't make a place for creative energy in our lives we lose our lives. My grandmother decided at the age of 69 to learn to play the guitar...so she studied with a teacher on television...Andre Segovia.

She was never going to win on American Idol but music was her passion and she refused to let it go.

– Be present. It's no easy task to put ourselves out in the world when every bone in your body is telling us to stay at home. But there's a reason that young people cry during pride marches when they see us either in the grandstand set aside for elders or on the little jitney. They need that balance of seeing themselves. We represent who they can be. We didn't have that as young people but we can give it to them.

Create the full picture of what it means to be a lesbian from baby dyke to old school and our movement is stronger for it. Be present at places that surprise you and surprise them. Don't let our invisibility become a liability for us and for them.

– Don't be afraid of passion. We must embrace visceral feeling to keep our blood flowing. Never be ashamed of passion, rather see it as a heat necessary to our humanity. Desire and passion have been at the heart of much unforgettable poetry (some forgettable poetry too) and of much revolutionary activity. And if not sex per se then sensuality. Being a lesbian is about touch...touching each other.

Being old and in love is one of the best feelings I've ever experienced.

– Pick some political/social activity and throw yourself at it. Is it the Gertrude Stein Democratic Club? Should you start one? Is it the equal marriage campaign? Is it participating in safer schools programs for LGBT kids? Is it walking dogs for other old lesbians?

Many of us donate money even when we think our little amounts aren't much. But don't just donate...do. We are lesbians who lived through some of the greatest changes in the 20th century surely we don't want to retire from social activism now?

The theme of the conference this year is California Dreaming. A wonderful old Mama's & Papa's song; most of us remember the words:



*All the leaves are brown  
 And the sky is gray  
 I've been for a walk on a winter's day  
 I'd be safe and warm if I was in LA.  
 California dreaming on a winter's day.*

These are our colors. The leaves are brown as we enter these later stages of our lives. We've been through the seasons and the deep brown of age is reflected in our eyes.

We have walked through long winter days. Even though they seem to have flown by more quickly than we imagined they would, they were long hard days of protest and loss interspersed with sudden crisp and bright successes.

And as the song promises: We are safe and warm and we ARE in LA.

And we'll take LA to be the metaphor for us being here together. We did make it here to be together. To witness our old age. To witness the growth and change in each other and the world around us.

This is our class reunion. This is where we complain about the pain in our bones and the pain in the ass in the White House.

And this is where we replenish our energy and go back out with our To Do list and make more change in the world.

I wrote a more recent new adventure for my vampire character, Gilda. In it she does—sometime around her second century of life—come to realize that she misses the sensation of growing old. She makes love with a woman, a witch, who seems to be about a hundred years old—a youngster compared to Gilda. In their lovemaking, in the sturdy and delicate body of that old woman Gilda finds a brief sense of the miracle of the layers of age.

And it's only in that small moment Gilda can glimpse the sweetness of mortality. Our small moments to take in that sweetness of mortality and of our power come when we are together in each other's arms as we are right now.

Lesbian poet, Audre Lorde said "Life is very short and what we have to do must be done in the now."

This California dream is where we stop to rest and refresh.

And this is where we pick up the journey again. Right now.

[www.jewellegomez.com](http://www.jewellegomez.com)

[www.redroom.com](http://www.redroom.com)

[www.hillgirlz.com](http://www.hillgirlz.com)



Pat McCutcheon

***Unsanctioned Epithalamium\****  
for Cheryl

*If we could marry,  
I would write an epithalamium in praise  
of twenty-four years, three children raised.  
But our countrymen forbid us wedlock,  
refuse to authorize the love of women.  
So this is just a love poem,  
strewn with breathless words,  
first-days-of-frenzied-passion words,  
panted in bold italicized delicious shivers,  
phrases fierce as "I trust you."*

*Even after all these years,  
this poem could never tell  
how it feels to be utterly known—  
beyond persona, make-up,  
naked beneath my best impression—  
still accepted without conditions.  
Loved even,  
in mental illness and in health,  
in overdrafts and wealth,  
through harried hugs and sideswiped kisses.*

*We chase our trials and errors,  
ecstasies and terrors, try for balance, lose it,  
mired in molasses, try to remember  
what comes next or even where we put the list.  
Decades ago, we swore each other all the love we had  
before we knew how deeply we could love  
anyone, could love ourselves. We made ends meet  
with boxes of wine and frozen tubes of ground turkey,  
around cheerleader practice and homework resistance  
we wrote letters rustling with our passion.*

*Now we both know better*



that "I'll be there for you" means,  
 for better or for worse,  
 know what it promises,  
 only need a glance to say it.

If this were a paeon to married love, one might look for  
 explicit scenes, straining with desire,  
 allusions to your blue eyes,  
 which, in certain light, turn thalo green  
 but, in any light, see straight through me.

This, however, is a discreet and decorous poem.  
 I'll mention just your hands. How they move me, my unwedded love.  
 Long-fingered, far-reaching, gardener's hands  
 that brush a hyacinth's tiny bulb with tenderness.  
 Your subtle fingers spread the supple soil, stroke a trough;  
 urgent, gentle touch pressing into moist, warm hunger;  
 the shaft grows deeper to enclose the alchemy. Heaven and earth move.  
 The bulb wakes in darkness, into what she never knew was in her.  
 The air swells with ineffable fragrance, sweet, profound,  
 unauthorized, unsanctioned. We need no other license.

*\*a poem that celebrates marriage*

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Jane Herman

## Old Positive

Last spring, just after I turned sixty, a few of my older dyke friends asked me if I was planning to attend the 2008 Old Lesbians Organizing for Change (OLOC) National Gathering in Los Angeles. I'd seen e-mails about the conference and had been thinking about going. To tell the truth though, the idea of old women as a political group was almost meaningless to me. I knew about OLOC and Silver Threads, but I thought of these groups as social organizations more than political ones. My impression was that they were exclusive and self-congratulatory. I pictured lots of dancing and singing in rounds at their meetings, and lots of awards given out. I simply did not see old women as having any real collective power.

I decided to attend the L.A. Conference. Some women I had not seen in many years were leading workshops at the Gathering, and I was interested in connecting with activists I had worked with and been friends with during the women's movement. And I wanted to facilitate a workshop on Environmental Illness (E.I.) and Multiple Chemical Sensitivities (M.C.S.) I'd been disabled by E.I. and M.C.S for many years and had important information about environmental health to share.

The old dyke activists I knew had always seemed to be organizing around issues other than age. I was surprised to find, when I went to L.A. in July for the OLOC National Gathering, that these dykes, extremely activist women, were putting their old age in the center of all they were organizing. This should have been obvious, but I had been thinking they would have lost a lot of their fervor. I was so wrong. There was Pnina Tobin, speaking passionately about the particular oppression we working class and poor Jewish women experience, and she was the same powerful activist I'd known since we were in our thirties.

Pnina and the other old dykes at OLOC I'd know thirty or forty years ago were the same women I had remembered, but there was a difference: they were much, much more powerful. They were dynamic and more deeply emotional. Watching Pnina, I saw a woman who, like the other women at the gathering, had become more present with age, her political activism blending with her emotions. Old women, I began to understand, are more capable of being at one with ourselves and our feelings; we are less fragmented. When you are nearing sixty years old, your politics move from your brain and body to your heart. When we are younger we think we



understand passion. But the older we get, the more we really understand passion, and more importantly, compassion. Everything becomes more intense. Happiness becomes happier. Sadness is sadder. Friendships are more important. And no, it is not because we are getting closer to death!

I was a baby among most of these women at OLOC. Newly old, I learned from these women that being old is so much better than I ever could have imagined. There was something really glorious in watching these old women—really smart women, who had spent the majority of their lives as activists. To describe this I want a word more magnificent than simply “old.”

Or maybe what I need instead is to reclaim the word “old.” Last summer I returned from OLOC excited about being an old woman, and early this year I decided to start a new OLOC chapter here in Sonoma County. But I still had trouble with the word “old.” Speaking about OLOC to a group of twenty five dykes, I accidentally called the organization “Older Lesbians Organizing for Change.” Luna Lester, who was sitting next to me, sweetly interjected, explaining that we had learned to say “old.” When we say we’re older instead of old, Luna said, we are creating divisions among old women. It’s as if we are saying “I may be older than some women, but I’m not really OLD, like those women.”

I thought about what Luna said and knew she was right. Old is a lot like being fat (a topic with which I am very familiar). People are afraid they’ll hurt our feelings if they say “She is getting old” or “She is fat.” So instead, they use euphemisms; they say “older” or “large.” But “old” and “fat” are not pejorative words, any more than “slender,” or “young,” are. Saying “I am old” enables us to define old in positive terms and allows us to see it as it is. Our bodies have changed, and so have some of our abilities. We must ask ourselves, “How do we operate in this new community of old women? Do we have the right to expect other women to take care of our needs? How may we speak our truths without feeling badly judged?”

These are questions I grappled with back home in Santa Rosa after the OLOC conference was over. In the U.S. old women, as an important and powerful group, are invisible. My own behavior and attitudes about old women before I attended my first OLOC gathering were far from unique. Even in lesbian communities, it seems somehow that everything else is more important than the collective needs of old women. Part of our responsibility as old women is to educate younger dykes. We need to explain to young lesbians that telling us we “don’t look old” is no more a compliment than saying that we don’t look Jewish, disabled, or fat.



Perhaps more importantly, we old dykes need to examine our complicity in our own oppression. Collectively, are we expecting injustice as a norm? If someone tells us we look younger than our years—or that we're not like other old women—do we smile and say “thank you?” We may do so out of vanity, or because we want to be “nice” and avoid causing conflict. But when we choose not to challenge ageism, we do so at our own expense; we help ensure that the collective needs of old women remain invisible.

We may avoid identifying as old women because we fear the stigma of old age. This fear, we must recognize is left over from our pre-feminist days. The stigma of old age is like the shame we have attached to ourselves for being too fat, having less education, or being too dark, too small, or too hairy. And so we can use the same strategies we've already learned to fight this stigmatization. We can ask ourselves who decides that an old woman is too feeble or unworthy. Who is profiting from our oppression? If no one were making money from weight-loss diets, cosmetic surgery, anti-aging lotions, Social Security privatization, or cuts to Medicaid and other social Services, then we would be far less oppressed.

As lesbians, we've dealt with similar issues before. Much of what I've said about old women applies to other groups as well; you could replace the words “old women” with “Jewish women,” “women of color,” “disabled women,” or “working class women,” and most of the ideas would still apply. Lesbians are doing the difficult work of incorporating these subgroups into our communities. We make our meetings wheelchair accessible. We have learned to see fat and disabled women's bodies as sensual and beautiful; women who use wheelchairs have become participants in dance troupes, and fat women may be belly dancers or strippers. We can incorporate old women in the same way. (I'm not saying most old women I know want to be strippers... but on the other hand, why not?) Old women can be sensual. We can see old bodies as beautiful.

I am saying this to every woman. I am talking to you, whether you are thin, fat, old, young, disabled, or non-disabled. No one is separate from all of this. All lesbians must raise our consciousnesses about how we each contribute to the oppression of old women. For example, are there certain kinds of old women we like better than others? Those who are not too weak, who don't have too many memory problems, those who don't have trouble standing? We like old women who are still feisty, strong, able-bodied, and sharp-witted. We prefer those who have socially acceptable beauty. We admire the old woman who still tends her garden, but forget about the one who lives in a nursing home.



It will take practice to re-educate ourselves. As a newly old lesbian, I find myself in a process of “coming out” again. This makes me think of my twenty-three-year-old niece, Jennifer Herman, who recently came out as a lesbian, and wondered (as I did myself over forty years ago), “Will I do it right?” “Do I really belong?” “Am I the appropriate kind of old dyke (or newly minted baby dyke)?”

I don't even know what that last question means. But I do have some ideas about what kind of old lesbian I want to be. I want my activism to make connections between ageism and my oppression as a fat and disabled woman. I taught a workshop at the OLOC National Gathering because I want other old women to learn how to protect themselves from the thousands of chemical toxins that are part of everyday life. And the new OLOC chapter I established this year is the first to have our meetings be fragrance-free and cell phone-free. And I need to learn from other old dykes who've been activists in anti-war, anti-racism, pro-choice/abortion, anti-violence against women, environmentalism, prison, class injustice, and other areas.

Lesbian organizations like OLOC are supporting and guiding old lesbians to reclaim our power and collectively be seen, heard and respected, not only within lesbian communities, but in all places where we need to advocate for ourselves and our sisters. I will no longer separate being old from anything else. I am adding “old positive” to my list of skills as a community organizer. We old lesbians must identify and connect with each other everywhere we go. Let's greet each other as good friends and members of a distinguished society who bond together to make positive changes in our lives. As political activists, we must remember that it is important to create change, not adjust to our oppression. We must no longer accept invisibility or injustice as normal stages of ageing.

*Note: My warmest thank you to Anna Mollow (38) for helping me edit and clarify the ideas in this essay.*



Bethroot Gwynn

***For Hawk Madrone, at 70***

*Dogs know.*

*Dogs look into the smiling eyes  
feel the soul embrace  
of this woman who has been loving them  
for lifetimes.*

*Any dog.*

*Dog in the back of a truck at BiMart  
Dog in the park  
Dog by the side of the road  
Dog at the Shelter  
The Shelter dogs are the ones most awestruck  
by this angel who gives them touch and walk  
and comfort, of an afternoon.*

*I know.*

*I have been watching this woman for 35 years.  
The sights I have seen!*

*I watched as she and I held the snake  
and she ever so carefully cut away the tangled bird netting,  
scissors slipping precisely under the tight plastic cords,  
tight against soft scaly unscathed skin.*

*I have stood holding the fence post as she pounded,  
heavy sledge rushing inches from my head—  
knowing she would never miss.*

*I watched her build finely crafted cabinets, doors, windows,  
drawers, stairs, shelves,  
gates and more gates and yet another gate.*

*I have seen her transform a brushy hillside,  
choked with honeysuckle, blackberry, poison oak,  
into a lush cascade of flower beds—  
decades she has done this work,*



*still she expands the tended reach,  
digs up, improves, amends, moves plants, adds new ones.  
Her face lights with wonder in a flower's glow.*

*I have seen her, countless times, on her back  
under the rusty truck, face flecked with truck debris,  
using this tool, now that, to insist a bolt will budge.*

*She does insist.*

*Her bark is worse than her bite.*

*I know.*

*This is a tender-hearted cur-mudgeon.*

*She is more shy than you know.*

*I have heard her sobs, all the way up the hill,  
when she found the little wren mama  
dangling dead from its nest.*

*I have been witness to this woman's grief—  
love gone missing. She gave her heartbreak to  
the dogs, the trustworthy ones.*

*Soft.*

*I remember that her feet are especially soft,  
and so the iconic story in my ancient heart-shrine  
is of a day, 35 years ago—we were high on mushrooms  
and romance—this woman walked all the way up Flagg Mountain  
in her bare feet. In her bare, tender feet.*

*I will walk with this woman, I said to myself.*

*And I have, I do, on this mountain, round and about  
our different paths, our common ones.*

*I have watched her change, grow,  
retool herself to the delicate technologies of computer, camera  
(old dog learning new tricks)*

*She has learned the arts of solitude  
books read, pies baked, prose penned  
hands and imagination busy, accomplishing—  
a mastery of self-care.*

*She walks Flagg Mountain barefoot every day,*



*you know—perhaps you don't know—  
 an inner world of high-pitched sounds screaming  
 non-stop in her head.  
 She is brave to be alive, I say.*

*And she gives of herself  
 shares this forest refuge with women who come for its solace  
 offers:  
 wisdom to those who seek her counsel  
 footrubs at the ready  
 exquisite writerly critique  
 exquisite writing  
 a regular, frequent letter to an old, old woman  
 still in the nursing home where her mother aged and died  
 carpentry skills to help friends building  
 companionship to help a friend dying*

*She has figured out, even, how to navigate  
 the narrow, squabble-pocked streambed of  
 unarticulated love between us:  
 the gift of a mended chair,  
 thrift-store pants that always fit me,  
 advice and support for the overwhelming project,  
 hands-on when my bolt won't budge,  
 praise for my own word-craft.*

*She steadies my ladder.  
 I steady hers.*

*Two golden dogs race along the lane, rough and tumble their play.  
 They give this woman daily laughter,  
 keen hearing, deep brown devoted eyes.  
 She adores them back, cooks them vats of healthy stew,  
 rubs their every inch with her fingers.  
 Knobby fingers now: I have been watching.*

*I went looking for Dog Goddesses.  
 Ninkharak, Mesopotamia  
 Nehalennia, Celtic  
 Dog Goddesses of Healing and Protection*



*Yes! This is who she is,  
This is who she runs with.*

*May there be packs of them—  
all manner of fluffy and scruffy and sleek,  
tails wagging wildly  
when she gets to the Great Evermore  
where D-O-G is G-O-D  
and Muphin, her most beloved,  
is waiting.*

*March, 2009*



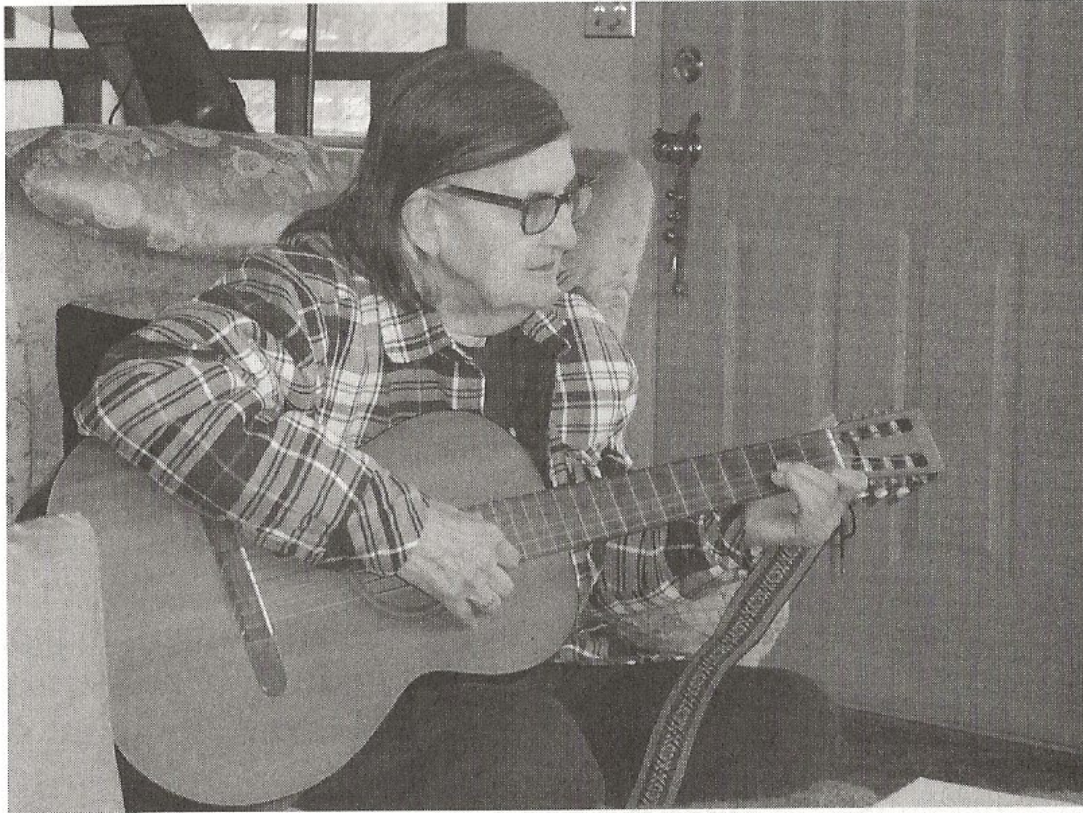


Photo of Ruth Mountaingrove by Juli Palmer

Ruth Mountaingrove

## A Day In The Life Of An 86 Year Old Lesbian

On this sunny morning in Arcata I awake to my usual routine: Cranberry EmergenC blessings on my body for bringing me so far on this journey. Later breakfast with nutrients and vitamins and pills for the day with my oatmeal and prunes—Aspirin, Benazpril and Metoprolol, one for high blood pressure and one for slowing my heart rate. I am Type A.

After breakfast I may write or read. I review a book a month for our lesbian newsletter, the *L-Word*, or I may write a short piece for my Writers group. Lately I've been writing about my experiences in a commune from which I took my last name. I may do some cleaning, nothing heavy. Turn on my computer and check my lesbian listserv to see what topics are interesting then, though I seldom contribute, read my e-mail.

One of the “gifts” of the drugs is that sometimes I can't type. The computer screen gives me a headache. The drugs can also do that so I use the computer sparingly.

By that time I'm dressed and it's time for lunch, usually graham crackers and peanut butter, maybe soup or an egg. Then a nap or listening to Talking Books\* reading me a book I requested.

Waking slowly after about ten minutes I get dressed to go for a walk. That may be just to my post box, or down to the store and back, a half mile, or



around the block, a mile. This depends on the weather and how my body is feeling that day. Back from my walk perhaps I will have another ten minute nap. Somewhere in there I will take my blood pressure with a wrist cuff measurement, walk over to my mailbox to check my mail, begin to prepare my supper. Listen to the local news, have my cranberry pill and decussate, turn on the TV for the Rachel Maddow Show, other political comments, maybe watch a DVD. At nine I turn off the TV and go into my bedroom where I have my computer, read and answer e-mail or do keying-in when I've got something I've written.

I always hand-write my articles to begin with. At ten I'm in bed reading or listening to the radio, taking my meds—the two I took in the morning at ten, plus Amiodarone and Amlodipine. Turn out the light.

Two years ago this was not my routine but my racing heart and three trips to the emergency room changed my life considerably. For one thing for the first two trips I was uninsured and the doctor at the ER did not admit me to the hospital under Medicare A, which would have only cost me the co-pay of under a thousand dollars and I was left with a hospital bill of five thousand dollars which I have been paying back. The third trip was covered by Medicare A since I was admitted to the hospital. Meanwhile I enrolled in Medicare B at two-hundred-seventy dollars a month and Medicare D, which varies depending on the supplier. These bills have certainly cut my shopping down but I make a budget every month and I'll have the hospital paid off by June.

My social life has been cut down to some extent. I have to pace myself, rest, not just go barreling through as was my MO pre-racing heart. Learn to deep breathe when needed.

There are doctors visits: my GP and sometimes my cardiologist. Since I gave up driving and sold my car at eighty, I've depended on kind friends to take me to those appointments. I have a pharmacy which delivers my drugs.

Up until six months ago there was a corner grocery I could walk to to buy my food with a monthly trip to the CO-OP, Now it's all CO-OP.

Things I don't do much anymore: play my guitar, though I do sing. Take photographs with my digital camera and process them in Photoshop, write long e-mails. All of these take energy which I no longer have as I adjust to the drugs. Adjusting has been the hardest part of this heart which wants to be back in the race. For thirty-six years I've used homeopathic remedies. These are gentle and have no side effects. Moreover they are inexpensive at ten dollars a bottle for two hundred fifty pills. Their principal is to fight fire with fire but in minute amounts. I still use them even with the drugs and they still work.



My favorites are Arnica for sore muscles, Nux for nausea which is drug-related and Cocculus Indicus for dizziness, also drug-related. There are many remedies for specific problems and one shelf of my medicine is devoted to them.

I was sailing along two years ago, walking a mile a day, eating pretty much healthy foods. My favorite meal is rice, veggies, and baked salmon or chicken loaf, all of it steamed. With three trips to the ER I was knocked off my perch so to speak. I no longer felt that I was invulnerable.

I wrote this in my journal three weeks after I had been admitted the last time to the ER.

December 27, 2007

It is quite a shock to be suddenly old, not a gradual sinking into old age but BOOM I am there needing care, needing emergency rooms, hospitalization, Home Health, a cardiologist. Me who never experienced the loss of energy except from the flu and its recuperation.

I had a series of shocks in 2007: The selling of my darkroom contents in Oregon. Mentally I know it had to happen but emotionally I wasn't ready. Getting through my attraction was difficult. I knew relationship wasn't practical but the heart continues to hope even at the end of life. So two shocks on the heart, an accumulative emotion.

The mind accepts, the heart does not. She breaks a little, has damage to the left ventricle, A small, leaking away of the blood before the valves close. Body and mind are tied together no matter how I would separate them.

The shock of rejection of friendship though she doesn't realize what she has done to me. The phrase "Be still my heart" applies here when the heart is racing out of control, my doctors trying to put the right balance of chemicals into my blood stream to quiet my heart.

The shock of recognizing that my life will never be the same as it was before November. I am now living on borrowed time with weakness, with acceptance of hand held showers, "hat" on the toilet seat, grab bars. Occupational Therapists who arrange these things.

Living with the confusion the meds have created. This is especially hard for me who has always lived in my mind, sensation, spatial sensing taken for granted.

Should I be crying—probably, but I'm not accustomed to crying. Instead I'm shaking—sometimes or a lot. Some times just a tremor, part of the drug scene but also from the motor center.

I have lived into old age to be met by all the alternatives to dying, and this is another shock. There are other ways to die more painful than a racing



heart, which in itself people don't die of. But the runaway heart can simply wear itself out.

So I'm taking the meds to keep all things calm. But I am so tired, so lost in a fog after blood pressure pills. Also a dull shock so that I am hardly able to function for hours at a time. This is my plaint for today. My sorrow for my old self I had up to November.

\* \* \* \* \*

So where am I in 2009? Much stronger—I've come through two Novembers and many drug changes in order to find the right balance for blood pressure and heart, and hopefully this time we've got it right.

I'll never be seventy again, when I was going to college full-time working for a Masters in Theatre Arts, but I'm happy to be living the life I have now, and the journey is not yet over.

\* Talking Books, Audio, is available to anyone disabled, through the Library of Congress.



Matu Feliciano

### *How Do I Repay You*

*How do I repay you, my love*

*For what you have given me  
Has lasted over 50 years or more*

*All this time has gone on  
Without you*

*I never forgot the lessons of love  
Even now I write what I learned from you*

*My soul was filled with compassion that I learned from you,  
my love*

*Had I known then what I know now*

*What I know now  
I didn't know then  
You left me a life of loving you*

*A mind that opened to the world around me*

*You took my mind away from personal suffering  
You filled my mind with justice and why it was important*

*I was 12 years old  
You were 14*

*I am forever knowing what love is  
Because of you  
Moduephue*



Matu Feliciano**Temple***It's Sunday**I get a call asking me, who's playing at El Rico today?**My answer is always the same**I don't know, I just go to Temple**Que se yo**Las Diosas estan velando**Fever for the dance**Comida por La Alma**Menenla**Seniendo la fersa del baile sensual**Salsera del corpo santa**Ritmo de las mujere que quieren passion**Passion del movimiemento**Las sinturas pa los cielos**Los labios Boricua**Besos santa**Manos que guardan la llave**At El Rio**We have what has become the Latin Quarter, west coast**And of course extended family**Representing all of Latin American lesbianas**The passion for salsa has become our drug of choice**Like peyote, yohimbe, y un palito de ron**Our ancestors insist we remember the dance**The baile de su parente, Taina*



*Everytime we dance  
We come closer to understanding  
Our beginnings  
We acknowledge our survival*

*Most of all we know who we are*

## APPRECIATIONS TO BOOKSTORES

*Antigone Books* in Tucson, Arizona

*Bird and Beckett Bookstore* in San Francisco, California

*Bloodroot Bookstore* in Bridgeport, Connecticut

*Charis Books* in Atlanta, Georgia

*Food for Thought Books* in Amherst, Massachusetts

*Giovanni's Room* in Philadelphia

*In Other Words Bookstore* in Portland, Oregon

*Laurel Bookstore* in Oakland, California

*River Reader Bookstore* in Guerneville, California

*People Called Women Bookstore* in Toledo, Ohio

*Toronto Women's Bookstore* in Toronto, Canada

*True Colors Bookstore* in Minneapolis, Minnesota

And other bookstores that order through Ubiquity Distributors





*Photo of Gaye Adegbalola by Cathy Cade 2008*

Gaye Adegbalola

## Civil Rights vs Queer Rights

I have known oppression all my life: as a black in the segregated south as a poor person, as a woman, as a single parent, as a lesbian. By far, the most severe has been the oppression of color. My ancestors were raped from Africa, families separated and sold, my language and culture stolen. My name stolen. My first identity is shaped by my blackness.

Yet, many of the struggles and indignities I have faced as a lesbian are similar to those I've faced in my struggle for black civil rights. Briefly I will share a few of the similarities. I should note here that I will use the word "queer" to represent the GLBTQ community inclusively.

First, both black oppression and the oppression of queers are justified by the Bible. Yes, it says that slavery is okay and that the master can keep and sell the children. The Bible also says that the homosexual is an abomination and should be put to death. Yes, it's all right there. Yet, it also says that adulterers shall be put to death, that non-virgins before marriage should be executed, that divorce is not permitted, that married men can have concubines, that if you have riches, you won't enter the kingdom of heaven. You see, this beautiful book can be selectively used to oppress anyone.



Secondly, the struggles are identical in that the oppression is legislated. Think about the many Jim Crow laws which legalized discrimination. Laws kept schools segregated, prevented blacks and whites from marrying, kept blacks from being protected from hate crimes. Now, current laws prevent queers from hate crimes, prevent partner visitation in hospitals, prevent us from leaving our social security or hard-earned pensions to our partners—laws even prevent nursing home rights and military recognition. It's not about whether your church will accept me—that's a question of faith—it's about whether I have the same civil rights as everyone else. If I pay the same taxes, I should have the same civil rights. The law denies me hundreds of rights.

Both struggles have had its share of martyrs: Emmitt Till, Medgar Evers, Malcolm and Martin. So, too, there's Harvey Milk and Matthew Shepherd and Brandon Teena. Both struggles require courage to speak up, to stand up—they require the courage of our convictions. As with the black struggle, many queers fear retribution—loss of jobs, loss of family, and hate crimes. And, just as blacks needed white allies, queers need straight allies—we need allies of good conscience. Indeed, we must foster worldwide allies and work to end worldwide oppression.

Let us not forgot the name calling—coon, buckwheat, sambo, nigger; dyke, faggot, sinner, abomination. We are made to feel inferior. Eleanor Roosevelt said that “no one can make you feel inferior without your permission.” But basically our inferiority has been beaten into us. Simply put, from day one black has been made to represent evil and ugliness—death is black, devil's food is black and angel's food, of course, is white. My flat nose and nappy head were called ugly. And, simply put, from day one, our queer physical images and gender identities have been stereotyped and ostracized. Until I embraced the beauty of my blackness, I could not throw off the cloak of inferiority. Until I embraced the beauty of my queerness, I could not throw off this particular cloak of inferiority. I have no shame. I can look my adversaries in the eye and be proud of my own self worth and dignity.

And, of course, there are many differences to the respective struggles. Briefly, I'll share a few examples:

First, the biggest difference is you don't have to tell your mother you are black. Automatically, with the black struggle, your mother and your family had a full understanding. You didn't have to worry about losing your family. For the most part, in the black community, you couldn't pass. But many queers can easily pass. If all of us had the courage to step forward,



families would change, legislation would change, society would change. Most blacks do not have to live the biggest lie. Many queers are called "sinners," but is it not a sin to lie? To me, the biggest sin of all would be to live one's entire life as a lie.

Another major difference in the struggles is how "sex" is placed in the forefront of the queer struggle for civil rights. The word "homoSEXual" is said in such a way that it's all about sex. Many folks talk about one's orientation as though it is something one can change. Just as I cannot change my blackness, I cannot change my orientation. If I could, would I ever choose a life so very difficult??

I could go on, but I'll conclude with one final, but BIG difference: the queer struggle doesn't have any real protest songs like the black civil rights struggle—or if so, I haven't heard them. So, of course, I wrote one. Whether we are closeted by our sexuality or perhaps by abuse or mental illness or poverty—whatever might make us fearful and shameful, it is my hope that this song will be a song of freedom for all people!

### *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 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*



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

Repeat 1st verse





*Photo of Avotcja by Cathy Cade*

Avotcja

**This Sister Ain't Quitting!!!  
Or  
Life Dodgin' the Margin of Acceptable Risk \***

*Been living my life on borrowed time  
Going to sleep exhausted & I still wake up feeling tired  
Beat up & almost knocked down from doing the MS\* shuffle*



Got tossed around, tricked, caught up & sucked into  
 What could be my own demise, disguised by  
 An innocent looking smile on the iron jaws of science  
 (And any fool knows that science never lies)  
 But one taste of truth  
 Forced me to look at their toxic delusions & BLAAAM!!!  
 I opened my mouth & saw the fake beauty of  
 All that Mercury staring back at me  
 Sitting there ... just as cold & bold as it wanted to be  
 An enemy had moved in & made itself at home in my teeth  
 I was caught, entrapped by a medical fantasy, a Venus Flytrap &  
 Now all "their" pretty mercury's really got a hold on me  
 Even after all my shuckin' & jiving & ducking & denying &  
 Trying' to make every kind of outlandish bargain with God  
 There's still no place I can hide, 'cause  
 I'm still waking up tired & still finding myself riding  
 In the Margin of "their" Acceptable Risk  
 Acceptable? ... By who's definition?  
 Marginal? ... Compared to what?  
 Me? ... Are "they" really talking about me? ... Not this Sister!!!  
 Uh, Ugh! ... Can't be! ... Not me! ... But who?  
 Watch your back, cause there's always some mad scientist  
 Cooking up some new strange brew in his cauldron of doom &  
 Dr. Strangelove wants to try it all out on you  
 "Oh no, can't be!" ... "Not here in the land of the free!"  
 "That kind of stuff just doesn't happen today! But.....?"  
 Dodging the Margin is acceptable ... to who???  
 When science is God, the margin gets hazy  
 It's a racket ... A scam! ... It's a multi-million dollar game  
 The whole concept is inhumane, it's madness, completely insane  
 It's crazy!!!  
 "The Margin of Acceptable Risk"  
 Is anywhere the powers that be, want it to be &  
 They want "it" anywhere there's a profit to be made, it's all about  
 Money, money, money all the way to the grave  
 Like the so called benevolent syphilis experiment in Tuskegee  
 Only this time "their" experiment is me &  
 It's as moveable & obscene as a corporate baron's morality &  
 As clean as the untested "miracle of "their" Estrogen dreams  
 As unasked for & unnecessary as the cruel gift of Agent Orange &  
 As evil as dumping on unsuspecting Farmworkers  
 Sitting like ducks, stuck, getting sprayed picking crops



This is a nightmare in real time!!!  
 And unfortunately, this time it's my time  
 The "Margin" is a very profitable lie ... it's as sick, as sick can go  
 Look at me, I'm living proof, all this drama ain't no joke  
 It's anything "the scientific community" claims it to be &  
 It's whatever "they" claim it to be & as long as it's done for  
 "Their" financial gain, in the name of "their" progress &  
 The only real casualties are you, our neighbors & friends & me  
 Seems to be, The Margin of Acceptable Risk is  
 Whatever "they" can get away with & they" get away with it  
 All the time!!!!!!!  
 So here I be ... still tired ... almost whipped  
 Caught up & all wrapped up  
 Locked in the temple of some invisible "madman's" technology  
 Just one more insignificant waste of "their" corporate space,  
 Another loud mouth expendable Artist  
 A "marginal" target sitting in the center of "their" bullseye  
 But, I refuse to go out living my life like some sacrificial lamb  
 In The Margin of "their" Acceptable Risk  
 Just a new age human receptacle, a toxic waste dump on legs  
 Hidden away in some unethical, but scientifically acceptable deception  
 I don't know what "they" been smokin, but my life ain't no joke &  
 As long as there's one of us strong enough to write this Poem,  
 I'm gonna be a thorn in all "their" self righteous myths  
 This Sister wasn't born to quit & even though  
 I still wake up tired & MS may steal some of my fire,  
 I plan to live my life right up 'til the day that I die & I know  
 MS may eventually get the best of me, but until  
 The White Citizen's Council unanimously elects  
 A Blue/Black man Imperial Grand Dragon of the Ku Klux Klan  
 The Margin of Acceptable Risk will continue to be  
 Completely unacceptable!!!!!!!

*\*Multiple Sclerosis*

© 8/2002



Antonieta Gimeno

## Reflections at the Borders / Reflexiones de Un Ser Fronterizo

In 2003 I'm heading home for my annual visit. Home: A word, a site, a memory that still provokes discomfort and puzzlement still at 61 years of age. But I am attached to it, whatever it is. I feel I am already there sitting at the Newark airport. Many Mexicans like me are checking in and waiting for flight 1970 leaving at 4:55 pm for Mexico City. Their faces, eyes, hair, skin color and speech speak of the real Mexican. Me, I am wearing my Mexicaness in my sleeve. My queerness and old age is what people will see. But however we look, this Mexicaness, these seres fronterizos speak of traditions (good and questionable), values, contradictions, expectations; our eternal longing to belong and our struggle and desire to be self sufficient.

*I am many languages and cultures  
I came out from my mothers tongue  
And I enter into another  
Holding one, crocheting the other  
Making loops and turns  
In and out, like the waves of the turquoise ocean  
In this path I walk in many unknown lands  
Always a visitor, always belonging*

### Part I Toña La Pelona/Toña the Skin Head

I have a picture of myself at 4 years of age. I have no hair; that is, my head has been shaven. This is one of these traditions, when parents find lice, out goes your hair.

I'm wearing corduroy overalls and I'm riding my red tricycle as a cowboy. The absence of hair made the presence of my amber eyes the biggest feature of my face. My parents' friends would say: Toni es todo ojos/Toni is all eyes! Toni? All eyes; serious; questioning.

As I got older, I would look at myself, the texture of my hair, the color of my skin. I would then look at my father, a Spaniard who had migrated to Mexico, as a refugee of the Spanish Civil war; a tall white man with black straight hair and dark brown eyes. I would ask myself: Why don't I look like him? Hell, come to think of it why didn't I look like my mother who was a beautiful dark brown skin woman, with wavy hair, who turned out



to be from El Salvador, as I found out many years later? My two brothers, younger than me, one looked like my father and the other one like my mother. As if actors in a telenovela, my mother gave my aunt Esther, who lived in Guatemala, a photo of my “real” father, in her dying bed: A skinny, brown skin, wiry, curly hair (like mine), hazel eyes (like mine), handsome man. His face shaped in a triangle with a prominent chin, like mine. I am resting on his left shoulder. The background is a building in Panama. This was my “real” father: A Mexican. His mother, my paternal grandmother was Mexican. His father, my paternal grandfather was English from who knows where. I’m assuming from the Caribbean.

Around the age of 9, I started going to the beauty parlor. That is my mother would take me as if in an annual pilgrimage. The mission: straightening out my curls. Why? It was a well kept secret who my real father was. My mother had agreed to hide or delete anything that would uncover the craftily constructed story of my origins, which involved some of hers.

I still remember the name and smell of the product manufactured in the U.S, a powerful cream called Posners, which would relax my hair and made it look bouncy and beautiful, but only after I set it in rollers. Otherwise my hair was a pitiful mangle of rubber-like strings, smelling of lye. I would sit very still, facing the mirror watching the beautician apply the cream, with heavy rubber gloves. Once my whole head was covered with the cream, she would comb and comb and comb until my hair was saturated. At this point my head was throbbing with heat and pain. Months later I would still have bleeding scabs from the burns.

Fast forward. I am watching Spike Lee’s “Malcolm X”, played by Denzel Washington. During a scene Spike is applying a similar cream to Denzel’s hair. When he realizes there is no water to rinse it off, Denzel is forced to use the water from the toilet to stop the burning pain. The shit burns bad, I know! I also know exactly how his new “planchado” hair made him feel. I am not comparing myself to Malcolm in his greatness. But regarding our hair and all its meanings, we were soul mates.

During one of my first visits home, after I had migrated to the US, I returned home with a full fledged afro a la Angela Davis. The sky fell on earth. My mother was in shock, mortified. “Antonietta, she said, you can’t wear your hair like that here. What are people going to say? meaning “people will think you’re black and I will have to tell you the truth.” Letting my afro grow was an instinctual act to find out who the hell I was.

The history of our internalized racism is an infamous chapter yet to be fully acknowledged by most Mexicans. The exploitation and decimation of



Indigenous people by the barbarian conquerors has been well documented. And yet, their treatment today, by the government and many nationals is of unspeakable violence. Thousands of Afro descendants, most of them brought in bondage to the shores of the port of Veracruz, remain invisible actors of that history and national life.

*Toña the skin head  
The one with amber eyes  
Opened in amazement  
Of fear, of restless inquiry  
Only eyes, serious like a philosopher  
With the signal on her forehead  
Sitting on a cold border wall  
Dividing the sea  
An island, two continents, maybe three  
Three travelers  
Who like terrified ghosts scream  
To silence the secret of your birth  
This silence, the lie to conceal your own  
Infant's cry on the Island of Kunas and Africans  
Is a bleeding wound  
Marking your tender soul  
Making you a gypsy, a permanent traveler  
A border-body  
Always searching, digging, retching, reinventing, creating  
Remembering  
Reconstructing, piece by piece that event of  
December 28 of 1942*

## **Part II Antonieta**

Sitting behind a group of three Mexican women, I overhear their cantar conversation. Their “singing tones” and the expressions they used, remind me of my connection to my Mexicaness, my history; it confirms that I also have a past, a root, however truncated, however distorted, planted in a physical place, in a particular geography: El Zócalo and its majestic Cathedral and the National Palace in the heart of downtown; Paseo de la Reforma, one of the longest avenues in the city, ending in La Plaza de las Tres Culturas, where a massacre occurred in 1968, at the hands of the government, when I had just left the country; La Alameda, a park for



families and lovers, and my favorite spot to eat my lunches when I was working as a beautician in 1959; Colonia Narvarte and Del Valle, two neighborhoods from my childhood; Coyoacán, where Frida Kahlo and I lived at different times; camiones, part of our transportation system which I began to use at the early age of 10. The history behind these memories defines both my belonging and my alienation. The fragile thread of culture that unite us, breaks or tears a little when your own people say: "You don't speak like a Mexican;" or "you don't look like a Mexican."

It is 2007. I am now 65. Under the hood of my black coat, as I walk the streets of New York in El Barrio, I look into peoples' eyes and search, sometimes quickly, sometimes languidly for their acknowledgment. Mexicanas y Mexicanos, el pueblo. When they smile at me or address me in Spanish, without an effort on my part, is re-affirming. The thread, the national umbilical chord gets tugged a little and I don't feel totally alienated. I belong to them and they belong to me even though in many ways we may have nothing in common. Or do we?

*I am alone, but don't feel lonely  
The stars, the moon, the sea and the sky accompany.  
I am their daughter  
I'm not alone. Thousand stories of women who have suffered  
Struggled for survival, planting trees  
Writing about the unthinkable, the unnamable  
Loved with total commitment, even if it was only for 5 years  
Gave birth to themselves and their continuation  
Laughed until tears rolled down  
Watering the souls of incredulity  
Made love with ecstasy, for the pleasure of it  
And have done what they were told they couldn't do  
I'm not alone. Those that love me, walk by my side  
Returning from my stroll  
I am happy  
Of human absence, the solitude of the house  
I am my best companion  
With my thoughts  
My tired body  
And the barking of dogs*

As an elder lesbian, I am aware and more comfortable with my difference. And with it I throw friendly ribbons to those who want to grab them, to



strangers, people who see me in the street. Most don't give a fuck about me. Every now and then somebody will smile, sometimes in response to my smile.

Older women greet me as if they knew. There isn't very much that they don't know and I am sure that our age we could share, in spite of the rivers that divide us, the mountains that surround us, the rocks, the walls with barbed wire, the deserts covered with blood, frozen, with tracks of coyotes who rape and murder, who get paid with fear salary, who are executioners of the ones we call imperialists. All mercenaries.

The North, at the border, where life hangs like saggy dirty laundry, human life, where a girl cries, floats in the water until she reaches the other side. Alone. Alone. And she will get up, rise up to become a giant, an artist, a community rebel organizer, a heroine of daily work, a maquiladora, a housekeeper, a driver for rich white people; an elder who makes delicious bread and tortillas, does laundry and ironing to perfection.

And at the end of the day, this sister will drink to feel silly; she wears lipstick, dyes her hair and in the darkness of the night, and in temperatures of 12 degrees, she leaves her children asleep in a makeshift room, opens the door, into the freezing wind to feel her brown anesthetized body, offering her young body to a sad old man, to cover essential expenses.

All of this to say, that these old women and I would have a lot to talk about.

Men look at me intrigued. They wonder who I am or what I am, where I come from. They run their lecherous eyes up and down. To most of them, I am a foreigner, a whore, somebody at the margins.

*Border  
Stone over stone  
Building possibilities  
A nest  
Once occupied  
Where water rests hidden in the crevice of a black rock  
After a torrential rain*

*Tears also strike like this  
A rod in the middle of the day  
Her hand striking  
Scratching the face of the enemy*

*Now I sit here  
On a rock*



*A stone that once was  
Where soup and sweat lodges used to happen  
But I can't dance  
My feet kick the dirt of a long lonely road  
I am lost in the night  
And my coat sags with holes of hunger  
Eating my heart that now shrinks.*

*I see a bird in another island  
And calls me with a faint melody  
My mother's lullaby  
Border home is now my body  
And the stars of the night  
Crown me with their diamonds  
I bleed in the hollow ground.*

### Antonieta Part III

- How may I help you señor?
- I want a Burger King meal.
- Anything else?
- That's it
- Gracias señor!

I am wearing my “rapper”, felt green hat over my shaven head. I am wearing green pants and my leather jacket. My queerness is dressed in this particular way today. I don't aspire to be a man. But when the young man working at Burger King, calls me señor with a very sweet voice, I can't help but smile and don't question or challenge his assumption.

Later, when I enter the women's bathroom, an older woman looks at me in shock. I see the fear in her eyes. I may be a rapist.

“Is this the women's bathroom,” she asks for fear she has made a horrible mistake. “Indeed it is” I answer gently and reassuringly. Her eyes follow me as she keeps a good distance from me.

During the last Latin American Lesbian Feminist conference of 2004 in Mexico City, I was facilitating a workshop on issues affecting older lesbians. I called it: *Ripe Fruit How Delicious!* or something to that effect. Before the workshop began a “sister” and I got to talking:



- Where are you from, she asked.
- I 'm Mexican, I responded plainly.
- Funny. You don't look Mexican. You look like a foreigner.
- What makes me look like that? I was playing it smart.
- Your little hair, your outfit...

Her comment hurts like a little dagger. I tried to not fall apart. I wanted to feel part of the Mexican lesbian universe. But this of course was a little absurd. I'm not because I don't live here anymore. I don't belong. Vengo de las Gringolandias, so this makes me a tourist, an outsider, a suspect. I'm Mexican, visiting my original homeland maldita sea!

Later on I thought of a question: Aren't millions of people, lesbian and immigrants, a bit like me?





Marjorie Norris

### ***This Is My Autobiography***

*I was well into my 20s before I considered myself a woman,  
 Raised in the 50s to anticipate marriage and babies  
 Despite my body's urges which I quelled as Mama  
 Had told me. In the 60s back to the land and granny squares  
 Were in vogue, but I lusted after education and life experience  
 Amid the babies and the garden and the putting up of  
 Tomatoes and pickles. Experience in the local feminist  
 Bookstore was more than Women's Studies predicted:  
 It was separatist and radical, and we had our collective  
 Meetings under the watchful eye of Chairman Mao,  
 Each box of paper clips, each book was ordered  
 Carefully. We had little money but our eyes were  
 On the prize, a radical feminist literature offered  
 To all classes and colors, to all women gay or  
 Straight and their children. In Buffalo, New York  
 On Fillmore Avenue and then on Greenfield Street,  
 We had children's birthday parties at Emma,  
 the women's bookstore named after Emma Goldman,  
 with prizes of comic books on African American  
 (Afro-American then) heroes and heroines, and  
 posters about the nuclear family busting out of its  
 chains. I busted then, it was the 70s, and I was  
 ready for the unity and lust of women, embracing  
 some of the rhetoric, but knowing the body had  
 to inform one's desires, so my kids were raised  
 in an open fashion, one of belief in toughness  
 and love. Our life was characterized by Nestle's  
 and Libby's boycotts so that babies would  
 not be deprived of mother's milk, our eyes  
 were on the third world because we knew  
 at base we lived in it. We were citizens  
 of the world, but not the United States, not  
 after Vietnam, we couldn't be, it was hard  
 to put my hand over my heart during any  
 anthem that had to do with power and war,  
 as all anthems did. But do not misunderstand:  
 I carried the acculturation of my 50s nurturing*



Into this more open mix, stood on the ground  
 Of its ambivalence yet growing power, and  
 later I would discover other relevant  
 companies of women through writers' groups,  
 Feminist Women Writers Workshop in Ithaca,  
 WomonWrites in Atlanta, having met Cheryl  
 Hopkins who ran Pride in North Carolina  
 During Jesse Helms, and Corky Culver,  
 That Melrose, Florida, woman of words  
 And guitar and maker of diversity films:  
 It is to them that I owe my becoming,  
 Any perceived limitations long behind me,  
 All joy has been mine to be lesbian,  
 Feminist, and to possess my own  
 Two-headed woman: a radical  
 With sweetness on her plate, not  
 Bitterness, but molten power.  
 I have embraced the world,  
 And it is mine, or so I feel, now age 64.





Photo of Sharon Raphael by Cristina Vegas

Sharon Raphael

## Ageism and Lesbophobia

*Presented at The OLOC Gathering, August 2006 in Durham,  
North Carolina by Sharon Raphael, Ph.D. Professor Emerita,  
California State University Dominguez Hills*

Old Lesbians Organizing for Change (OLOC) is in an unusual position to carry on the tradition of its founders and early pioneers, women like Barbara MacDonald, Baba Copper, and Shevy Healy who saw prejudice toward old people from the unique position of being feminists and Lesbians. Standing outside the traditional heterosexist fold, these women were able to see the importance of resisting stereotyped ideas of what old women and in this case what old Lesbians should be and do with their lives in spite of the great obstacles involved in living in an ageist and sexist society. The purpose of this panel is to challenge and encourage all of us to continue to fight lesbophobic, ageist, and sexist thinking and behavior that might get in the way of our leading fulfilling and creative lives.



These are some of the traps we can fall into that can keep us from being the Old Lesbians we would like to be, free to make our own choices about our destinies and purpose in life.

One big trap I would like to mention is the Invisibility Trap. It has been pointed out by observers of aging that old people in general are not seen as sexual beings, the idea of sexuality and oldness does not sit well with younger people because they are under the assumption that oldness and sexuality are mutually exclusive. Women with grey hair and wrinkles tend to all be viewed as helpless grandmotherly figures.

Some Old Lesbians use this burden to their advantage, avoiding a kind of visibility that might make them in certain situations vulnerable to Lesbophobia. On the other hand, consistently avoiding visibility as Lesbians can work at cross purposes with the identity we have about who we are and how that identity may affect what we want to do with our lives in later life. Each Lesbian must choose for herself how far up the visibility road she wants to go.

Another trap to avoid is confronting the ageism that exists in the LGBT community itself. Although changes have taken place in part as a result of the work OLOC has done on this issue, there is a need for old Lesbians to resist and be aware that younger Lesbians and Gay men and others in our community do have prejudices and fears about aging that spill out and sometimes affect our lives in negative ways. In group settings we often are not treated as equals. Barbara McDonald in her book *Look Me in the Eye* drew our attention to the practice of younger Lesbians putting us on pedestals and using us as the Mothers they would have wanted, a practice that keeps both young and old from having equal and healthy relationships.

The Sexism in our Society is a trap that is hard to overcome but not hard to fight against and be aware of. Women have second class status and Lesbians even less status; therefore if we add the category "old" to that it translates to triple stigma and then if one goes on to add a few other categories i.e. race, class or disability we then can see the stigmatization factor becoming very weighty indeed. One reason we form groups like OLOC is to change the way society sees these stereotypical ways of classifying people.

Lesbophobia is an ism that affects us most profoundly as we grow older and Old. It is the reason many Lesbians avoid institutions that serve older adults out of fear of either being discovered or being mistreated or both. Not having the safeguards of marriage equality affects the security for those of us who have partners. Discrimination against Lesbians in assisted care and nursing facilities has been documented.



OLOC is a Lesbian organization that affirms aging and helps us identify in a positive way with the term OLD, which is a powerful idea, a very feminist idea, and an idea that is very unpopular in the world at large. I guess we could call it the so called “real world” but that is relative.

OLOC needs to affirm the term LESBIAN in the same way as we affirm and take on the word OLD. Just as it was true that it was Lesbians who gave the much needed woman power to many aspects of the feminist movement, it is OLD LESBIANS who are intellectually in the vanguard of not only truly understanding what ageism does to Old women but are acting as role models for what to do to avoid the pitfalls of ageism. But the problem is that old women are not listening to us to any large degree in part because of their own Lesbophobia which we must fight not only for our own self interest but also in order to be heard.

Old Lesbians Organizing for Change (OLOC) has a unique opportunity to share what we have learned with the wider world but the first step must be to educate and change ourselves. Once we have integrated all these ideas on a personal level, we can then reach out to the wider world and make a big noise collectively and as individuals.





Photo Credit: (c)1979 JEB (Joan E. Biren) from Eye to Eye: Portraits of Lesbians

## Mabel Hampton

“I advise everyone – you have to live right, and you’re living right if you’re a Lesbian...if I had it to do over again, I would be a Lesbian.”

Excerpt from “*Surviving and More: Interview with Mabel Hampton*” by Joan Nestle. *Sinister Wisdom* 10, (Summer, 1979) p. 22. This interview is also available in *Sinister Wisdom* 43/44 *The 15th Anniversary Retrospective*.



ila Benavidez-Heaster

## **CRONE: An elegantly-aged woman who knows how to cherish life**

Seated in a huge, overly cold meeting room; I huddled over my body, trying to conserve my body heat. Looking around the room, I wondered what I had gotten myself into this time! There was a stage in front of me displaying beautifully crafted artwork and a huge mother drum. And, everywhere I looked there were women, women, women. A wild excitement was in the air.

As I continued to scan the room, I noticed the beautifully hued colors that the women were wearing. They were exuding an energy that was radiating beyond their physical bodies which created a colorful kaleidoscope of living pulsating women. I listened to their voices raised in conversations as it filled the room with a deafening staccato beat.

There were close to 350 women and I only knew two of them and they were buried somewhere within the crowd. At the same time, my native, was deeply recessed within my being as I basked in the soul quenching of my long held thirst. I was soaking in the pure ecstasy of being in the presence of these beautifully aged women.

The year was 1995 and I was at the Crones Counsel in Scottsdale, Arizona. This was my first year and I would soon hear a number of the women say, "Oh you're a virgin." Little did I know "what" I would grow to understand from those words. Sitting, watching, listening; I was basking deeply in the women's energy. Slowly, I began to unfold to the beauty around me.

I had been yearning to attend this women's gathering called the Crones Counsel. And, now, I was finally in the room with the Crones. Oh my! I had heard the name Crones Counsel in many of my women's circles and inside my head I had unconsciously translated it to Crones Council. A great deal of time would pass before I understood that the word was "Counsel." And, in the years to come, I would grow in understanding of what "Counsel" meant.

As I continued to look around the room, a stunningly statuesque woman dressed in a colorful flowing robe walked forward, stepped onto the stage and began to strike her beaters on the mother drum. A deep, slow measured, reverberating "thump, tha thump, tha thump" began to fill the room. As the heartbeat of the drum permeated the room, the staccato of



voices fell into a hush and the performance began. A new woman stepped onto the stage. I watched the long slendered exquisitely sculpted body of the storyteller, I found myself listening deeply, when I felt a jolt in my body. Something was off! The amazing images that were flashed before our eyes were of young, slender, women. And, the lone performer with her beautifully choreographed movement was telling the story of the young women. "Oh, oh..." I heard myself mutter internally. "Where are the images of the old women?"

I could feel the tension building in that overly refrigerated room. And, I felt the cold seep even deeper into the marrow of my bones as my own tension was building. To further compound the situation, I was unable to let go of my internal despair around the lack of images of older women. The disjuncture created by the watching the living pulsating women and seeing the art images of the young women was disconcerting. At the same time, I became acutely aware that the energy of the group had gone into a lockdown.

The beautifully crafted performance came to an end. Silence! The women around me were not moving. Were they thinking similar thoughts to mine? I was stunned. And, I continued to storm about inside my head trying to make sense of what I had just experienced. I don't remember hearing any applause. I know that I would not applaud because I was too deeply submerged in my thoughts that were battling within my mind. Over and over my internal mantra chanted "Isn't this to be the place where older women are to be seen and revered?"

At that point an exquisitely stunning older woman stepped onto the stage and began to speak. The women were clapping, it was clear that she was a woman of high regard. I sensed that she was "Bwana" the leader of the way. I was unable to give her my full attention because I was still preoccupied with the thoughts of what had just taken place so I missed much of what she said. I sensed that she was welcoming us and she told us her name which flew right over my head. Slowly, I began to focus on this full bodied, white haired woman and noticed that she exuded a fluid tender loving grace. How beautifully she projected telling us clearly, smoothly, and gently that this would be the time for storytelling and how it would work.

Later I was to discover that this woman was Shauna Adix, a woman I would grow to love profoundly. But in the moment, I was mesmerized by her graciousness and my other thoughts began to recess to the back part of my brain. She opened the storytelling by asking who was willing to start. There was absolute silence in the room. No movement. No one stirred. The group appeared to be mired.



And, without thought, my arm went up of its own volition and words flew out of my mouth: "I'll give you a kick start." Good grief, who said that and who was leaping up the steps of the stage? There was no thought to my actions; I felt like I was being pushed forward. Then I was standing beside the bwana-woman. She looked at me with a softened smile and immensely kind eyes while she offered me a cape, not knowing what to do with it, I did not take it. As I looked deeply into her eyes, I asked, "May I speak in my own language?" She kept a steady look of a loving connection with me and in less than a heartbeat she agreed.

Moving to the front of the stage, I faced the women. Their power was palpable and, at the same time, their energy was tightly constrained. How strange, I was not frightened. I felt embraced by their intensity. Then my body softened of its own accord, I was no longer in my head, no longer thinking. I merged into the body movement of calling in the wind with my being and my voice gave over to tonal sounding. How good my body felt to give over to the beautiful fluidity of the wind. I began to feel a shift in the room. There was a re-opening of the energy that had been locked down. These were the wise women, they got what I am doing. No explanation needed.

I was only up there for probably less than two minutes. I brought the expression to a close. I felt the release in myself, as well as the women in the room, and I jumped off the stage steps. The women erupted, they were standing, clapping, crying, shouting "thank you!" They were yelling at the top of their lungs and throwing wadded paper my way. I would grow to recognize this as a standing ovation but in the moment, I was just trying to get back to my seat. As I sat back down, I had to quickly bend over to cover my head because I was surrounded by a number of women who were hugging and more than exuberantly pounding my back while shouting into my ear "Thank you!" "Yes" and all the words got mangled into an indistinguishable but wonderful appreciation.

As I untangled my new deeply appreciated self from the women, Bwana-woman stepped forward from the back of the stage. She looked at me with shining eyes, I did not hear her words but they felt like they were swaddling me in love. She then called forth the next storyteller. One of the women in the audience walked toward the stage and stepped up to give voice to her story. Now, the stories had begun. I sat back and listened to the women. I began to do a deep soak of their stories. The authentic and genuine reflections of the joy, pain, and struggles of what it means to be alive as a woman. This is the oral tradition that is "my familiar" a recognizable known to the cellular fabric of my body. I was home once again.



I spent the remaining days of the Crones Counsel basking in the wonder of these amazing women, many of them elders and some moving into elderhood. The days sped by at galactic time travel and the Crones Counsel came to a close. As I was leaving the hotel, I was waving and saying good-bye to the many women I had met, when I heard the Orcas Island women saying "Come see us some time." Who... me? Oh my heart was overflowing. Definitely, no longer a virgin, I was open and in full abandonment to love.

Later seated in a booth in the airport restaurant while I waited for my plane, I was madly writing in my journal. I was working through all my tumultuous emotions. Out of the corner of my eye, I noticed two of the crones from the weekend. They were motioning for me to come join them. I was no longer in the shelter of the safe space of the Crones Counsel and had reverted to my reserved shyness. But their warmth was so magnetic that I found myself sliding into the chair beside them.

Conversation came easily with them. At one point they ask me how old I was and I responded with great pride saying that I was 55. They both tenderly chuckled, and with the most delightful melodic purrs said "Oh, you're just a baby!" My eyes flew open along with my heart. Their words were soft and caring and I joined them in their effervescent peals of laughter. When we could stop laughing, I then asked them, "So, how old are you two?" They said in their 80's. Ah, there they were in the full beauty of the well aged. Yes, these were the old women treasuring the vulnerable tender part of my being and I was the younger one soaking in their love. With a lighthearted spontaneity they let me know I was cherished. Now, as I recall that memory, I sense that I had been in "counsel" with these two beautiful crones.

And, I had an epiphany during that time with those two most gracious crones that a Crone is a woman who has aged so elegantly that she knows how to cherish life. The memory is vibrant and stays with me to this day. Yes, being with these two stunningly beautiful old crones, opened me to the moment, and I was gently nudged into cherishing.



Dorothy Fowler

## Savasana

That is the word for corpse in Sanskrit and the name of the resting position following the exertion of yoga exercise. As an elderly preoccupation I've started thinking more about death lately. Perhaps because I underwent heart surgery last year and almost died that it became more clear to me that I had become 81 years old.

I mean it had been perfectly understandable to be 65 or 70 but 81—that suddenly seemed excessively aged. My skin appears to have become perceptibly loose and who knows what unknown changes were taking place in the more hidden internal tissues of my body. The thought occurred to me that more testing at the local HMO where I am a member might uncover some catchable-in-time malaise.

At age 30 I remember that I had already begun worrying in bed at night about whether I was becoming too old to function and still be loveable. Now 51 years later I'm not sure of anything and I no longer worry about an unknown future, the future is now. It is possibly short and marked with unknown conditions and may end with a demise of indeterminate speed. I am hoping that, as certain gerontologists (those who study aging and related activities) say, it is possible to live (and die) as an example of "compressed mortality." That model promotes the idea that if we, the aged, continue to take care of ourselves with good nutrition, physical exercise and with the absence of ongoing disease, we will live along as though nothing will stop us until the moment comes when we will quickly drop dead—a nice idea but when and how?

The life-after-life movements and the promises of religion that reward us with eternal grace if we are deserving enough hold no appeal for me. Like the medieval tomb sculptures at the Cloisters in New York I rather fancy myself wrapped in metal and laid out in a comfortable dyke outfit with my feet resting on the devoted body of my dog, a composite of all the dogs I have known and loved.

The death bed scenes of the 40s American films with movie stars propped up and surrounded by loved ones holding their hands at exactly the moment of death makes me laugh because I know that the most alone experiences any of us will ever have are the singular acts of birth and death.

Still, we have what we share as the aged and that is our variety of conditions, always interesting and a good reason for sharing, social



interaction and support. I notice that what we share as the aged is our variety of conditions, among our acquaintances and what's being done about them and our attitudes towards these breakdowns and about survival itself. Hip and knee surgery are always good for a detailed discussion and the successes and failures of American surgery in hearts and colons gives us hope that our worn out parts may have another chance to function. Also, it turns out, that one of the most important uses of the computer is not just record keeping at the office but what can be shared about who we are and what we can do to help ourselves and each other.

The question about which one will nail us (not on the cross) is the secret of the final experience. Let's hope it will be comfortable and the ultimate experience of a lifetime, something to live and die for.



Sandy Tate

## Vertigo

In her essay "A Slow Walk of Trees," Toni Morrison talks about racism as it affected her grandparents and the African American community.

"And like most black people of my generation, I suffer from racial vertigo that can be cured only by taking what one needs from one's ancestors."

The phrase 'racial vertigo' hit me like a blow to the stomach as I recalled what my ancestors suffered as a result of woman-hating. I can feel the witch burnings—their screams plot a course through my shivering body—their crimes being born female.

My Jewish ancestors suffered from thousands of years of torment, being chased from their villages or countries, only to settle in another place that ghettoized them in yet another way, their crimes clinging to and nurturing a sense of identity that others would not tolerate.

For so many years the crime of being born Lesbian plagued me, closeting me within the confines of the walls of heterosexuality. Lesbian vertigo had me firmly in its grip leaving me wondering what Sapphic ancestors to call on for help. The Second Wave of the women's movement solved that dilemma.

Just as I can call on my ancestors of female and Jewish origin for help, thankfully, today, I can read an endless array of Lesbian Feminist writings that hold and nurture me, their vision breathing life into my thoughts and feelings. When I hear or read of the brave actions of Lesbians the world over it spreads joy, giving me a strong sense of who I am. I can call on my Sapphic ancestors now as well as the huge global network of Dykes who are out, proud and actively pursuing their rights, ensuring that those following in their paths have an ancestral wealth of history to call on for help and guidance. But sometimes the vertigo leaves me wondering who I can call on for guidance while the world continues to subsume the female self.

When I refer to adult females as 'women' I actually get looks of confusion, sometimes followed by derision. Sitting recently with three women well into their seventies, I tell them that I'm surprised they refer to each other as 'guys'; that I find the term insulting. They immediately dismiss my concern and go back to the subject at hand. It seems the word has even spilled over into other countries so that anywhere English is spoken women are rendered invisible under the rubric of 'him'. Even in travelogues, I hear travel guides refer to the tourists as guys. This language is global and has



been fully accepted into many cultures. How can this happen after all the work we've done; after all the brilliant analyses Feminists put forth?

Like a virus that eats its way into a computer, gobbling up everything in its path, destroying valuable information, a virus has been infecting our language, furthering the patriarchal notion of all things being male. The words woman and women are disappearing from the English language, and being replaced by 'guys', a generic word that has always stood for non-women. I suspect that one day dictionaries will pronounce as archaic the words woman and women. When men began working on airplanes and for temporary agencies the word 'stewardess' became obsolete, replaced with 'flight attendant,' and 'Kelly Girls' evolved into 'Kelly Services.' Males are not ever referred to as any name remotely connected with the female sex. Every occupation males enter must be de-feminized as a sign of respect to the men. Not so for women. We are still frequently referred to as mailmen, congressmen, chairmen, etc.

Alice Walker addresses this doublespeak in her essay "All Praises to the Pause."

"It has been despairing to see the ease with which women, after over thirty intense years of Feminism, have chosen to erase their gender in language by calling each other and themselves, "guys." This is the kind of thing one can reflect on during a pause. Are we saying we're content to be something most of us don't respect? Conjure up the image of a guy."

More than once I've heard women calling to their little girls to come along by saying, "C'mon guys, it's time to go." I don't know how mothers can do this to their daughters, and I don't understand how these little girls can grow up to have a sense of themselves as young women when their girlhood has been erased by substituting images of males. Can you hear the loud objections of others if mothers called their young sons girls? Can you get your head around walking into a room filled with men and greeting the audience with "Hi gals"? The room would erupt with indignation. At the very least there would be laughter at the nonsensical notion that males could be included in a class of people whose status is considered beneath them.

Rendering women invisible is not a hate crime. It's just business as usual, like violence against women everywhere. But disrespecting women with language is a violation of women, and exists on the continuum of woman hating. We know it's a part of women hating because it would not be allowed if the opposite were done to males. One reason our language is



saturated with woman hating is because women themselves perpetuate it. Unlike people of color or Jews who don't normally perpetuate hatred of their kind, women fall right in line and foolishly go along with the latest demoralizing depictions of ourselves.

I'm not blaming the victim. I'm saying it's long past the time when we stop allowing the victimization of females to keep infecting the language. It's long past time when women stop referring to themselves as bitches, whores, fat, unlovable, etc. Allowing the innocent-sounding 'guy' word is every bit as denigrating as these other words because it once again sets females up to be 'other' and that 'other' is less than equal. You can't render more than half the world invisible with the language unless that half has already been lowered in stature.

This convenient way of erasing womanhood and femaleness is evident in old movies I watch. It started slowly. You might hear it once or twice in a few movies of fifteen or twenty years ago, but in newer movies and plays it's rampant.

So, how do we stop it? How do we make clear the idea that this is not okay; that this is not to be tolerated? We must speak up about it because this is not the last insult. It is more of the same and will continue to get worse. Violence against women in all forms (and this is one form because it erases our being), has escalated to pandemic proportions. Erasing our femaleness, our womanhood, our sense of who we are results in female vertigo. Until we name this virus for what it is; until we object every time we are diminished; until we say out loud that calling us 'guys' is insulting to our personhood, female vertigo will continue to shadow us.

I challenge the women of the world to start objecting vocally every time they are referred to as guys. I challenge the women of the world to look deeply into their sense of self and see that their self is being disappeared under the convenient and false guise of inclusiveness. When a server comes to a table of women and refers to them as guys I challenge the women to correct that language. When a person trying to sell some people a product refers to them as guys, I challenge the women in the group to speak up and inform the salesperson that they are women. I challenge the women of the world to hold what little ground we have, and to keep pushing at the groundswell of insults that are meant to further demean us.

We are Lesbians and we are also women. We don't often identify ourselves as Dykes in the outside world, so we must hold onto the words women and woman, or we will continue to be identified as 'him'.



Merle Woo

## Currents

*During my lunch break, I walk in the pouring rain,  
from where I work as a secretary  
at Montgomery and Bush  
to East/West Journal  
at Grant Ave. and Washington.*

*Right across the street where my father was a butcher  
at Sang Wo and Co.,*

*I pass 25 banks on Montgomery in a four block walk.*

*I ride up to the third floor of the Empress of China building,  
feeling a bit childish in my father's raincoat,  
a cap and soaking corduroy pants,  
to meet the friendly people of this Chinese American newspaper.*

*Virginia Mei has asked me for my Chinese name,  
so East/West can translate the story of my case into Chinese.*

*But I don't know how to write my name—  
I can only say it.*

*I have brought some calligraphy in black and red crayon,  
hoping that this is it. Long ago, my son Paul had been taught  
some Chinese by his 1st grade teacher, Sue Lim.*

*Virginia laughs at what I brought.  
It says "Good Luck" or something like that.*

*Then she asks me to say my name.  
I say, "Woo Suk Ying."*

*She says, "Hm. Let me try."  
So she grabs a piece of paper and begins to write.*



*As she does so, I remember  
the three dashes here, the little box there.  
She has gotten my name!  
I haven't seen it in years.*

*"How did you know? How did you know?"*

*The people there tease me and say,  
"Oh, she's known you for a long, long time."*

*Virginia says, "It was easy, that's a common girl's name.  
And you said it with the right accent. Just right."*

*How I beamed with pleasure.  
Saying it right.  
My name being a common girl's name.  
Like the Asian American working woman that I am.*

*("Merle" is not a common girl's name because my  
mother didn't want me to be a common girl like  
she was.)*

*East/West is translating the story of my unfair termination  
into Chinese. Benjamin Chan, a translator there, says they  
want as much support for my reinstatement as possible.  
Because I am a "minority and a lady."*

*Yes, indeed, and a lesbian, a unionist, and socialist feminist.  
What are the characters for these words?*

*Virginia says, "Here, let me write your name down on another  
piece of paper for you. Don't lose it now."*

*As I leave, Virginia says, "Thank you for coming in all this rain."*

*I say, "Thank you for giving me back my name."*



*I kept explaining to them:  
I only went to Chinese school for one year and flunked.  
I said, I don't know my name because my mother is Korean.*

*(Passing the buck to my mother.)*

*I said, Oh and I have every intention of learning Cantonese very soon. Sure.*

*Always feeling I have to hide or make up excuses  
when I say I don't understand:*

*"Gnaw emhew gong tong-wah."*

*Students, staff and I got mad and protested when we lost  
Cantonese and Tagalog in Asian American Studies, UCB.*

*Got fired because we protested.  
Got mad when we lost the bilingual ballot.  
Faster and faster losing bilingual/bicultural  
maintenance in the schools.  
College counselors telling Third World students  
not to study bilingual ed.  
because there's no future in it,  
no projected funding.*

*Jesus. And I'm still apologizing.*

*I prefer to walk back to work along Grant Ave.*

*Twice as many art and dry goods stores on Grant  
as banks on Montgomery.*

*I can imagine a wet, poor, Asian humanity  
sandwiched in between these two great historic streets.*



*Christmas carols are piped through every speaker.  
I see young Chinese saleswomen in those empty shops,  
talking to each other in Cantonese,  
as they watch the rain drench Grant Avenue.*

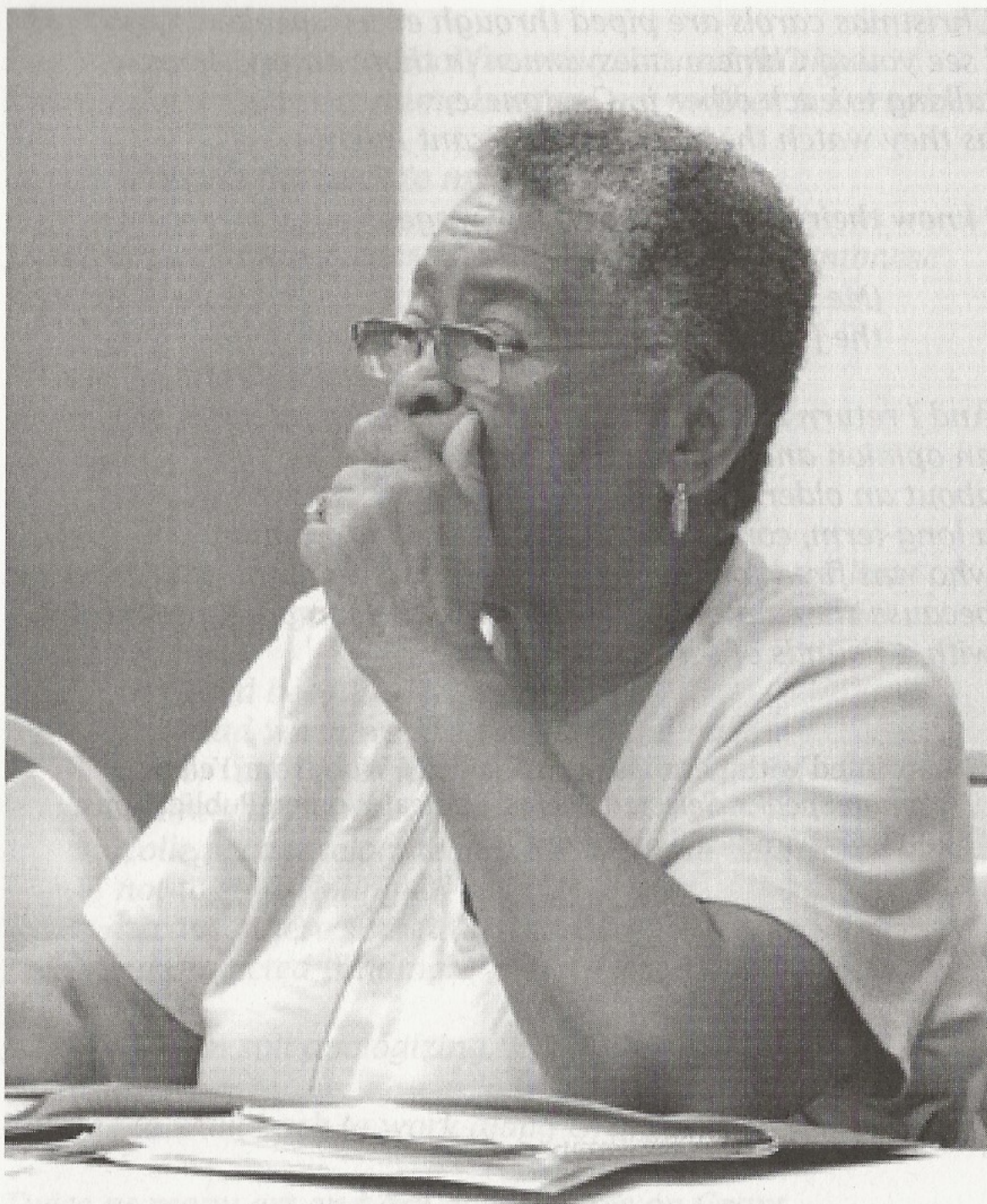
*I know their long hours and low wages.*

*(Me and my comrades are in  
the fight for the long haul.)*

*And I return to the office and finish typing up  
an opinion and award  
about an older white woman,  
a long-term, conscientious, hard-working woman,  
who was fired for just cause  
because she had attempted to leave the company premises  
with 4 pounds of scrap meat.*

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*Photo of Shaba Barnes Photo Credit: Cathy Cade*

Shaba Barnes

## A Dyke by Any Other Name

The year was 1961. I was 26 years old. I had a baby eight months old. My one-year marriage had just broken up. My father, whom I loved dearly and the only one I believed who understood me and loved me unconditionally,



had passed away a few short months earlier. I was told to leave the Muslim Temple # 7 in Harlem because I was blamed for this short-lived marriage. None of the members, including my family and friends, were allowed to even speak to me because divorce was not allowed in the Muslim community. I had changed my birth religion from Judaism to Islam because I could not find other people my age with whom I could identify. I studied Islam and found that their philosophies were similar. I was alone and afraid. I knew I was Lesbian on a soul level but I did not acknowledge it on the physical level. I was feeling like a failure. My mother and one Aunt tried to maintain a relationship with me, but I was in too much pain to see it. Plus they helped me with my children; I had a son in a previous failed relationship who was five years older than my daughter. I got a small apartment, not too far from my aunt and mother. I went thru the motions at work and came home to regrets, loss and pain, to the ghost of past mistakes. I could not face my family that broke the laws of the Temple to just speak with me, no matter our relationship. I visited my children less and less, making excuses so they would not see me broken and depressed. It wasn't just being put out of the Temple; I thought that I had failed my GOD/ALLAH to whom All Praise is due. Islam was my life. I worked for the phone company but did not socialize with any of the employees. I was close to my family and spent all of my free time serving the Temple or Mosque as it is presently called. I felt too ashamed to pray and when I did it was for this purgatory, this hell to end, for my life to end. My family became worried about me. I would go by and visit with my children when I thought no one would be there who would condemn me. This went on for months.

One day I received a call from a cousin, my father's niece Mary. She appeared to be in her late 40s; I never asked her how old she was. I got to tell you, she was always someone I feared. I remember when I was much younger and she used to visit, I was so afraid of her that I would hide under the bed and peep at her. She did not fit the profile of anyone I had ever met. She smoked cigarettes, drank beer and wore a white tee shirt all the time with pants. I heard her talking one day about the time she met and befriended Billie Holiday in jail. She was not graceful as I was told ladies and women were. She talked coarse and her posture was weird to me, a girl child who was taught children should be seen and not heard, and women were to carry themselves in a certain way. No one in my family smoked cigarettes, including my father and other men folk. Of course I did not know at the time she would play a major part in my life and my development into the woman I am today. She wanted to visit me. I did not



think much of it at first. She was a close relative on my Dad's side and I made the assumption that she wanted to talk about him.

I was not far from wrong. She came by one Friday evening with a bottle of wine. I served dinner and we sat and talked about the family, some folks I knew well and some I hardly knew. I actually enjoyed her company and began to relax more than I had felt for some time. The next weekend she called again and asked if she could visit. I said yes but I was mighty curious. I wondered why. Almost as soon as she came through the door, I asked her what the purpose of her visit was. I had enjoyed her visit the previous week but wasn't this too soon for a returned visit. This time she did not pull any punches. She told me that my father had asked her on his death bed to look after me. He told her that I was going to need her one day and she promised to be there for me. My mother had called her and told her about my situation and asked if she would call and talk with me. What! I was astounded. My mother and my dad knew about me all the time and they watched me try marriage after marriage trying to fit in, trying to be the daughter they wanted. That was not enough. She told me of the many Lesbian relationships in my family: two aunts, two cousins. I did not understand. They were all married and living with their husbands, yet they had girl friends too. Some of the girl friends had husbands also and they would double date and visit each other. This was in the early 60s and many older Lesbians were in the closet. I remembered what one of my aunts told me. She said to be careful with a certain friend whom I associated with, that I would not be the same. When I questioned her further, she said to just remember what she said, with no further explanation. Then Mary told me about herself, how she came out, how long she has been gay (as she referred to herself), about her wife, her work and her social life. She taught me that another person could not make me a victim. That is what we do to ourselves. She said too many of us deny our feelings to please another, and we end up alone and miserable. I realized as she was speaking that is what I had done. It just wasn't working. My folks knew, and never said anything. My God knew, my parents knew. I tried to live up to what I thought was their image of me. No more. I busted the closet door down and came out with a vengeance.

My cousin gave me tips on being Butch as she identified me. No, not tips, she gave me the full course. How to care for a girl friend, keep her happy and in love; how to keep another woman from taking her from me or disrespecting me by hitting on me; she taught me how to carry myself, how to dress, what women liked. She even introduced me to one of her



friends, someone her age who taught me everything else. I was angry with my parents for watching me make a fool of myself pretending I loved men. I got married twice and even had two children. I do not regret having my children of course; they are part of my legacy and together they have given me twelve grandchildren and three great grandchildren to date. I soon forgave my folks. They did not talk about man, woman sex to me. How were they going to tell me I was gay?

The next time my Mother saw me, she cried. I always had long hair that I wore natural with cut bangs, I made and wore a twist in the back. I walked in the door with my hair cut to the length I wear it now. I wore a Leonardo Strassi Italian knit sweater, men's slacks and loafers. I stood tall and proud because by now I knew the experience of making love to a woman. Almost overnight, I became a stone butch.

There was a girl in elementary school who I had a crush on. I had seen her from time to time as we grew older but I usually felt clumsy around her and still could not take my eyes off her. Once I hid in the clothes closet at school when we were in the first or second grade. When she came to hang up her coat, I kissed her. She yelled and made a scene so I stayed away from her from then on. I looked her up. I found her. We fell in love, at least I did but there was not happily ever after. She was a beautiful successful singer and worked in nightclubs around town. All of her paying customers were men and I did not fit. It did not last long at all. For awhile I had the best experiences my narrow world had to offer, until the day I realized that I was stuck; each day and night was the same: work, hang out, party, sleep, and spend time with my children. That was it. I decided to move from New York to Los Angeles in April, 1968, get a college degree, settle down with my then babysitter, and maybe become a movie star. I was no longer a stone butch, now I was Gay.

Los Angeles was a good place for me. I should have made that move a long time ago, to get away from my family if nothing else. I could see the disapproval in their eyes although they were not openly critical. My mother worried that I would get into trouble. I was fast tracking with a major Airline now. I traveled the world and got paid for it. I became a spokesperson for the Airline. They even paid my expenses in 1975 to attend the World Conference of the International Federation for the Formation of the Permanent Integration for Women, where I had the honor to share housing with many women from Central and South America. I had a wife and four children now. My son the oldest stayed with my mother in New York. I decided to pursue my ambition to be a nondenominational



minister. It took me six years but I made it. My last year in the Seminary, I was the class President and I gave the Graduation Address. I found that many changes were made in the LGBT community (as it is now called) during the time I was in the seminary; one of them was that now I was a Lesbian. It took me some time to get used to the new description of myself, but I began to wear it like a Greek alphabet, like the sorority that I was a part of.

I kind of pushed the envelope when I came to call myself an Old Lesbian. My friends and family thought something was wrong with me. I was about 52 years old, but I started telling everyone that I was 60. I wanted to be included so badly. That was in 1987.

Here we are in 2009, and I am a proud Old Dyke. My road has been hard. The journey has been long, but whatever I am called, I carry all of the experiences that have made me who I am today. An Old Dyke is an Old Dyke, is an Old Dyke. That's me.



Pat Gilmore

## A Couple

Two old women worked silently in the flooded basement. The only sounds were water splashes and strains of Schubert's Adagio coming from an ancient Zenith permanently tuned to CBC Radio Two. "How thoughtful of them to play one of your favorites, Sue," Kate said, stopping a moment to roll her shoulders.

Sue smiled, brushing her white hair from her forehead. "Yes, isn't it?"

"And the score from my favorite movie, *A Company of Strangers*," said Kate.

"Oh no, don't go there!"

Kate raised her eyebrows and widened her faded blue eyes. "Go where?"

"You know perfectly well, you want to talk about that OLAC thing."

Kate interrupted, "OLOC."

Sue frowned, "Whatever, OLAC, OLOC, I just can't understand exposing our lives now after all these years."

Kate's mouth pursed and she looked down for a moment before speaking. "Yes, all these years of hiding, pretending, masquerading," she paused, "I'm sick of it."

Sue shook her head, "But it still seems so dangerous, so terrifying, so.... Her voice drifted away.

"Oh Sue," Kate stood and reached for her partner.

They moved close to one another in an embrace, kissed slowly at first, then more deeply until Sue said, "I love you so."

"I love you too, dearest, but I regret the lost thirty-five years." Kate took a deep breath and continued, "I think our fifty-year history would have a certain reality if chronicled in the Oral Herstory Project.

The old women silently returned to their work. Kate finished wringing water from a lavender bath towel as the phone rang. "I'll get it," she said.

Sue glanced at the drain, smiling now that the water had reversed direction and was forming downward swirls instead of upward fountains. She stood gingerly, reached for a broom and coaxed the edges of water toward the drain. She looked up as Kate returned.

"That was Jean."

Sue shifted her glance to the drain. Kate's eyes followed. "Thank the Goddess," she said pushing up a sleeve of her red Ohio State shirt.

"You can say that again in capital letters. And Jean?"

Kate rolled her eyes. "Poor Jean's frazzled."



“Hmmmmm, let me guess, not Fred?”

“Didn’t say.” Kate took a step backward to allow Sue to sweep near her scuffed running shoes. “I was thinking that as good friends as we are with Jean, she doesn’t know us.”

Sue continued sweeping, finally she said, “You’re right.”

Kate frowned and nodded her head. “Anyway, I invited her for lunch in a half hour.”

“Good. A sandwich will make the latest Fred caper more palatable,” said Sue watching the last of the water flow toward the drain.

The barks of small dogs interrupted their thoughts.

Kate smiled and rested her broom against the wall. “I’ll let the wee beasties out.”

“O.K.” Sue looked up a moment. “How’s this, you let them out and put three eggs on the stove, I’ll take a shower, make sandwiches, and wait for Jean.”

“Sounds like a plan.” The women smiled at their worn expression.

As she opened the kitchen door, Kate heard eight tiny paws hit the floor and come running. “You sweet girls,” she greeted the Yorkies, watching them bound into the yard.

“Kate.”

She turned at the sound of her name. “Oh, Jean, hi.” Kate walked over to unlatch the gate. Her eyes widened. The “never a hair out of place” Jean was wearing a rumpled silk blouse and strands of hair floated free of her French twist.

“Just letting the dogs out before a quick shower,” Kate said, holding the gate open. “We had water in the basement.” Kate looked out to see the dogs sniffing for new information in their kingdom, “I think those two can stay out.” She walked to the door. “Come on in.”

“I’m early, I know I’m early but I just couldn’t ... couldn’t stay there another minute,” Jean said shaking her head.

“You’re always welcome.” Kate said holding the door open. “Sit down. I’ve got to put some eggs on.”

Jean walked to a platform rocker placed near a window. She sat and looked out. It seemed to Kate that her neighbor was looking for miles yet seeing nothing. She wanted to offer a cup of tea and then excuse herself, hoping Sue was finished and that she could shower and get out of her wet and now chilly clothes. But the anguished look on Jean’s face kept her rooted, sharing Jean’s sorrow.

The sound of steps broke the silence. Sue entered the kitchen, glanced at Jean, then at Kate, and raised her eyebrows. Kate shrugged her shoulders in response. Sue walked over and put her hand on Jean’s arm.



At Sue's touch, Jean looked up, tears welled in her eyes. She bent her head and large drops moved down her cheeks and dripped onto her black sweater. Sue moved a chair next to the rocker and took one of Jean's hands.

Kate walked to the refrigerator, reached up, took down the Kleenex box and placed it next to the crying woman. Jean looked up, her face red, and eyes puffy. She took a tissue and wiped her wet cheeks. "Whatever made me do that? Things aren't bad enough but I come here and make a damn fool of myself." She shook her head.

"Let's have a cup of tea while I make lunch," said Sue.

Kate moved to the cupboard, took out three mugs and placed them on the table as Sue filled the tea kettle.

When the kettle whistled, Sue poured boiling water into a blue china pot.

Jean sighed, "It's Beth."

Kate and Sue kept their eyes on Jean's face.

"I can't believe it, hardly able to say it, maybe I heard wrong, maybe it's not true, maybe, maybe, maybe."

Sue waited, then finally spoke, "Do you want to tell us?" She was afraid even as she asked for what could have happened to Jean's daughter.

Kate filled three mugs with the steeped tea.

Jean turned her head and stared out the window. Turning back she peered deep into her tea mug before speaking. "Beth told us last weekend that she and Jennifer are a couple. They are les.. les.." Her mouth puckered as if to refuse the bitterness of the word.

"Lesbians?" asked Sue.

Jean said, "Yes, I just can't bring myself to say that horrible, ugly word." She picked up her mug, raised it to her mouth, then put it down without drinking. "Beth said that she's tired of pretending to us, to the aunts . . . to everyone that she's dating and expecting Mr. Right to appear any day."

Kate drank some tea.

Jean rubbed her forehead with her hand. "Said she's sick of the deceit... said that we have a choice, accept it or lose her." Tears flowed down her cheeks as she spoke the last words.

Sue picked up the teapot from its rest and checked the three mugs. She moved the cream pitcher closer to Kate.

Jean reached for another tissue. "Oh, it's terrible, Fred is acting so crazy, one minute telling me this is a phase, saying she'll get over it and the next saying they're never to enter his house again." She blew her nose. "And then three minutes later he's acting as if nothing's happened and asking me what I'm fixing for lunch. That's when I called you. Lunch, how can he



be thinking of lunch?" She stopped talking, took a sip of tea, and started rocking.

She looked up at the sound of Sue taking the eggs from the stove and running cold water over them. "Aren't you going to say something? Aren't you shocked? Horrified?" She didn't wait for an answer. "I guess I didn't make myself clear. Beth is hell bent on ruining her life and ours."

"I understand you're upset," said Kate.

"Yes. I'm upset, I'm brokenhearted. She has no right to do this to me."

"How old is Beth now? Twenty-three? twenty-four?" asked Sue.

"She'll be twenty-seven in July," answered Jean. "Age has nothing to do with it." She continued, "It's wrong, wrong, wrong." Sue watched Jean and Jean studied her mug. The three women stayed this way until sounds from the yard interrupted their thoughts. Kate went to the door and saw that the dogs were running in tandem along the fence with Angus, their Collie neighbor.

She returned to the table and said almost to herself, "Poor Beth, poor kid."

Jean looked up abruptly and moved her head forward. "Why do you say that?" She paused. "They are in total control, flaunting themselves, not caring who they hurt." Her eyebrows drew together. "It's so wrong to choose something like this."

"I don't think that Beth chose this anymore than she decided to have green eyes rather than brown," said Kate.

"Of course she's choosing. All through school she knew lots of nice boys. She could have married any number of them if she hadn't been so fussy."

Kate stifled a laugh and said, "If I remember correctly, you were always encouraging her to be fussy."

Jean's voice grew stronger as she said, "I can't believe you'd stick up for her instead of being disgusted."

Kate looked at Sue, raised her eyebrows, and gave a slight shrug of her shoulders. Then she took a deep breath and said, "Beth's made a difficult decision but one that seems necessary to her, like breathing."

Jean's eyes narrowed, "Well, of all the lame things I've heard, this tops them all! You'd almost think...." Her voice trailed off as she put three fingers over her open mouth.

Sue took the bread knife from Kate, cut the sandwiches into halves, and arranged them on a pale lavender depression glass plate.

Jean's face grew pale and her eyes darted from the women to the floor and around the room. The two old women watched her silently as the rainbow clock ticked.



Chrystos

***Before Me the Land & Water Open***

*Before me the land & water open  
 their arms tender sisters who have kept my place  
 watched each spray of racing birds  
 woven them into the still air for me to catch  
 a glimmering glint  
 The blowzy pine grows tall  
 as the distant mountain we call home  
 Mischief of the eye is sweet  
 Silver slate the Sound ruffles my hair  
 Roots I have packed for years settle in this meadow  
 delicate with brambles, broom  
 bright yellow suns I call beach daisies  
 These are the shapes I dream in hotel rooms  
 These are the variations of green & gold  
 I keep deep within my hands  
 These never same astounding clouds drift through my eyes  
 in bleached conversations with strangers  
 These are the leaves & berries who marry me in delight  
 This is the earth I carry in a corn husk pouch  
 against the brutal light of clapping hands  
 Here is the path choked with driftwood I trace  
 to watch the sun go down over mountains whose wildflowers  
 have caught & pressed my heart  
 Fly through these words sharp as  
 a deep blue and rust swallow  
 that wavering branch is  
 waiting for you*

*In memory of my deeply loved comrade Barbara Cameron  
 Nation Shield*

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*Photo of Alix Dobkin Photo Credit: Cristina Vegas*

Alix Dobkin

### ***New Ground***

*words & music by Alix Dobkin ©1986*

*You and me  
We're goin' out of bounds*



We're goin'  
 Oh so far, not even close  
 To yesterday  
 We're gonna seek new thrills, easy  
 Brave, wild, sweet darlin'  
 Breathe deep, keep the faith  
 We'll find some  
 new ground

One by one  
 We're gonna take each other home  
 We're gonna  
 Take our words and call each other "girl"  
 Whenever we please  
 We're gonna' live together  
 Hold hands and kiss each other  
 On the mouth just because  
 We love our  
 new ground

We are the women  
 We are the loving women  
 Loving women loving ...

Once we were  
 Separated from ourselves  
 Afraid and lonely for what we couldn't even name  
 We cried, despaired  
 Died in flames  
 Scorned and shamed or worse  
 What heartbreak, passion, rage  
 Has driven us to  
 new ground

Women's work  
 It's an endeavor never done  
 From women's blood, the web of life, our world is spun, and it's  
 Women's trust  
 To keep ourselves  
 From losing touch, from losing heart  
 From losing sight



*From losing ground, our  
new ground*

*We are the women  
We are the loving women  
We've been around forever  
Deep in the hearts of women*



## Senecarol Rising

### Wake Up Calls

My mom usually had a tough time getting me out of bed in the morning. We kids had to catch a big yellow, smelly school bus. Mom probably wished she had given me a middle name, like the boys had. But no, we girls didn't have one because we were to take our maiden names as our middle names when we married. If I'd had a middle name she could have used it as emphasis for her growing frustration with me as she continually yelled up the stairs for me to hurry up and get up. I'd usually wait til she threatened, "You'll be sorry if you make me come up there." And I would be. Sorry that is. So I'd get a move on, collect my brown paper sack lunch at the door, and trudge on off to the waiting bus, only to endure six miles and forty minutes of pure torture. The bus literally made me feel sick, probably from the exhaust fumes adding to my already toxic overload from coal burning that heated our house, the DDT that Gramps sprayed on the screens whenever the flies hatched, or perhaps from the constant gasoline fumes from his two-pump gas station in our front yard.

Grade school is mostly a blur. Since I'd started first grade at age four I was always at least two years younger than all my classmates. I was a runt, and treated as one by many of the boys. Somehow I never got held back a year, though my report cards were pretty dismal. I slept a lot in school, sometimes with my head resting on my arms on the desk, sometimes with my head flopped to one side or hanging on my chest while trying to look awake. Then one of my teachers might force me to sit up, "Sit up, stupid child." I only clearly remember two teachers actually calling me "stupid." Both of them had first names of Mr. By the time I was a teen I believed them. Mostly I was too tired to care. The town doctor said I had iron deficiency anemia. I got a lot of needles stuck in me and had to eat my liver: chicken, beef, turkey and deer.

Gradually things started to change. When I was 15 I met a woman who assured me that I was not stupid and that I could go to college, even though my 10th grade report card showed only one subject, bookkeeping, in black ink. The rest were in red. That is, til the final Regent's exams, which I miraculously passed.

Barbara never saw my school report cards, and had never met my family, except for my Mom, who was active in the church and had helped hire the new preacher. Barbara was his wife. The first day I met her I was smitten.



She smiled a lot. She seemed happy. She sang beautifully, even better than Doris Day, like she could be on a record. She was very affectionate and playful with her three young children, all under the age of seven. At the point that we met I wasn't very interested in the church, though I had grown up attending Sunday school and was sent off for a free week of church camp in the summer. I understood this all to be happening to give my Mom a much needed break from the unassisted burden of six kids. Mom was not one to accept charity, so she more than gave back her fair share by volunteering in a myriad of ways.

My big brother had dropped out of high school and joined the navy. My big sister had graduated at the top of her class that summer and immediately got married. She was pregnant at 17. Her marriage meant that I inherited her overnight babysitter job for two little neighborhood girls whose parents both worked the night shift. I got \$8.00 a week, paid by check. All I had to do was sleep. (I was good at that.) Now that I was the eldest child at home I was Mom's right hand assistant too, a job I often rebelled against in small ways, like waiting til the last minute to get up. But the day Mom unknowingly sent me off to be Barbara's right hand gal, everything changed.

Mom had baked bread and cookies and told me to walk them down to the manse and help the new minister's family get settled. I walked the hot macadam road, popping tar bubbles with my Keds and grouching about how put upon I was. I dawdled, stopping almost immediately just past the Grange hall to feel the warm, powdery, nearly pure white chalk-like sand of the rocky scar where the road had been blasted through. Wildflowers clung to the wound like colorful bandages on a scraped knee. I too had scars. Standing at this place, contemplating the flowers and the sand, I remembered.

A pre-adolescent friend and I had hidden on the top of this hill behind some protruding boulders. Up there, out of sight, she and I had stashed several softball size rocks, and one dead snake. Our ammunition at the ready, we waited for the white Borden's ice cream truck with the big gleaming silver latches and hinges. We'd show him. He'd tricked us into free fudgesicles and crèmesicles. To get them for both of us, all I had to do was let him lift me high up into the frosted cold opening, reach way in, and get them. He'd boosted me way up and held me there, helpless, as he slipped one hand up under my shorts and into my privates. The treats lost their appeal. As he finally let me down a bit of ice also slipped into my heart and lodged there. At first I thought my pal would be mad at me for coming out empty handed, but instead she was mad at him, and helped me figure



out a plan to get even. Pelting his truck with a dead snake and rocks tasted like sweet revenge.

But thinking about it again on this hot summer day on the road to the manse, I felt that lump of sadness all over again. Wiping the memory from my mind and the warm white sand from my hands onto my rolled up dungarees, I picked a bouquet of wild flowers and continued my two and a half mile trek to deliver the welcome basket, and now the daisies, to the new young minister's wife. How could she not have been impressed with me—the dirty, sweaty, flushed kid bearing flowers and treats, free labor and love at first sight?

The preacher's affectionate little family became mine. I was more than just babysitter and general helpmate, more than gardener, dishwasher, ironer and housekeeper. When he was away in the big city to finish a degree, I was the closest thing to adult company she had in the house. He stayed in the city many nights, and when any of those coincided with nights off from my job, I would stay with her. Sometimes I slept in the room with the kids. More often than not she would seek comfort from me as I filled his side of the bed. She suspected that he was having an affair. I would hold her to my chest and assure her of his love. My hormones were raging and I was confused by them, but I was sleeping exactly where I wanted to be. Our hands and lips touched with a great deal of affection, but the genitals were carefully avoided.

When I turned 16 Barbara gave me a copy of *Seventeen Magazine*. I had never seen one, and didn't find it interesting, but she thought that since I was going to go to college, I should learn some proper ways of behaving. That same Christmas the woman who was the mom of my overnight charges gave me a boy's plaid flannel shirt. She said I deserved to have a new shirt of my own, not a hand-me-down. I was quietly pleased, but embarrassed that she seemed to know my secret self—a self I hadn't yet a frame for.

During my junior year at the Baptist college that Barbara had helped me get into, the preacher finally got around to telling her that he was indeed having an affair. By this time they had been called to another church, and had moved closer to the big city. My special family was dissolving, I still hadn't learned much from the *Seventeen* magazines, but I had fallen in love with last year's homecoming queen. Working in the kitchen, my studies and my new love life kept me very busy. I nearly forgot how to sleep. My world was this tiny campus and my first lover in the hills of West Virginia.

I was 20. That November John F. Kennedy became the nation's first Roman Catholic president-elect. But, before he was even inaugurated I



was headed home alone, without my lover, to look for a little comforting from my beloved Barbara. The college officials, having gotten word of our relationship said that if I left quietly, my lover, a senior, could stay and complete her degree. While I had become the first in my family to ever attend college, my sister's sons would become the first to achieve degrees, way before me.

When I told Barbara why I was home mid-term she promptly expelled me from her life and acted all scared that I was gonna molest her kids or something. I didn't remind her that I was a kid when she gladly invited me into her bed, and that hell, I was still a kid. My mother was the only one in my blood family who knew why I didn't make it in college. The others thought I was lazy and stupid. When mom admonished me, "Don't tell anyone, especially your father" I thought it best to listen to her for a change instead of always bucking her. I got a series of factory and kitchen jobs, eventually turned my Keds in for a cheap car, got rejected by the Peace Corps and the Women's Air Force, and for much of the next decade woke up with a hangover and a variety of different women in my bed, or more usually, their beds.

Gradually I woke up to myself and came to see my losses as lessons. Barbara, who I never saw again, married her shrink; her loss. I wonder if she ever lost any sleep over me.



Ida VSW Red

## *Free Range*

*Now, I'm an old woman  
 free-ranging belly & thighs  
 breasts and desire  
 judging everyone younger  
 ridiculously raw & untried  
 each older woman a risk  
 a reminder, denial shattered*

*Fragile, we lie in a bed of  
 rose petals, soft, precious  
 drifting onto my heart, strings  
 attached as to a gifted heirloom  
 carrying significance & stories  
 from other lives, other times  
 greedily embracing this day  
 before learning to let go*

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Tita Caldwell

## The San Francisco Dyke March, 2008

Each year we anticipate with great pleasure the Dyke March. It is an amazing experience to see some 20,000 women come together to celebrate this occasion, our special holiday. As the event has grown, a lot has been done to make it more accessible to the old and the disabled lesbians: a fairly large area of the park is cordoned off where we can meet and sit comfortably in chairs that have been provided for us, although the number of chairs never seem to keep up with our growing needs. Here, however we are at a safe distance from smoke, incense and booming music.

This year, a few days before the march we're dismayed by the news that there will be no old dyke speaking from the stage. The six minutes that we might have expected have been given to the Pat Bonds Old Dyke Award committee, represented by a younger lesbian. When she realizes the situation, she generously grants five of her minutes to the Mother Tongue Readers' Theater, most of whom are old lesbians, and there is a sense of relief: we will have our moment on stage.

The organizers also provide a trolley for women who want to participate in the March but aren't able to walk the distance. This is decorated with posters and balloons, and is cheered by bystanders along the route.

Some of us, however, prefer to sit in the "grand stand" that is set up for old and disabled lesbians on the street outside Temple Sha'ar Zahaf, (San Francisco's gay and lesbian temple). They treat us to snacks and cake and, what is even more important, provide us with two port-a-potties of our own. Here we not only get a good view of the march and see many of our younger friends walking by, but we are also visible to the thousands of women streaming past us, many of them waving and blowing kisses, running up to us, some with tears in their eyes to express their appreciation with hugs and gifts such as flowers, rainbow flags and colorful feather boas. An occasional topless walker will stop and jiggle her breasts for us.

My fiend Pat and I talk about this a couple of days before the event. She thinks it is disgusting the way the younger women treat us when they walk by, showering us with attention this one day. Yet they don't want to take the time to listen to us, to see who we really are. Of course I have to agree with her. Sometimes I feel like wearing a sign that says "No Voice, No Kisses."

"But I must admit, Pat", I say to her, "I do like the attention, and look forward to it every year, even though I know it's for the wrong reasons."



This year some of us leave the rally early, to go to a nearby Vietnamese restaurant. My sweetie, Marge, and I think of this day as our anniversary, as it was at this same restaurant three years ago that we first clicked and decided to see each other again. We love sharing the occasion with old friends and new. All of us also share our grief this year, mourning the loss just a few days earlier of our beloved Janet, who was always with us in previous years.

After dinner we hurry to "our grandstand" arriving just in time to see the hundreds of Dykes on Bikes roaring towards us. "One year," I promise myself, "I will ride on the back of one of those bikes." But for now I am content, as we find front row seats, to grin and wave as they fly past us.

Not long after, the trolley draws up in front of us. It has been the custom for them to stop there for a bit, while a young woman makes a speech about us old folks and how much we have contributed. Ida is planning to speak about Janet, and we are all looking forward to it. Two of Janet's children have joined us, wearing their mother's favorite old sweatshirts to honor her at this special occasion.

This time, however, there is a long silence after the trolley stops right by the curb, forcing the marchers to walk on the far side. A couple of us approach the driver, a young woman, asking her to move forward a few yards because she is blocking our view, but she refuses. We look around and find one of the organizers, whom we approach with our concerns. She asks for our patience; the little ceremony that has been planned to honor the old dykes can't take place without the sound truck, which will be along as soon as it can make its way through the crowd.

When the truck arrives a short time later, a youthful woman gives her speech in appreciation of the old dykes. Then the truck pulls away, in spite of the insistence of several old dykes that Ida be permitted to speak first.

I rage and grumble in my seat, but when the trolley moves I settle back to watch the rest of the march, and relish my connection with the people walking by. Later we hear that it was the police who insisted that the sound truck keep moving.

"Pat," I tell her the next day, "you were right, there were some really disgusting moments, the worst being when they wouldn't let Ida speak."

In the following weeks we begin to strategize how we will get our voices back. We don't want to be appreciated only for what we did long ago when we came out. We want younger lesbians to know that as Old Lesbians Organizing for Change we are still active, building community, fighting ageism and homophobia, protesting for peace and better health care and



much more. We talk about getting our own sound truck covered with our posters, but soon learn that the cost would be prohibitive, and that probably a second sound truck would not be allowed by the police. But our own bull horn or sound system is a definite possibility, along with leaflets. And maybe we'll even have a speaker on the stage.





*Lily Yuriko. Photo by jody jewdyke.*

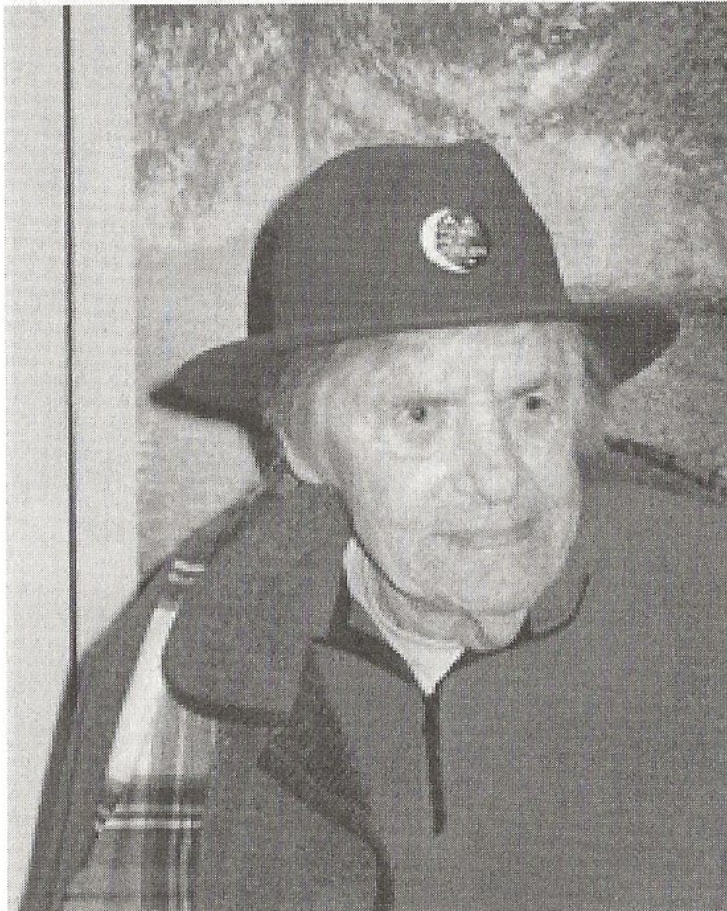


*Ivy Bottini. Photo by Cathy Cade*

*Kate Rosenblatt Photo by Cathy Cade*



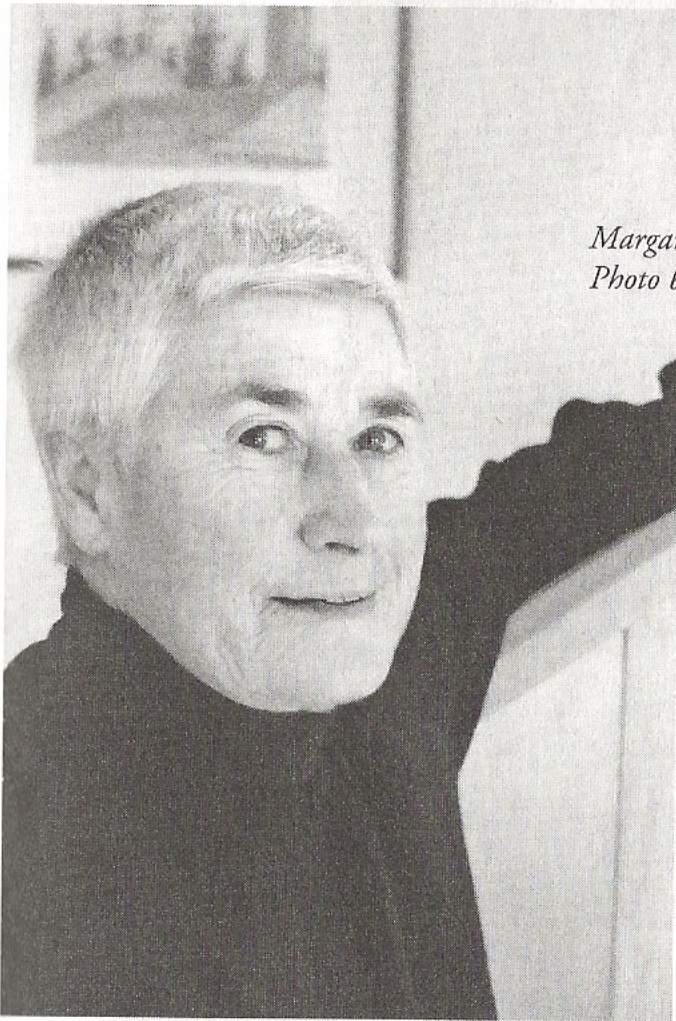
*Barbara Kalish.  
Photo by Cristina Vegas*



*Kate Rosenblatt wearing her infamous "A You-re an Amazon" button pinned on her favorite hat. Mostly homebound these days, Kate joined with dozens of Bay Area Old Dykes to celebrate her dear friend Jess McVey's 91st birthday, February 14, 2009 in San Francisco. Two very proud OLD LESBIAN activists, artists, and pioneer feminists, doing what they both love best: being who they are and beloved by the company of Lesbians they've kept these many years in California and across the country. Over the years playwright Kate Rosenblatt participated in the Older Women's Network (OWN), Old Lesbians Organizing for Change (OLOC), and in the struggle for equality, peace and justice. Kate and her partner, Joyce Pierson, are celebrating their 25th Anniversary this year.*

*Kate Rosenblatt. Photo by Cathy Cade.*





*Margaret Cruikshank.  
Photo by Donna Murphy.*



*Grace Santana. Photo by Lenore Chinn.*





*Mina Meyer. Photo by Cristine Vegas.*



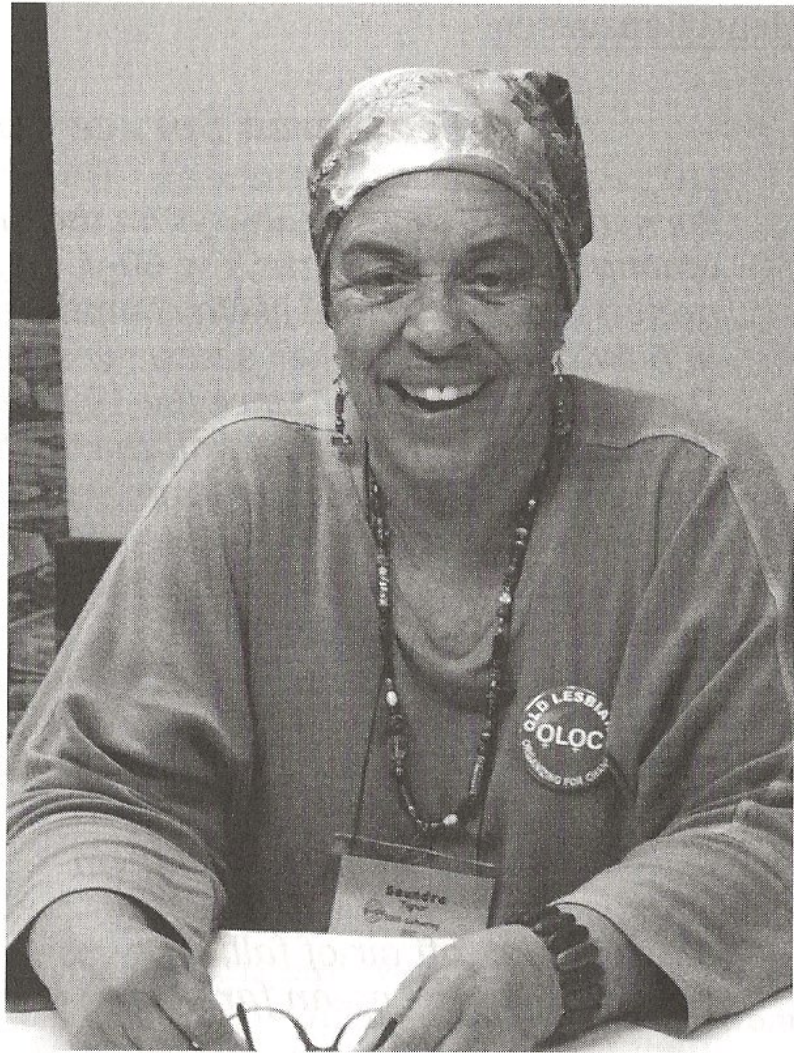
*Vera Martin. Photo credit: Unkown.*



*June Millington in the snow.  
Photo by Marita Madeloni.*



*Sandra Tignor.  
Photo by Cathy Cade.*



*Marion Abdullah. Photo by Cathy Cade.*



Henri Bensussen

### ***A Feathered Spruce Cone***

*Born in L.A. to parents always on the move  
among its varied suburbs, the 60-year-old woman  
prefers to travel north, like a compass point.  
In Bandon she meets her peers, the same-aged  
Douglas firs grown up since the 1936 fire  
that ate their parents and half the town.  
Firs root themselves deep, the only way  
to get them moving is cut them down  
and truck them out. She is different.*

*Days later she reaches Cape Perpetua,  
the far northwestern tip of Oregon.  
Spruce are dominant here, so old  
they're aged in centuries. Youthful  
by contrast, she walks among them  
eating salal berries, wraps herself  
in the sweet, soft air of fall, a sky  
richly blue as the ocean far below.*

*A spruce has no tap root, instead it  
flings out long thick arms to grapple  
the rocks it grows on, an octopus of a tree.  
Up, up she gazes at The Giant, 500 years old.  
Rootless too, this woman,  
but neither does she cling  
letting chance seduce her, in winter storms,  
like a feathered spruce cone  
to new, fertile ground.*



Marcia Perlstein

## Do Ask, Do Tell: Tales of Precocious Aging or What It's Like to Be Me

### *Context*

Almost dying in 2003, at age 58, has given me a preview of coming attractions to aging: the challenges and choices. Now, at age 64, I've been living longer than anyone anticipated, but with numerous disabilities and having to spend far too much time doing the things necessary to keep my bodily machine running. There are silver linings, however, beginning with feeling truly blessed to be alive. I know that the details of my numerous ailments cause folks to gaze away with glazed eyes (I was the same way); or, worse, some want every detail and I gaze and glaze, hating the re-hash. In fact, I no longer participate.

### *Proudly Layered Lesbian: Visibility Issues*

I do notice increasing invisibility, layered: woman, lesbian, physically compromised person, old woman. I've reframed my continuum from minor irritation to full blown anger at being ignored in the larger world to the comfort of not having anything expected of me. Anything I do is gravy; any notice I get flies in the face of what people think I can do. I now have the freedom to put myself out there periodically and to choose my actions and activities more carefully.

### *Small Sampling of Strategies and Goodies*

By the way, kindred spirit reading this, I recognize that I'm not the only one going through all this: all of us aging folks with increasing physical challenges each have our own version of issues and responses. I alternately rail at the narcissistic self pre-occupation just to stay alive; then, again remind myself that I AM alive. When I misdirect my energy to preoccupation and activities not worthy of my attention, I step back vowing to screen more and use my limited energy more selectively.

I'm aware more frequently of possible "lasts." The last trip to Europe with sufficient mobility; the last time I might see someone who is ailing and lives far away. I am learning to be content with the preciousness of the



“lasts” rather than what may not be: with the memories and the moments, etched strongly in my being.

Sometimes, I’ll flex my muscles with smaller projects which may mean less to me, just for the experience of completion so that I can use that energy spurt to build on in approaching something more meaningful. I have to be careful, not to get stuck for too long where I don’t want to be, doing what I don’t want to do—even if the activity flexes muscles. I need to be careful, also, for if I tarry too long where I don’t want to be, I may not have the energy for what I truly care about.

Time, as we know, no matter what, proceeds and will bring us all to our ultimate destination. We have the choice of flailing and railing or accepting with grace. However, the range of emotions are what they are and we need not beat ourselves when the difficult ones emerge. I don’t get scared anymore by my own suicidal thoughts; my questions about whether all it takes to continue is worth it. Each time I offer myself that choice, I re-choose life. That makes it all the sweeter. My current goal is to increase the length of sweet time and reduce the time in despair. Also, I try to see the cycles as mirroring the ocean: the dangerous waves come and go, replacing themselves with the calmer ones. I try not to panic when caught in a large emotional swell.

I really enjoy reminiscing over magic moments—all the more pink in a far away light. I try to limit ruminations about betrayals, unmet expectations (we all have them). I enjoy my own paradoxes such as running towards peace. Can peace come on the run? I’m still searching for ways to lift pressures and find true “me” time. Shouldn’t all time be “me”; then, from a firm foundation of my own terra firma, I could reach out by choice, from strength; not from obligation, I definitely do find my way to continuing to help others; to offer them brief flickers of magic that they might look back on.

A dying friend, several years older than I still has my off key song, sung to her answering machine when she couldn’t get up for the phone, saved. She emailed me that she listens to it when she is low. I get great satisfaction from hearing that and will persist until I give out in singing to my friends. If they answer the phone, I often ask them to hang up so I can sing to my electronic stand-ins. I call back their machines.

### *Precocious Aging Conundrums*

1. Folks far older than I sprint past me, full throttle as I gimp along.
2. Friends from college (1962) pass through and tell me how wonderful



I look. They seem to expect all my challenges to “show.” From the rumor mill they arrive expecting an ashen looking clone of a Holocaust survivor. However, the wrinkled, smaller sized person they do see belies my pain, struggle and the large cocktail of medications, the energy it takes to prepare to greet them, be with them and then recover from my moments of seeming effervescence. Yet I wouldn’t trade the contact for anything.

3. What I consider to be liberties of intimacy is that lover, family and friends apply a caring, nevertheless, intrusive magnifying glass to how I manage my health: especially around doctors’ visits and basic functioning. This is perhaps a remnant from the long period I was completely bedridden and dependent. Now, though I struggle physically a great deal, my mind is still such that I know that the choices I am making for myself are right for me. The cacophony of unsolicited opinions frequently foisted upon me are coming from a loving source. However, I dislike, not only having to manage the pain but to expend the energy arguing for my choices to be respected. Hence this bit of writing.

### *Nearest and Dearest Take Heed*

Dealing with my own cacophony of medical issues has turned me into a strange blend of isolate and social person. I am alternately irritable and angry; cheerful and appreciative. The largest sources of gratification in my life are embedded in deep and mutual connections with people. I do, occasionally have to re-learn the lesson to stay away from toxicity or friendships that aren’t truly mutual. Even in my wonderful relationships with my main squeeze, family, extended family and friends, my two major issues are: 1) being pressed to talk about my health; 2) being expected to satisfy social needs that I only have random and unpredictable energy for.

The bottom line for me in terms of aging and disability is RESPECT MY CHOICES and I’ll hang around continuing struggling and juggling as needed. And, when the time comes: let me go, knowing I fought the good fight and had the grace to know when to pack my tent to exit.

The point of this short essay is to share what it feels like to be me. I think there are many universals common among those of us with chronic disability and all of us as we age. Other categories, as mentioned earlier include feelings after over six tenths of a century of trying to help others and be aware of their needs, becoming, of necessity, a self involved curmudgeon. Since my world is somewhat constricted, small slights or disappointments loom larger. What once might have rolled off my back overly occupies my homebound thoughts.



I do, however, enjoy the bit of work I do more than ever. When I sit in my chair (the one contoured to my body since I began practice in 1967) I feel like a wise woman. My connections with clients are far more tender and well paced than ever. I get a kick out of being an occasional crisis worker in jail and ER—not being in charge of anything—being at an emotional remove, yet having a front row seat to staff dramas at our small agency. **On the professional front, there are still moments where I know why I am on this earth. As long as I am able, I'll continue to make space for those moments, as energy permits.**

So, if you are reading or hearing this, I invite you to picture your own choices as you age; customize your choices to your knowledge of yourself and fight like hell for them once you know what they are. Also, be as gentle with yourself as you can since nothing is in stone and today's choices may need revision tomorrow. We're all works in progress; everything is in flux, but we still get to steer the ship of our own evolving needs and desires.

From the bottom of my heart, I thank everyone who has blessed me with their presence in my life: even those who are high maintenance (since I continue to learn). For, as Lord Buckley said,

**“People are the true flowers of life and it has been a precious pleasure to have temporarily strolled in your garden.”**





*Photo of McVey at her 91st birthday, 2009. Photo Credit: Cathy Cade*

Jess McVey

## A Hive of Mad Bees

The words were a muddle in my head—a stroke? I said to myself. So this muddle is the result of stroking? I always thought stroking was an affectionate gesture, but here I am—almost in a constant muddle. I soon learned to keep my mouth shut—any confusion was not appreciated—friends stared, saying things to each other behind their hands. So what was so terribly wrong with me? My head felt like a hive of mad bees. Should I try to continue this way—source of laughter and shame as these words tumbled out untamed. Thoughts of death returned—actions which would lead me on, free at last, at last.

Written in a Mothertongue workshop facilitated by Ida VSW Red  
*New Leaf Second Sunday, September 14, 2008*



Janet Lubeski

## May 12, 2007 — Happy Birthday

As I start my 74th birthday I am astonished I have lived this long. I always thought I would die when I reached my 58th! Yet I chose to live. I have worked hard my whole life. It has not been easy to be true to my beliefs and values. The struggles began early...

I have come to understand many things about myself and my world I have created. The ideas I was raised with are no longer valid for me. I want to put down on paper what I truly believe today. These are my truths, my values, my design for living the rest of my life a day at a time.

I love and wish to be loved

I respect myself and my body

I cherish my children and grands

I love nature, especially birds

I respect no institutions

I am going to continue to live fully without fear of consequences

I have come to believe in cosmic energy within me, all around me, giving me the light/humility to understand how to live my time left here.

I am brave. I am part of the whole. The light is knowledge, the gift of all gifts to be acknowledged by me as truth.

Beauty is my companion. I see beauty and I am relaxed, feel joyful, energized, full of life energy.

Love is surrounding me. I will embrace it, acknowledge my wealth, will not hold it greedily to me but let myself accept and embrace all. I will not have the idea that I need credibility.



Susa Silvermarie

## **Forty Years Out**

*In Response to her Question: Do you have Images  
for your Experience of Coming Out?*

### **1. Birth**

*“At birth my untamed body/ slides so supple out to earthWil-  
derness within me,/ I spring to wilderness without.”<sup>1</sup>*

*From between my own lips I deliver  
consciousness of who I am—*

*Daddy’s not in power anymore.*

*Coming out is virgin birth like Mary’s,  
partheno partheno partheno*

*GENESIS.*

*Discovery of myself*

*emerges sudden as a baby’s head.*

*Acceptance within*

*emerges second, like the placenta.*

*Revealing to others*

*emerges        emerges        emerges.*

### **2. Initiation**

*“In the midnight swelter/ I descend to the vortex of silence-  
and there I feel the sobs that break it.*

*My own tears stream/ cool blue truth.”<sup>2</sup>*

*The Dyke crucified by family and culture  
hangs on the tree hungry  
for illumination.*

*Descending into the cave  
the deep heart underworld,*

*Inanna quests her vision,  
seeks her own*

*gifts. Initiation*

*hauls wisdom in,*

*and with its sacrifice,*

*changes*

*everything.*



*Coming out  
inaugurates  
the power coming in.*

### **3. Breaking Ground**

*“Bare so bare of even the last mask...  
I am steady in wanting exposure,  
yet I weave, a silvery beech in wind.”<sup>3</sup>*

*The ground simply there, nothing to notice,  
the expected orientation, the way it is;  
a she with a he,  
everything groomed and neat.  
And in the rows between  
where upstarts might disrupt:  
a thick black sheet of plastic.  
It takes a Movement  
to push me through.  
We, the fragile seedlings,  
break ground crazy,  
crazy with joy  
crazy with joy of germination.  
Pulsing with impossible love.  
We grant the garden  
precious chaos.*

### **4. Eruption**

*“Here where the earth exposes me  
I break, I open.”<sup>4</sup>  
From the core comes eruption.  
Its catalyst: desire named.  
Fire flows upward  
from the root through the crown.  
Kundalini, as it rises,  
kills every lie.  
Then cascades  
back down in cleansing flame.  
What remains: volcanic ash,  
the nitrogen of miracles.  
This quantum leap  
cannot be predicted.*



As Ruth follows Naomi,  
 I attend the body's wisdom.  
 I follow only  
 her furnace of burning truth.  
 Pele, Bride,  
 Shakti and Kali,  
 keep me grounded  
 in the electric garden.  
 Every time I climax  
 they show me:  
 There are no others,  
 only  
 One.

### 5. Passage

"Breath moves through my body/Nothing stops it, nothing  
 rushes it... My sorrow is the impossible passage /between  
 dusk and stars. Nothing stops it, nothing rushes it."<sup>5</sup>

Coming out is crossing,  
 not knowing how,  
 the line, the road, the tracks;  
 the river, the channel, the canyon;  
 crossing that chasm by sheer grace.  
 A pilgrimage I learn I am on  
 only when labor is done  
 and I gain my name.  
 Crossing the culture  
 causes me wounds  
 but the view from the other side,  
 oh! An expanse of compassion!  
 Disclosure  
 envelops the suffering of others.  
 I am a woman wearing a burqa,  
 the shroud that allows only  
 a patch of mesh to see and breathe,  
 a woman who rips it off.  
 I will never take for granted  
 peripheral vision,  
 or sunlight's revelation.  
 Coming out I become  
 fully human.



**6. Transformation**

*“Chrysalis in crystal night  
I go to my heart’s mountain/ to stand still within change  
We spin everywhere/ a vast change.”<sup>6</sup>*

*When a caterpillar  
calls itself a butterfly,  
fresh perception from its airy outlook  
shrinks the milkweed cradle.*

*When the daily body  
becomes the sacred body,  
the lesson of evanescence  
requires new bearings.*

*Culture shock!*

*Then the North star appears.*

*Freedom’s song calls  
all the lost girls  
to name their splendor*

**7. Blossoming**

*“Rooted in this sacred nesting place,  
I have bloomed.”<sup>7</sup>*

*We nudge one another to ask,  
‘Does she go to our church?’*

*When I admit myself  
to the garden,  
the strength of confirmation  
comes upon me.*

*An outward sign, a sacrament.*

*I am awakened, illumined, enlightened.*

*What is revealed to me,*

*I must reveal:*

*petals in a whorl  
that spiral inwards without end.*

*A midnight moon  
filled with Kuan Yin’s  
boundless benevolence.*

*Celebration*

*of self as She:  
flower in full glory, and  
smiling gardner.*



*With this blossoming  
I do  
commence.*

### **8. Homecoming**

“This is a home your bones know...  
where the waters you leapt from  
still glisten with salt and wisdom.”<sup>8</sup>

*After being forbidden the image,  
to see in the mirror!  
No reunion is deeper.  
After the prison of division,  
I marry my true self.  
I return to the kernel,  
to the way I was made by the Great Creator.  
I restore  
my original language,  
I mend  
the rent fabric of my body.  
Whole with every healing story  
of every holy book,  
I am, in coming out,  
an exile coming home.*

### **9. Rebirth**

“Hold open the door to float into space!  
And it feels like blowing barrierless—  
like owning my magik my magik my magik.  
The nightmare’s bridle—

*loosed!  
Out  
of what is dark and female  
comes  
all that is. Bold  
is the resurrection of Persephone  
from her winter cave.  
To greet her,  
the whole world  
greens.  
At forty years out,*



*this step in the dance,  
dips me clean  
in Mother's waters;  
baptizes me back,  
all the way back,  
to original joy.*

*From Imagine Her Satisfaction by S. Silvermarie. Milwaukee:  
Midwife Press, 1985.*

<sup>1</sup> *Virginpoem*, p. 74

<sup>2</sup> *Vortex*, p. 76

<sup>3</sup> *Windswept*, p. 65

<sup>4</sup> *Wyoming*, p. 72

<sup>5</sup> *Passage*, p. 73

<sup>6</sup> *Chrysalis*, p. 75

<sup>7</sup> *Genesis in Four Seasons IV*, p. 85

<sup>8</sup> *Child to Your Greater Sea*, p. 110

<sup>9</sup> *First of the Perfect*, p. 108



Emma Joy Crone

## **Rural Old Lesbian**

*R.O.L. has lived in a  
Canyon with many Lesbians  
In cabins (Cabbage Lane)  
Trillium, Star,  
Rainbow.  
Outdoor living,  
Clitoria  
Outdoor beds  
Under the stars.*

*R.O.L.  
Has lived on acres  
Amidst towering trees  
Slept on the ground  
In a tipi  
In a trailer  
In a henhouse (OWL)  
In a Sheep pen*

*R.O.L. has danced naked  
Under waterfalls  
In Pools  
Moonlight glistening  
On naked bodies*

*R.O.L. at 49  
Chopped wood  
Raised a tipi  
Discovered her rural self  
Had her first Dyke haircut  
In a field.  
Cooked for twelve women*

*Outside  
One tap  
No stove.  
R.O.L.  
Ate peyote  
In a circle  
Shared visions (singles summer)  
Heard stories  
Lesbian stories  
Women's pain  
Women's joy  
Dusk to dawn.*

*R.O.L.  
Lived with Lesbians  
Denmark, Wales, France  
U.K. Oregon & Canada*

*R.O.L. at 50 years  
Traveled with Nozama  
Greece, Lesbos, musicians  
Looking for Sappho  
Singing and loving  
Across continents*

*R.O.L. has grown  
Many gardens  
Eaten produce  
Harvested the Green Goddess  
Shared in their growth  
Taken a new name  
Pennyroyal*



R.O.L at 77  
Lives on an Island  
With her 50 year old love  
Enjoying cronedom  
Grows smaller gardens

Harvests seeds  
Still dreams of lesbian nation  
Lesbian lands  
Networks with sisters  
All over the planet.

Reprinted with permission from Emma Joy Crone  
from Maize (Spring 1996)



Jean Fleming

## A True Lesbian Fairytale (60 Years of Fairy Dust)

Once upon a time there were two little girls. One was named BrownEyes and one was named BlueEyes. On the day BrownEyes was born, she and BlueEyes were the subject of the Fairy Godmother's Annual Meeting.

No one really knows where Fairy Godmother's Annual Meetings are held. We know for a fact they must be held high above the earth because once in a great while the minutes of their meetings fall out of the Queen Godmother's brief case and are carried to the earth by soft faith winds. If they fall in just the right meadow the news becomes told among all the little people.

Here is the way it was told to me: It was May of 1939 and the Queen Godmother was assigning new god children to "Goldie," a Fairy godmother of some experience.

The Queen Godmother spoke, "Goldie, you have an exciting and challenging assignment. Do you see the baby BrownEyes being born in Michigan today?"

"Yes, Yes, I do. " Goldie had very good eyes.

"Now do you see the little girl named BlueEyes in Chemung, Illinois? She is right down there and she is roller-skating on a hill by a church."

Oh, yes. She is coming into view at the corner."

"Goldie, your assignment is to see that they fall in love at the end of 1999 and they meet in January of 2000."

"What!! Queen godmother that is a 60-year assignment. Er, excuse me—do I understand you correctly? How can this be? You know I take my assignments seriously, but I can't believe that you would give an assignment that would last that long. Most of my other godmother duties end at age 16 or 18. These women will be old women by then."

The Queen Godmother smiled. "For someone who has been around for centuries I find your reaction amusing. These women will each grow up in their respective states where they were born. They will only be separated by Lake Michigan and a little land, but they will never meet until they are in their sixties. They will both marry men, they will both have children, and they will each have a child that dies. BlueEyes will leave Illinois and move to Colorado."

"Queen Godmother, that will make me travel back and forth between Michigan and Colorado for over sixty years. I will need to have so much



Fairy dust that I will need Fairy dust stops far more than usual. And one other thing—did you misspeak when you said, “they would fall in love and then meet?”

“My Dear Goldie, I have never heard you offer so many excuses. Do not worry about the fairy dust stops. You have always been a godmother noted for your great patience. I chose you particularly for this assignment. In sixty years surely you will figure a way for them to meet. You see, Goldie, these are very special women. These women are artists and writers. But this is not what makes them special.

They will fall in love because of their writing. They have great gifts they must share with each other because they will be searching for each other all of their adult lives. In all of their searching, loss and love their will is one thing that will keep them special. It is because of their hearts. In their lives, they will manage to keep their 16- or 18-year-old hearts.”

Goldie’s face had softened and her puzzlement had disappeared.

She said, “Really, Queen Godmother, this hardly ever happens, does it?”

“Sadly, that is true. No one really needs to lose us out of his or her life but suddenly they stop calling on us. Soon their young hearts are gone. Goldie, be sure you don’t spare the Fairy dust. They will both have hardships and great losses. They will need you spreading your Fairy dust and whispering childlike encouragement in their dreams.”

So it was in the next sixty years, Goldie carried fairy dust to the highs and the lows of BrownEyes and BlueEyes lives. They continued to keep their hearts in the 16- or 18-year-old time frame. Goldie was amazed the time had moved by so swiftly.

In 1999 she sprinkled Fairy dust on their heads. They each thought they had a great idea—when they wrote to Golden Threads, a safe letter writing organization for lesbians who want to write to each other. In the months that followed they did write to each other. They talked thru letters; they ironed out differences and they fell in love. Goldie’s work was done. Goldie smiled.

The Queen Godmother is going to be so proud when Goldie accepts her “Godmother of the Millennium” Award at the 2000 Annual Godmother’s Meeting. Goldie will know she had done a good job for BrownEyes and BlueEyes.



Lee-Ann Freilich

### ***Easter Sunday 1999***

*I got a real birthday surprise from my dear friend and lover  
Who announced she and her new love were flying to Aruba  
"For once couldn't you be glad for me? Time to move on," she said.*

*Although depressed I resolved to call my friend Sharon  
A woman I met at Woman on the Move  
To move out into Nature by train to Long Island.*

*Side by side we sat riding together  
Tall Libra ... "Hum, Moon in Aquarius?"  
"I'm Aquarius rising." Must've sounded interested  
'Cause she left to talk to another friend (male) hiker  
I must be impartial. Look at me  
She's just an old acquaintance ... I'm jealous, anyway.*

*I'm sorry, Sharon, Carol, Jennifer  
My legs are short. Too sleepy to walk faster  
If I was dead, I wouldn't be so lonesome.*

*Standing sentry at the gate, Canadian geese are hissing  
To see that us hikers mind they pay admission  
To get into Bayard Cutting Arboretum  
On the grounds of an Elizabethan mansion.*

*Twigs crackle underfoot, leaves float in a brackish stream  
Roots that Winter left for dead Spring is at work awakening.*

*When I was eight one Easter I had come down with the mumps  
So I had to miss the long anticipated  
Sunday School Easter Egg Hunt.*

*"Too fast for you?" Sharon is suddenly asking  
"No, thank you," I responded. I was long past caring.  
But my grandmother soothed my tear-stained misery with  
An Easter basket, jelly beans, and a soft pink fluffy Easter Bunny!  
Fifty years later  
What I need is the time it takes*



To study the situation around the lake ...  
 Beech trees aligning themselves sideways  
 Plane trees aligning their branches  
 In precise parallels to their perpendicular  
 Young trunks against the sky  
 A branch / some sky / a branch / grey sky  
 A branch. Just so far, but then no further  
 To a point and then down the other side,  
 Swollen lake of grainy satin  
 In its liquid, the sky is reflected  
 Tranquilizing the eye.

Squawk of crows from nearby bushes  
 "Caw, Caw" returns Sharon from the picnic table  
 Hawks from tree to tree go flying  
 Hawkeye seeing cowering being soon to be devouring  
 Alders: small red berries, long red stamen  
 Anticipate birds cross-pollination.  
 "Pain is inevitable, but Suffering is optional"  
 (motto from Meadowsweet Apothecary's herbal)

Soft-eyed Sharon, taciturn Amazon  
 Would like to be obliging but doesn't want to slow down  
 I run and run to catch up, but later on got winded  
 Grey forest path ranges on and on.  
 Perfectly safe to ramble all alone on

IT'S EASTER SUNDAY, FOR CHRISAKES!  
 ON MY DAY OFF I REFUSE TO HURRY!  
 I'M DONE WITH THE WORRYING!  
 I'M DONE WITH THE HURRYING!  
 THE WORLD CAN HURRY ON WITHOUT ME!  
 LIFE IS TOO SHORT!  
 ON MY DAY OFF  
 ON EASTER SUNDAY!  
 NO EASTER BASKET!  
 NO EASTER BUNNY!

ON MY DAY OFF FROM THIS HURRIED WORLD OF WORRIERS  
 AN UNHURRIED  
 SLOW WALKER  
 WALKS ALONE.



Jean Taylor

## Lesbian Life Begins at Forty

Even though my 40<sup>th</sup> birthday was celebrated with a lesbian party in 1984 I really had no idea that there would be such new and interesting things over the next few years. So much so, that my middle- and now old age have become the best times of my life.

Into my 40s, I started writing plays and began acting and directing for the first time in my life. I set up the Purple Parrots, a lesbian feminist performing group in 1986, to perform several of my plays, including the Bar-Dyke and the Feminist. And I was a founding member of another lesbian feminist performing group, Amazon Theatre, in 1989 where we work-shopped and wrote and then performed in all four of our plays starting with Spot the Dyke.

I turned 43 at the first National 10/40 Conference (10 years in the Women's Liberation Movement and over 40 years of age) which was held at a bunk house style camp in country Victoria in 1987. Three delicious meals a day were provided by the live-in cooks who'd been hired for the occasion, there was a full program of workshops during the day, and story telling, a dance, and a concert in the evenings.

It was an eye-opener for me personally. Not only was there a workshop about demystifying the myths and learning the facts about menopause but it was also a reminder of how much fun and laughter there was to be had as we grew older. The 10/40 was also an important political milestone because it was the first time lesbian feminist activists had got together to talk about the effects of ageing and ageism and what we needed to do in order to get where we wanted to be in our old age.

Over the next ten years I attended all but one of the 10/40s which were held annually in different states all round Australia. And went to innumerable workshops including ones on death and dying, Co-op Housing, relationships and sex. And ran workshops on challenging racism, vanilla sex, basic circus skills and activism in the '90s. More often than not I organized the concerts, always my favourite things to do, where we showcased our music, skits, songs and storytelling and entertained ourselves at the same time.

I enjoyed traveling to the various interstate venues and was one of the organizers of the 6<sup>th</sup> 10/40 in 1992 where the candle ceremony was first introduced to remember our loved ones who had died. We dykes developed



a pride in being middle-aged and began to appreciate that growing old was a great deal more interesting and more adventurous than we'd been lead to believe. It got so we could spot and challenge an ageist comment at 50 paces: You don't look 40 (or 55 or 72). Oh really?

By the time the last 10/40 was held in 1997 the radical lesbian feminist community in Victoria was almost exclusively made up of lesbians aged 40 and over. And several significant groups had formed to meet the needs of older lesbians.

The Matrix Guild of Victoria was set up in 1992 by and for the benefit of lesbians over 40. We organized innumerable fundraisers to provide appropriate care, accommodation and support for older lesbians in Victoria. Into the new millennium and Matrix was doing outreach to the lesbian community and by 2009 was in the process of buying a small rental property with money it had received from a recent bequest.

In the meantime, I ran away and joined the Women's Circus in 1991. At the age of 47 I was learning how to do extraordinary feats, such as forward rolls, group balances and walking on stilts. Over the next several years I performed in five major shows, innumerable gigs and was part of the contingent that performed at the International Women's Forum in Beijing in 1995.

Out of these experiences, I established the Performing Older Women's Circus in Melbourne in 1995 to teach circus skills to womyn over 40. The participants who were predominantly lesbians learnt how to walk on stilts, swing on the trapeze, do acrobances, become clowns and form a band. And subsequently exhibited those skills with an hour-long performance called Act Your Age. POW Circus went on to perform in many large shows and small gigs to the amusement of ourselves and appreciative audiences.

The Lesbian Cancer Support Group was formed in 1996 by the lesbian feminist community to offer support and information for lesbians with cancer, their partners and carers. We accompanied lesbians when they went for treatment, went on a 24-hour roster to care for them at home and when they died we organized their funerals. All of which was an empowering and bonding experience for the lesbians involved.

We also cared for and supported my partner, Maureen O'Connor, when she went through treatment for ovarian cancer. And after she died in 1998 I wrote a book, *The C-Word*, (Spinifex Press, Melbourne, 2000) describing her courage and generosity.

Becoming a grandmother at the age of 52 was one of the great joys of my life. I now have four grandchildren, the latest one was born in 2008, who have given me a great deal of happiness over these past thirteen years.



At the age of 56, I celebrated the fact that I was entering the last stage of my life by organizing a Croning Ceremony with my lesbian friends. There have been several lesbian Cronings over these past few years and without exception they have been moving and affirming experiences. My lesbian friends have also celebrated our decade birthdays with parties and on my 63th birthday I celebrated getting my Old Age Pension at long last.

The older we got the more it became our business to care for and support our lesbian friends as they were dying. To document some of our knowledge in this important area of our lives, eight of us established Long Breast Press, wrote and published *Willing Up and Keeling Over: A Lesbian Handbook on Death Rights and Rituals* and launched it in 2007.

As part of our trip to the US in 2008, Ardy and I attended the Old Lesbians Organizing for Change Conference for lesbians over 60 in Los Angeles and had a great time. I attended as many workshops as possible including Practising Anti-Racism for White Women. There was a balanced mix of keynote speakers and forums for African American, Jewish, working class and old lesbians. The entertainment in the evening was fun, especially the Talent Show where we read our poems from *Willing Up*. And on the final day we went on the bus tour to various locations including the June Mazer Lesbian Archives.

The older lesbian feminist community here in Australia has continued to meet on a semi-regular basis to workshop ideas and exchange information for our mutual benefit. We are only too well aware that in this ever-changing world us '70s dykes are regarded as dinosaurs because of our so-called outmoded ideas of radical lesbian feminism. Not that we're fazed in the least. Fortunately, there are still enough of us about that we can continue the work we need to do, in my case being on the collective of the Victorian Women's Liberation and Lesbian Feminist Archives and writing and publishing *Brazen Hussies: A Herstory of Radical Activism in the Women's Liberation Movement in Victoria 1970-1979*.

Now that I'm old, 65, and know that growing old is not only inevitable, if you're lucky, but a fun and growthful thing to do I wouldn't have it any other way. Little did I realize, when I was young and knew everything, that I would not only have the opportunity to be a founding member of several dynamic groups for older lesbians but that there would still be a very nurturing and vigorous radical lesbian feminist community to sustain and support me in my old age. Over these past couple of decades I have been much more discerning about my choice of lovers. And since 2000 have been very gratefully partnered with a wonderfully affirming lesbian of



my own age. I'm more than happy still being sexually active well into my seventh decade. And counting.



*Muriel Fisher. Photo by Carole Stoneking.*



Rose Beth Levno

## Note on Memory and Cognition

I continue to study my recovery after a concussion that produced temporary amnesia, partial blindness and deafness, and longer-term memory loss. I am blessed with a favorable environment for recovery: wise friends and children and doctors, plenty of free time, choices for stimulation and rest, and control over the objects of my environment which serve as mnemonics. Luckily, there is plenty of optimism about traumatic brain injury recoveries now in the field of sports medicine. I heard not a discouraging word from anyone after the car accident.

When a moment of aphasia is apparent, I try to study it. For example, as I am driving, I review a story I used to tell about pilots out of Mountain Home, Idaho. On take-off, the pilot yells at the co-pilot to give him/her "take-off power." The latter takes off power and they fall out of the sky. I wonder to myself, "Is this story apocryphal or not? Perhaps." ...then I search for the word I want: "evidentiary?" "prophylactic?" "prophetic?" A teaching story? A warning story? I do not find the word, and I give up.

Then I wonder: Is the story credible after all? Who told it? Why did they not have full power while still on the runway? Why not a hand signal to push forward the throttle? I haven't flown a jet, so without research my analysis is limited.

While I consider it a bad sign when, as sometimes happens, I cannot retrieve a word after using it moments before, I consider it positive that I am using a more sophisticated cognitive approach to the story itself, questioning what I have taken for granted in the past. Because I like the story, I was willing to accept it as true, when I am now able to notice that it has all the earmarks of an urban myth.



Marge Nelson

## You're Never Too Old to Feel Normal

I'm sitting in the community room of our senior housing unit with about forty gay men and a few women. We're all listening to Don sing "There's a Place for Us" from the musical, *West Side Story*. He's brought an orchestral tape to accompany his lovely voice. I've heard this song many times, in many different contexts and often have shed a drop or two. Now, however, tears are streaming down my face and I'm struggling not to sob out loud. Good grief! What's this all about?

Emotion shakes my whole body. As I mop my face, I work with my breath to calm down. This must be important and a little scary too. I feel so vulnerable in the midst of all these men, and yet, I've invited them. I sneak a glance at Tita seated nearby. Like everyone in the room, she's stone still, completely absorbed.

Time seems to stop as I remember all the years of crushes on girls, then women, the fantasy life I created around them. How deeply ashamed I felt about my secret world, how worried that I was crazy. I hear my mother talk about her single women friends—professional women—as queer. I didn't know what she meant by that, but couldn't miss the feeling she conveyed by the sneer in her voice. Born in 1928, I never heard the word lesbian until the women's movement of the 1960s.

I think about my brother John Eric, who, upon facing the fact that he was a homosexual, had a severe nervous breakdown from which he never recovered. My husband and I with our three young children living in Corpus Christi, Texas took him into our home and gave him shelter. I listened to him for hours, months, as he grew progressively more insane. Did his condition mean that my mother was right about homosexuality? Of course not, but I didn't know that back then, nor did I share with him any of my own guilty secrets. I didn't know what to do with or about him. It was the early 1950s, a time of extreme gender differentiation: manly men and feminine women who leaned on them and waited upon them hand and foot. My sexual desires were deeply buried under my role as super Mom and super Housewife.

Don has finished the song and we are all clapping and talking. This is his day, his eightieth birthday. Tita squeezes my hand. "That song always makes me cry," she says. I'm so glad she's here. My sweetie. She stands up and gives me a hug, then walks off to fill a plate with food. As I watch her



mix into the crowd, I'm aware of the ribbons and flags of rainbows shining on the ceiling.

These decorations represent a huge victory for the seven lesbians and three gay men living here in "affordable" senior housing in San Francisco. Three years ago, during gay pride, Sandy came home with a bag full of rainbow flags and we decorated the common areas of our residence.

Lavish decorations are pretty standard here. Not a special day passes that our public halls, windows and doors are not filled with bunnies and pumpkins and pilgrims, etc. But no rainbows. Not until Sandy's generous act.

Within only a few hours they were gone. Who took them down? Nobody knew. We didn't want to believe it was malicious. Not in the heart of San Francisco. Not from these multi-ethnic, multi-racial neighbors. I wanted to think that some of these old people just liked rainbows. Our manager sent out a letter asking that they be returned, but no luck.

One year later, Sandy repeated her generous gift. Again all flags disappeared except for those on individual's doors. Okay, so it is a hate crime. Sandy organized a fight. She called all lesbians and gays here to a meeting. She demanded that management reimburse her, and contacted the Human Rights Commission. They responded with some meetings, including a session with all our residents about "cultural competency" Sandy got her money, plus a promise from management that they would fund our decorations as they do all the others. This year, we have rainbows galore. All over the ceiling, they are dazzling.

Pat comes to tell me that they are about to cut the cake. A close friend of Don's, she's one of the organizers of this party. She and Don are part of a weekly peace vigil in front of the Federal Building. The vigil was started by Quakers after the bombing of Afghanistan six years ago. It soon attracted other faiths: Episcopal, Unitarian, Buddhist (that's Don) and a bunch of peaceniks like me. Actually it was McVey who told me about it. She and I participated for many months until she had a stroke. Then I organized a little group from here: Tita, Sandy, Sherrill and our neighbor Lynn. We've been going for several years.

About a month ago, we were gathering up our peace signs, standing around talking. All my friends had left. Don and I were talking about becoming eighty, how much it was bringing up for each of us. Although I hardly knew Don, I felt pleased to be sharing this with him. When asked whether he was planning a party, Don seemed to dismiss the notion. He didn't know where he could have one; it cost too much. That's when I jumped in with an invitation to use our community room.



As the invitation tumbled out of my mouth, I felt surprised. Where did that come from? I'm not much of a party person, and I've never hung out with gay men. Although there have been and are special men in my life, for the most part I feel more comfortable around women. Most of the rest of what I do outside of my work and social world is related to my primary affiliation with OLOC: OLD LESBIANS ORGANIZING FOR CHANGE. In the past year I've been running groups for OLOC about aging and primarily about ageism; how distorted our society is in its views of old people, especially old women. As I've found myself wondering about my own changes, I've plunged into reading what others are saying about it: men and women, gay and straight. Being old feels like a whole other country where I've landed.

Later, when Tita agreed to co-host the party, I felt relieved. Pat and another friend took responsibility for most of the work. My job was to have the room ready and make iced tea. I could surely handle that. I began to look forward to the event. This could be a dress rehearsal for my own 80th party in December. I invited all the other gay and lesbian residents to the party. Sandy volunteered to help set up and make a couple of pitchers of iced tea.

Don brings over a little plastic cup of champagne. He looks happy. I tell him how moved I was by his song, wave a toast to his 80th celebration and take a sip. Still feeling the effects of my melt down, I'm now content to sit in my chair and watch the party. I'm comfortable. I'm not anxious, not needing to take care of anyone—that's often a trip for me. I'm just sitting here like any normal person, taking in the scene.

Eva joins us. Her apartment is directly over my own. It seems that she knows some of these men from their yoga class. As I watch them greet and hug each other, I feel especially happy. Our community here is growing. Tita returns with her plate, pleased to find food that won't upset her restricted diet. I sip my drink slowly savoring the fact that I'm in a room full of men and I know that I'm safe, even enjoying myself. As a child, I'd learned so violently and thoroughly that I was female and as such, was inferior to all men; only here to amuse or be the victim of my three older brothers, their friends, and as I grew, any man. My brothers brought home "comic" books filled with pictures and stories of torture which they tried out on me. My mother made sure that I would never fight back. "You have to learn to get along with the boys. One day you'll be thankful for them. They'll get you dates."

Ralph shows up with a plate of cake for me. The white cake has strawberries and whipped cream in the filling. Yummy soft, sweet and gooey, my mouth



enjoys every bite. Don brings more new guests over to meet me. I like them, these men so gentle and sweet.

My father was gentle like this—sometimes. He was also a passionate man. He'd pontificate at the dining room table about justice and peace and racism and socialism but also about "true womanhood," and how no real woman could think as well as a man because of her hormones.

I adored my father. I wanted justice, too. I wanted his passion, to be like him. But how could I? I was a woman. The order in our home was based on power and fear. I learned to be such a "good girl." I became hyper vigilant, anxious, filled with shame and silent.

I still want justice. I have spent years trying to balance the ideal of justice with the violence that has erupted against me and other women, the violence of manly men, of war and the abuse power. Domination is what war is about and what we glorify in war heroics. All of the attributes of manliness, strength, sacrifice of life, and glory set up the opposite for women. Women must accede because they are doing it "for us." And now we're seeing how it is played out on the earth itself.

Don's party is winding down when a group from the Zen Center arrives. We sit in a circle and talk. The one woman among them tells us that she has just finished reading the whole document of the Supreme Court of California's decision concerning the legalization of gay marriage. She's very excited about this language of equality and of rights. She urges all of us to read it.

It's only been a week since the Court declared marriage legal for us. The legitimizing of our sexuality is brand new, and truly profound. Because I'm very much "out," have no wish to remarry, and am critical of the politics of marriage, I hadn't considered how much of my own sense of being a lesbian might be affected by this discrimination. The Supreme Court decision declared that I can be myself and all the rest of us can, too. That's it. Normal. Simple? Obviously not.

About a month after Don's party, I attended with Tita a "communal" marriage ceremony of seven lesbian and gay couples. As a member of the audience, our joyous and even raucus participation in that ceremony gave me some insight.

It's about community in a very broad sense. The feeling I'd called "normal" was one of belonging, being a part of. I got to thinking that due to my severe socialization as a female, whatever I was doing, no matter how liberated I thought myself to be, from super housewife to super radical lesbian feminist, I was always doing it as a woman. Mary Daly wrote that



“women are denied the experience of our experience.” I think the same is probably true for manly men as well, but there’s an important point here.

I may continue to prefer most of the time to be with other old lesbians. I am not by any means declaring an end to such groups. But I am saying that my sense of feeling “at home” at Don’s party gave me a very new feeling of belonging to a bigger world. And that this could happen because I am already part of a larger and very mixed community which includes lesbians and gays. Is any of this about becoming 80? Maybe. Maybe not. I want to explore it some more. Being 80 gives me a huge catalog of experience to draw upon.

I thought that I was giving a party for Don. It turns out that I did it for me.

P.S. Guess who cleaned up?



Simi Litvak

## Disabled and Old

When I was young and disabled

I could hurry and not fall

I could keep my balance

I only had back pain

I thrived on crowds

I could stay up long hours and bounce back

I healed fast and moved quickly and rushed from place to place

I multitasked

I could pass. I could still get in places using only one cane.

But then I started wearing out.

Now I'm old and disabled

I have to balance what I eat, how much I move, how long I sleep.

If I exercise too much, it hurts my knee, too little and

I'm stiff and my innards don't work as well.

I broke my hip, had two cataract operations, developed an eye infection and can't drink caffeine anymore. And the list will surely go on.

So the balance is harder, because the edge is narrower, and it keeps shifting.



Simi Litvak

## I Can't Hurry Anymore

I can't hurry anymore

The phone rang and I hurried to get it and tripped on the rug and fell  
I lay there, counted my bones, rolled a bit  
Decided I could use the adrenaline rush to reach the desk chair and  
gingerly, carefully, creakily, crawled myself upright.  
Then the phone machine picked up!

I can't hurry anymore

I have to get into my van by 1:00 to go to the Mother Tongue meeting.  
At 10 minutes to 1:00 I can't find my sunglasses. After a search through  
purse and chair I remember I wore a sweater—glasses are in the pocket.  
Then I have to go to the bathroom. Can I wait so I won't be late?  
Don't do that! So I go—and I'm late!

I can't hurry anymore

Trip, fall, drop my keys, forget my credit cards...

I can't hurry anymore



Simi Litvak

## Logistics

Disability boils down to logistics  
If I can think far enough ahead  
And carefully dissect every move  
Like a time and motion study or  
An occupational therapy evaluation  
And figure out a solution for every obstacle  
Then I'm not disabled.

So I went to LA for 4 days with my partner  
We drove down in order to take my scooter, my walker, my canes,  
my breathing machine, my scooter lift  
In addition to clothes, shoes, sunscreen and my OLOC visor

But I didn't think of the shower!!!  
Our friends where we stayed only had a shower in the bathtub downstairs.

Uh oh!

Our next trip this summer we're going to Camp-It-Up and their bathroom facilities are perfect. I checked.

So I won't be disabled until I confront the next barrier I didn't anticipate.

Logistics is everything.



Jalaina Mar

## The Gift of Time and Age

The gift of time has allowed me to periodically re-evaluate my life, to grow and evolve. When I first started to think about writing this piece about older Dykes, I had something very different in mind. I had reached a place of peace in my life and I believed that I had a clear vision about my evolution as a more mature person and artist. Instead I chose to write about how a simple act of watching a television program, which aired in mid-January, made me question my childhood foundations. I thought that I understood myself as a 62-year-old white witchy crone living here in rural Oregon with my partner of 28 years.

LaVerne and I had just survived a very harsh emotionally and physically challenging winter in Disston. One of the highlights of this winter has been a memorial celebration of the life and work of our dear friend, Tee Corinne at the University of Oregon on December 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup>. LaVerne and I were readers in a twelve women panel from the Southern Oregon Women's Writing Group, Gourmet Eating Society and Chorus. The second was the inauguration of our new president Barack Obama.

On January 13<sup>th</sup> this year, the third anniversary of my mother's death, I was trying to distract myself and I started to watch an Oregon Public Broadcasting (OPB) program titled *The Ascent of Money*. The program began with Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*. That spiked my interest since the storyteller, Nial Fergeson, took slices of history and examined the complex interaction of art, politics, economics and religion. That intriguing Gestalt has influenced my life and work as a visual and performance artist, writer and filmmaker.

Nevertheless, *The Ascent of Money* is an economic analysis from the time of the fall of French King Louis XVI and the French revolution up to the current global economic crisis that is continuing to unravel. The names of the players are immense from the wealthiest kings, family dynasties, heads of states of countries across several continents; heads of religious institutions; to the endless names of con-artists, financiers, CEO's, global conglomerates and "captains of industry." The victims are always the poor and the workers.

Over the centuries the patrons of the arts from the time of the renaissance to the present time have been the wealthiest individuals, families, businesses and churches. Nial Fergeson illustrates his tale of *The Ascent of Money* with



famous works of art, portraits, paintings, sculpture, architecture and ceiling and wall murals which help chronicle the tale of power, prejudice and greed.

It did successfully distract me from my grief over my mother's death. I settled back in my chair to relax and enjoy the visual feast. The images abruptly shifted from vignettes of the grand canals of Venice, Italy to the broken down streets of Detroit, Michigan. I started to feel like I was viewing home movies of my childhood. First, cut to an image of the Hazel Park, to the Dearborn Ford River Rouge Plant where I had painted during summer, outdoor watercolor classes during my years of high school from 1960–64. A painter's delight, a snotty yellow, cotton candy pink and blue smoke filled sky with an oil slicked rainbow colored Rouge River running through the barren ground surrounding the plant.

Clips of the old wooden three story lean-to row houses surrounding my high school flashed on the screen with multiple lines of colorful clothes hung out to dry. Cass Tech was a four-year, public high school, which offered specialized studies in the arts, sciences and college prep-classes. It was a citywide-based high school with students who were recommended and came from all parts of Wayne County. I majored in commercial art.

The surrounding Black, Chinese and Greek neighborhoods in downtown Detroit provided inspiration for my design and paintings classes. As an art student I was allowed passes from school to scour downtown Detroit for artistic inspiration. The architecture of the surrounding churches, government buildings, banks, fountains and statues provided me with an abundant visual environment. The ethnic neighborhoods were a bountiful source of "exotic" foods. Ahh, the memory Greek-town's Baklava, sweet decadent layers of gooey honey soaked pastry!

Suddenly, I was visually transported to the grand courtyard of the Detroit Institute of Arts (DIA). The camera skimmed across the green- and brown-skinned, robot, stylized workers in a Ford Motor automobile plant with a small portrait of Henry Ford and his son Edsel in the corner of one of the gigantic murals. That was the first most historically and artistically significant piece of art work that I had ever seen. It wasn't until many years later that I began to understand its "radical" message. It still inspires me. I recall sitting for hours on a small concrete bench surrounded by those vast murals painted by Mexican artist, Diego Rivera.

I spent six years of special public art class each Saturday morning for nine months of every school year at the DIA. I sat alone in front of that mural the Saturday after the assassination of President Kennedy in November of 1963 and pondered about life.



Startling images shook me from those memories. Flashing, image after image of burned out buildings and black people with looks of terror on their faces. During the 1969 riots black neighborhoods near my high school were burned to the ground. It lasted four days and 43 people died. I was in Philadelphia attending the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts (PAFA) at the time. My mother called me on the phone the evening of July 4th from her house near Eight-Mile Road; I could hear the distant sounds of guns and loud explosions in the background. She said it looked like the annual July 4<sup>th</sup> fireworks celebration on the Detroit River except for the yellow smoky sky, and the military planes dangling tanks flying overhead.

But the most shocking moments of that OPB program occurred when the camera slowly scanned along the backs of a row of small “cottage” houses that looked like my parents home. In fact, they were identical! There were the same three windows in the back of the house. I could visualize the floor plan. The only difference being a long multi-muraled fence than ran behind this row of look-a-like houses. One minute I was viewing the canals of Venice the next minutes my childhood home. I was in shock! I had to check to see if the TV channel had suddenly switched to another program. No, it hadn't!

Talk about age and suddenly having a different perspective! I am a 62-year-old working class white woman; my father worked for the railroad first as a brakeman then as a conductor. My mother worked as a phone operator. We lived in a white Catholic neighborhood eight miles out from the center of an industrial city. I attended public school, went to a Protestant church, and was a 4-H member and a girl scout. I read a popular book in 1980s titled Detroit about the history of the city and the founding families. I thought I knew and understood my roots.

Foolish me. Watching that program on January 13<sup>th</sup> was an awakening. I should have known better, history has a reputation for burying the facts and spinning a different version about the events. Robert Frost's poem “The Grass” states that nature can cover the atrocities of man much like time can conceal actual historic events. My witch-hunt paintings depict strata's of the earth covering the truth about the massive gender-cide that occurred over a span of 300 years in Europe beginning in the 1500s.

So once again, the victors had rewritten history. That accounting of Detroit's history is not prominent in our “standard” history books. Apparently, after the 1929 stock market crash, half of the jobs were lost in the Ford factories and the remaining workers were being paid half of their original wages. There was a demonstration in 1930 outside of the



Dearborn River Rouge plant where 5,000 displaced workers demonstrated. The police and Ford security guards burst out of the fenced plant firing at the unarmed protesters. Outraged at the deaths of five people, 60,000 people gathered at their funeral singing the anthem "Internationale." The communist party newspapers called it THE FORD MASSACRE.

Henry Ford turned to FDR fearful of a communist uprising. Edsel Ford was blamed for the violence and in an attempt to redeem his reputation he hired Diego Rivera to paint the notorious mural. The communist painter's DIA mural was a statement about the conditions of the workplace and its workers. The barons of industry were appalled; but Edsel refused to destroy the mural. The next mural that Diego Rivera painted, in Rockefeller Center, was not tolerated by "daddy" Rockefeller and was destroyed. Discouraged, Diego Rivera and his wife Frida Kahlo returned to Mexico.

I had thought of FDR as a champion of the people, with all the programs that were created as part of "The New Deal." Once again Detroit was held up as an example of what went wrong. Obviously, the capitalists were terrified of communism. Consequently, they poured money into housing, businesses and government work programs.

Remember my mention of homes that looked like my childhood home? During 1941 a massive amount of small houses were built in Detroit. A six-foot tall concrete wall was built at an eight-mile marker in order to section off where federal money would be spent on housing; read non-White. We lived near Eight-Mile Road, on the west side of Woodward Avenue, east of the Michigan State Fair Grounds. Nial Fergeson pointed out red areas and the names of the major streets on a map of Detroit. Red areas surrounded the DIA, Cass Technical High School, and a large area along the Detroit River east of Woodward Avenue where two very close high-school girlfriends lived. One a poor white the other a poor Chinese.

The phrase "red lining" comes from sectioning off red-colored zones earmarked on a map and were ineligible for low-interest federal home loans as outlined by FDR. He is credited with creating a property-owning democracy. Clearly, the intent was to diffuse the "Communist Threat" by creating low cost housing for "the masses." There were very distinct black, white and ethnic neighborhoods clearly framed by major roads and streets. The wall (now partially deteriorated or collapsed) remains a long running, multi-sectioned wood and concrete fence currently painted with brightly colored murals of black people.

I believe that the Ford family poured an immense amount of money into the Detroit public education system and into the arts as an act to



appease the people. Henry Ford was once championed as one of the biggest employers of blacks in the 1920s. The Ford family and the federal government had managed to ghetto-ize the blacks and Chinese in the early 1940s. Henry Ford was also known as a notorious anti-Semite who talked about all those evil Jewish bankers and had befriended Hitler in the 1940s. All facts that seemed to have been overlooked by most historians.

The current “landscape” of Detroit has resembled a war-ravished city for over 40 years. Immediately after the 1967 black riots the white Detroiters fled to the suburbs. For example, the famous Ford Medical Center (funded by the Ford family) is still considered a cutting edge hospital. The size of a small island, it is a self-contained entity which sits midst a vast desert of flat, sterile land. Once in the heart of many vital predominately black neighborhoods numerous abandoned houses had been havens for drug dealers and the homeless. In desperation citizens painted the decaying structures neon orange to embarrass the city. Consequently, acres of single homes and large apartment buildings were leveled, displacing thousands of black citizens.

I’m still grateful for the education that I received. But I never knew that my path, which started with admiring a print or drawing of a violent 1800s battle-scene at a relatives home and continued along a path of educational opportunities based on more violence fear, greed and bigotry. Perhaps the biggest irony is that I escaped from my father’s hatred and bigotry and Detroit when I received a Ford Foundation scholarship and grant to attend The Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts in Philadelphia, the city of “brotherly love.”

I reaped the benefits of that era of new deals. But this “ol’ gal” has honed her vision, thanks to my roots. The gift of age has allowed me to “witness.” I am incredibly angry about the history revealed in *The Ascent of Money* and want to express that anger creatively with a sharper voice about social injustice as well pollution. I will not forget my roots!

So, now I get to participate during a monumental time in America’s history. At last, my partner, a black-Lakota woman, and I are finally represented as citizens of this country, she as a woman of color and both of us as lesbians. In addition I get to witness yet another collapse of my childhood hometown and of an economic and ethical meltdown of our country. At first, I thought there is no way that Barack Obama could begin to implement any programs to help the working people. However, Detroit is being held up as an example of what a land-based democracy is willing to do to avoid communism or socialism. If history is to be a lesson, I believe



that Americans need to shed their collective compliancy and once again take to the streets to protest our disdain. Sadly, the global stage is much larger, the corporate nations more pervasive and the “New Deal” may need to be more radical and played out on a different stage and be more inclusive than ever before. Time will tell.

After January 13<sup>th</sup> of this year, I spoke to Emma Joy Crone. She is now a vibrant 81-year-old crone. We caught up on recent news and marveled at how America nearly elected Hilary Clinton as the first woman president and the inauguration of the first Black American president. We both celebrate the fact that we lived to see these incredible events. It amazes us how just one single event can be a pivotal moment in our lives or in history. We spoke of the gifts of time and age. We both laughed at my foolishness 28 years ago when we first met on women’s land in California. I thought then that I understood what it meant to be a woman of age. “Well,” she said, “My dear, you have finally arrived. You are officially, a crone!” “Yes”, I mused, “and I have earned it!”



Lynn Brown

## Community

We just finished our memoir group and as Tita was saying goodbyes she mentioned that she should have written about the OLOC (OLD LESBIANS ORGANIZING FOR CHANGE) community she has gotten to know and how wonderful it is. I realized that we don't often talk about the community when we aren't in retreat because we get together in smaller numbers to appreciate one another. I, too, am very touched and enlivened by this group that I have embraced and felt embraced by. Even with the individual lesbians that I know my sense of community would be different, smaller and less vital without the coming together of all these wondrous old women who are dykes and lesbians. The peace demos, letter writing, art projects, theater and presentations on our ongoing issues make my understanding open with thoughtfulness and insight. I love having the opportunities to mingle with my San Francisco group but also to be a part of our national OLOC gatherings where so many varied women show from all different parts of the world. I feel more whole and connected in the presence of women of a feather, one kind or another. It is often amazing what these heretofore unknown lesbians have created with their lives and I am grateful to share mine with theirs. I am especially impacted by the art these old lesbians have created in their latter years, passions that were unfolded when traditional work lives retired or the work lives that continue in a different form along with the art. When I listen to the women who have come before me, or the ones who have passed being remembered I have a sense of a history that touches my heart and soul way deep down. The bounty flows over.

Any day now I have been invited to share the 91<sup>st</sup> birthday of Jess McVey who I have grown to cherish from our early working together in her garden, observing her art and listening to the breadth of knowledge and humor she communicates on many ideas to admiration for her years of fierce independence and doing it all. I've watched her life change and I hold her lightly in my heart as I know we might lose her soon. I heard her say that she wants to leave in the midst of an oral history where she was also talking about her next art project and how difficult the simplest daily tasks have become. I know I'll be heading down the same road one day as well and I am strengthened by her example. Part of this time in my life has been to come to terms with the shadow of my mortality and the impact that has on how and what I do now. McVey makes me remember grace and gentleness with all the flourish of not going into the light until...



Margaret Mann

## Is That All There Is?

My disability has made me old before my time. I suffered a spinal cord injury in 1997 at the age of 52. The time line speeded up and I am having to deal with all sorts of things in my early 60s that I thought I would not have to deal with until much later in life. Of course, we really never know what the future will bring and I suspect that expectations often make us miserable when things turn out different than we expected.

I went on Social Security at age 52, at least ten years before any one else I knew. In my working years I had set aside retirement savings I thought I would not touch until I stopped working in my late 60s, but at age 63 I have already run through them. Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) does not cover my monthly expenses and I have had to supplement it with my savings, which are now depleted.

Like other elderly people, I have to hire someone to clean my house because I can't do it. People open doors for me, bring my food to the table at the fast food restaurants, and take me to appointments in their car. I claim the senior discount everywhere I can. Who is going to challenge an old lady with white hair in a wheelchair?

Before my spinal cord injury, I was living the good life. I had a really good job. I thought I was making a difference in the world. I sat on the boards of directors for interesting agencies and had lots of friends. I was earning a really good salary. I lived in Dupont Circle in the heart of Washington DC and loved it. I was a tall athletic lesbian who loved to dance. But then, in a serendipitous moment, a blood vessel burst in my spinal cord and I got old all of a sudden.

One of the worst fears about my disability is that the best part of my life has gone by and I have nothing but pain and poverty to look forward to. The good old days all seem in the past and the future is looking grim. I understand much better now an old man sitting on a park bench repeating his WWII experiences over and over. When did the worm turn? When did the past become more interesting than the possibility of the future?

I have a life now. It's just not the life I used to have and it sure is not the life I thought I was going to have. Demons in the night whisper in my ear. I don't drive anymore and I wonder how long I will be able to get along with just my scooter. Will I become more disabled as time goes by? Will I get diabetes like my father and brother? Will my osteopenia turn into



osteoporosis? Look what happened when I broke my leg, it incapacitated me for nearly six months. What will happen when the arthritis in my hands gets so bad that it will prevent me from manually assisting my bowel movements? My blood pressure is on the rise, what if I have a stroke on top of my spinal cord injury? I manage limited exercise now, what happens when I can't exercise?

But even facing all this, I am not depressed. I ask these questions with a clear mind, a bright eye and a sense of wonder. I don't sit home alone pining away. I am a cheerful person because I know that you will suffer in direct proportion to how much you wish things were different. I live in Hawaii, one of the most beautiful places on earth and each morning I get to look out from the 25<sup>th</sup> floor over the harbor and Honolulu. Rainbows appear almost every morning. I meditate once a week with a Buddhist group and find it very fulfilling. But...in the dark of the night sometimes I wonder. Like the lines from that old Peggy Lee song, "Is that all there is?"



Neta Melton

## *Cobwebs of Love*

*I have loved you always,*

*Or nearly so, since little was the time before.*

*Loving you crystalized at eight,*

*When a game of hide-and-seek placed me under  
your window.*

*You were brushing your hair. The moment was  
immortalized for me.*

*I loved you two years, when I was twenty or so, while  
we worked together.*

*You were short, medium, tall, blond, brunette, red headed.*

*You were known by at least three names, which I can  
still recall.*

*Oh, how I loved you when I was twenty-three and you were  
forty-seven.*

*We shared a like faith and I wrote flowing presentations  
for such.*

*Sometimes you poured Tony's scotch for me.*

*Most likely you thought my flushed face was due to that.*

*I loved you at twenty-six, and miracle of miracles, you  
loved back.*

*You, the six-foot-one, hawked nosed bean-pole cared for me,  
but not for long.*

*My obsession endured several years 'till finally, a life long  
friendship grew.*



*I found you when thirty and you only slightly younger.*

*Blond, perfect hair, dark tinted cat eye glasses hid hazel eyes.*

*There was someone you couldn't leave quite yet.*

*I drank to forget.*

*I loved you when I was thirty-one and didn't know you were barely eighteen.*

*A dark-eyed little Robin bird, who loved unconditionally.*

*Too soon, I bowed to peer pressure and Blondie's return.*

*I sent you away.*

*I loved you once more, the tough talking blond, who stayed for a decade.*

*We played a tug of war with feelings, until we parted.*

*A lot of caring remained - memories and friendship 'till your life ended.*

*Love, loneliness blurred with a bottle's view.*

*It got easier to speak of feelings.*

*I loved you for a short time when I reached forty-five.*

*Your skin was black as night. You rode a motorcycle to work as a nurse.*

*The neighbor on the hill threatened to burn down my house. I didn't care.*

*I loved you at forty-six. You were a skinny five foot nympho and bragged about it.*



Maggie Leigh

## Getting There

Today, February 22, 2009, is Constance, my first love's seventy-ninth birthday. I hope she is still alive and a happy woman. Though I have not been in touch with her for decades, I have never forgotten her.

When I was twelve, I attended a girls' summer camp on the shores of Lake Champlain in Vermont. The focus was on the arts. Constance, twenty-six years old, was the poetry teacher and a counselor there. As my mother was the drama teacher they were colleagues and became good friends.

Soon a strong, passionate feeling grew in me. I picked fresh raspberries every day which I placed at Constance's table at lunchtime. She accepted my adoration and reciprocated by paying a lot of attention to me, talking to me about poetry and about her life. One day in her room she kissed me on the lips. My eyes stayed wide open. Several times after dark we went out to the lake nearby and we lay on the shore talking, looking at the night sky. She taught me how to recognize the constellation of Orion. At the end of the second summer of camp, at the last possible moment, I declared my love to her. In another occasion she told me: "This is just a phase you will grow out of. You'll meet a man, you'll get married."

My mother and I did not attend camp the following year. I wrote to Constance and she replied, but I only saw her when she came to visit once in Connecticut, and a couple of years later, in Italy, where my mother and I had gone to live.

During that visit in Florence, Constance and I took walks together and she talked about poetry, her life, her former lover, a man. I spent one night at her apartment. In bed, we kissed on the mouth and we hugged. I could feel her body in my arms, her chest pressed against mine. I had an awareness of her breasts. For several years after that I dreamed of her and yearned for her. I began a translation of *Tristan and Iseult* with the story of my love for her in mind.

It took me twenty-eight years to come out as a lesbian. I know now that societal, political and personal factors caused the delay. But for a long time it seemed to me that the detour started with Constance, with her telling me: "You'll meet a man, you'll get married." I refused to accept this: I wanted to be faithful, to love her forever. Shortly afterwards it was she who married and moved away, and I lost track of her.

Except for that first bloom of unconsummated love which had no name, and no shame, my sexual life was not of my own choosing. I started having



sex at nineteen. A man twenty years older than I, who was my divorced mother's lover, made a pass at me. I accepted this as a signal that we were in a relationship.

A similar situation which I had no memory of had set the stage. I had been sexually abused as a child by my father, but my knowledge of this had gone underground. My mother did not know about it or chose to ignore it. A man, my father, who was sexually involved with my mother, had betrayed my trust and forced me to have sexual contact with him.

When, in my late teens, the reenactment of that original situation came about, it was subconsciously familiar, which made it acceptable to me. The difference was that now my senses were awakened. I was obsessed with sexual thoughts, I thought I was a virgin and was anxious to be free of virginity, and I was having increasing difficulties with my mother, who was competing with me and against whom I was starting to rebel. Convinced that I was choosing freely, I took the situation and made it my own. I thought, and stated to others, that I was in love with this man, my mother's lover. I thought I wanted it this way in order to get back at her, to prove to her that I was now an adult, that I could love him better than she did. I enjoyed the attention of an older, established man of the world. It was short-lived. Even though he continued to see me, he soon sought out other women.

It was fortunate for me that this man died four years later, though I grieved for him for many months after his death. By this time I taught at a private school for girls, a job I had gotten due to this man's recommendation of me as a teacher, even though I had no credentials. I was out of my mother's house and free from this man's grasp. But it would take two decades to see clearly and to admit what had happened, to remember the root cause, to hear another incest survivor respond to my story with: "You were not responsible as a teenager, this man was a perpetrator, he deliberately took advantage of your youth and your difficulties with your mother..." It was hard to believe her. I still ask myself: at nineteen, even if burdened with emotional liabilities that I knew nothing of, was I not responsible for what happened? It is hard to forgive myself for adding to the already garbled mess of my sexual experiences and emotions, with guilt towards my mother and towards my teenage self.

If only I had been able to go right from loving Constance to loving another woman...if my father hadn't abused me...if as a teenager I had been aware of the incest and seen that man as another predator...if I had had a good relationship with my mother...if she had protected me...if I



had chosen to lose my presumed virginity with the young man who was courting me at the time, instead of the older, more assured man...if I had lived in an environment conducive to women loving women...

Though I continued to admire and have crushes on women, I insisted on being with men, with many years of celibacy in between each short relationship. I had always known that I would never marry and that I would work for a living, so I never looked to a man for economic support or respectability, nor did I feel loyal to men. Perhaps they sensed that. After a few failures, including a "long" relationship of two years, I gave up. I focused instead on having a child. I had a brief affair, got pregnant and became totally engrossed in raising my son. He gave me so much joy! His sweetness and innocence started restoring my sense of trust in humankind.

For many years the grave marker of buried memories of incest was the anguish I experienced every time I was in bed with a man. I now know I was dissociating, separating from myself while reliving past experiences of trauma, but for years I had no idea of what was going on. Desiring, lusting, having romantic fantasies...but when I got into bed the torment would begin, my mind racing, as if I were seeking to get away. I had a sense of other people crowding in the bed with me. I could not be in my body. Sexual desire was at war with obsessive thoughts that distracted me from what my body was experiencing, in effect shutting off sensation. I was helpless against this inner assault. I allowed the man to take over, consented to become an instrument of his experience, and lost track of what was happening with me. It was happening to somebody else. I felt defeated every time, as if the rug had been pulled out from under me. Though I had discovered my capacity for pleasure while masturbating, I could never come close to being there and letting go unless I was alone and safe.

I had been drinking from an early age. In Italy, where I grew up and lived as an adolescent and as a young woman, drinking wine with meals was the norm. Wine became a constant in my life and my memories of sex are blurred, surely because of alcohol. I drank steadily but avoided getting drunk because it made me very ill and depressed. By all appearances I could nevertheless function out in the world.

I had my first inkling of what had happened to me as a child when I came out of denial about being an alcoholic, at age forty-five. I got sober, attended meetings of Alcoholics Anonymous and started an exploration of my childhood in Incest Survivors Anonymous. I stopped smoking, worked with a therapist who happened to be a lesbian, and later started Rosen bodywork.

I went to the San Francisco Public Library looking for books on incest.



I found very few, which were housed on the same shelf as books on homosexuality. (I was reminded with a shock of that experience when, in 2008, I heard the church leader Rick Warren, whom Obama had chosen to take a prominent position at his inauguration, state publicly that homosexuality is akin to pedophilia, incest and polygamy). I spent many hours at Old Wives Tales, the San Francisco women's bookstore, reading everything about sexual abuse and its effects on the survivor that I could get my hands on. These books clearly delineated the power imbalance and the betrayal of trust inherent in incest, which cannot be equated with consensual sex.

My mind started clearing. Within two years my attraction to women became obvious to me. It was as if the unremembered incest had been a lid on the pot of my sexual existence. Finally the lid was off. I realized that the feeling I had for two women who had been in my life for awhile was admiration combined with sexual attraction. With the help of another late bloomer who was also a survivor and in recovery, I came all the way out to myself. A year later I became lovers with a woman for the first time. We were very close in age. I felt my hatred and resentment of men lift: something that had been warring inside me was finally at peace.

After two brief relationships I met a woman with whom I experienced total sexual trust, and with whom I could begin a long-term relationship. The dissociation that had plagued me all my life was gone. I was really there, in the present, in bed with my lover. I was fifty-six years old.

Many people allowed me to come to a place of personal fulfillment after so many wrong turnings. There were the courageous women and men who shared their life stories, their woundedness and their healing, whom I met in twelve-step programs like Alcoholics Anonymous and Incest Survivors Anonymous. But it was the Women's Movement that cracked open the silence around child abuse and incest in the 1970s. This made it possible for many anonymous women, as well as famous, influential women, many of them gifted writers, to speak out about their childhood experiences of sexual abuse, validating our own. The False Memory Syndrome, invented in the 1990s by perpetrators to hide their tracks, created a backlash and sent our movement underground. But at the time therapists and lawyers who believed the children and adult survivors were willing in some instances to stake their professional careers on defending us. And the lesbians who struggled for years in the closet and then out of it, who fought hard and forcefully to be recognized and who paid the price for being "different," brought me home.



Lilith Rogers

## 2008—THE YEAR IN REVIEW

*Was just looking at all the photos  
stored in this little computer  
of all the places I've been  
the people I've seen  
the loved ones I've embraced  
the nature I've walked in  
the workshops and weddings I've attended  
the parties I've enjoyed  
the art I've viewed  
over this past year.*

*What a rich and glorious life  
I've been living!!!*

*How did I do all this  
with so little work and money  
so much leisure time  
so many poems written  
so many books  
and newspapers and magazines read  
radios listened to  
conversations on the phone  
meals eaten  
time spent in bed—  
alone and with Luna?*

*A magic and wonderful year  
has passed  
and while I am looking forward  
to the new one  
coming up just next week  
I can't imagine  
it can be  
as glorious as this one has been  
but—we'll see!!*

*December 27th, 2008*





*Renee Hanover. Photo by Tracy Baim.*

Tracy Baim

## Renee Hanover: Radical Lawyer

Attorney Renee Hanover, 81 and retired in Los Angeles as of early 2008, is one of Chicago's most cherished lesbian activists, an attorney who worked inside and outside the system to save and change the lives of tens of thousands of people. With her senior colleague, Pearl M. Hart, she helped overturn the Chicago "zipper" law banning cross-dressing and worked on numerous cases of gay men arrested by police in public spaces.

Hanover, a powerful presence in any meeting, was a traditional anti-war leftie, always challenging the government, for example at a July 7–8, 1961, "freedom wade-in" at the South Side's Rainbow Beach to help desegregate Chicago's beaches.

Ferd Eggan, who died in 2007, wrote of Hanover in an essay titled "Dykes and Fags Want Everything: Dreaming of the Gay Liberation Front": "I remember best a demonstration [in the early 1970s] against the beating and killing of a Black drag queen by the Chicago Police Department. We came to understand that our gay rights would be nothing but privileges for the well-to-do unless we acted for the most vulnerable, most easily victimized queers. Long-time lesbian lawyer Renee Hanover, who had struggled for years already as an advocate of union and leftist communities in Chicago, was one of the maybe 20 of us in the freezing sleet on Chicago Avenue that day."

That was Hanover—you could count on her in the boardroom, in the



courtroom, or on the streets with ACT UP protesters or draft-resisting revolutionaries. She also took on the gay establishment, fighting for African-American lesbians kept out of women's bars. During the 1987 March on Washington weekend in D.C., Hanover was among those arrested at a protest in front of the U.S. Supreme Court. She was already 61.

For more than 40 years, she was involved in a wide range of causes. As an out lesbian attorney starting in the 1960s, Hanover made history just by being open, alongside very few out colleagues. Her practice with Hart inspired Hanover in her own work. "Her legal career consisted in large part of defending underdogs—aliens, alleged subversives, homosexuals, prostitutes, among others," Hanover said when Hart died. One could say the same about Hanover.

Hanover's work on women's issues was also important to her and to Chicago. She helped anti-rape efforts, the Women in Crisis Can Act hotline, Women Employed, Lesbians in the Law, Chicago Lesbian Liberation, Daughters of Bilitis, Lesbian Community Cancer Project, the National Organization for Women, Chicago Women's Liberation Front, and dozens more.

But she was also involved in numerous legal efforts, including the National Lawyers Guild, the Chicago Lawyers Committee to End the War in Vietnam, and even cooperation with the ACLU. She was very much a co-gender activist, working with Mattachine Midwest, Beckman House, Chicago Gay Alliance, Gay Liberation Front, ACT UP and Illinois Gay and Lesbian Task Force campaigns. She was in mainstream groups, Jewish organizations (gay and non-gay), progressive groups, and dozens more too numerous to list. The Chicago Gay and Lesbian Hall of Fame has a more detailed roster of her involvement. She donated dozens of boxes of her personal papers to the Lesbian Herstory Archives in New York.

What is most important to remember about Hanover is not just her résumé and her work, but Hanover as a person. She is short and mighty, a mentor and friend, an amazing force for change of both individuals and institutions. She was out and proud, and unapologetic, well before that became the norm. She was a role model for so many Chicagoans and others around the United States—lawyers, activists, politicians. Her retirement to Los Angeles was a sad blow to the Windy City. Chicago may never see the likes of Renee Hanover again.

*Reprinted with permission from Out and Proud in Chicago: An Overview of the City's Gay Movement (Surrey Books, 2008), edited by Tracy Baim, [www.ChicagoGayHistory.org](http://www.ChicagoGayHistory.org).*



Rose Beth Levno

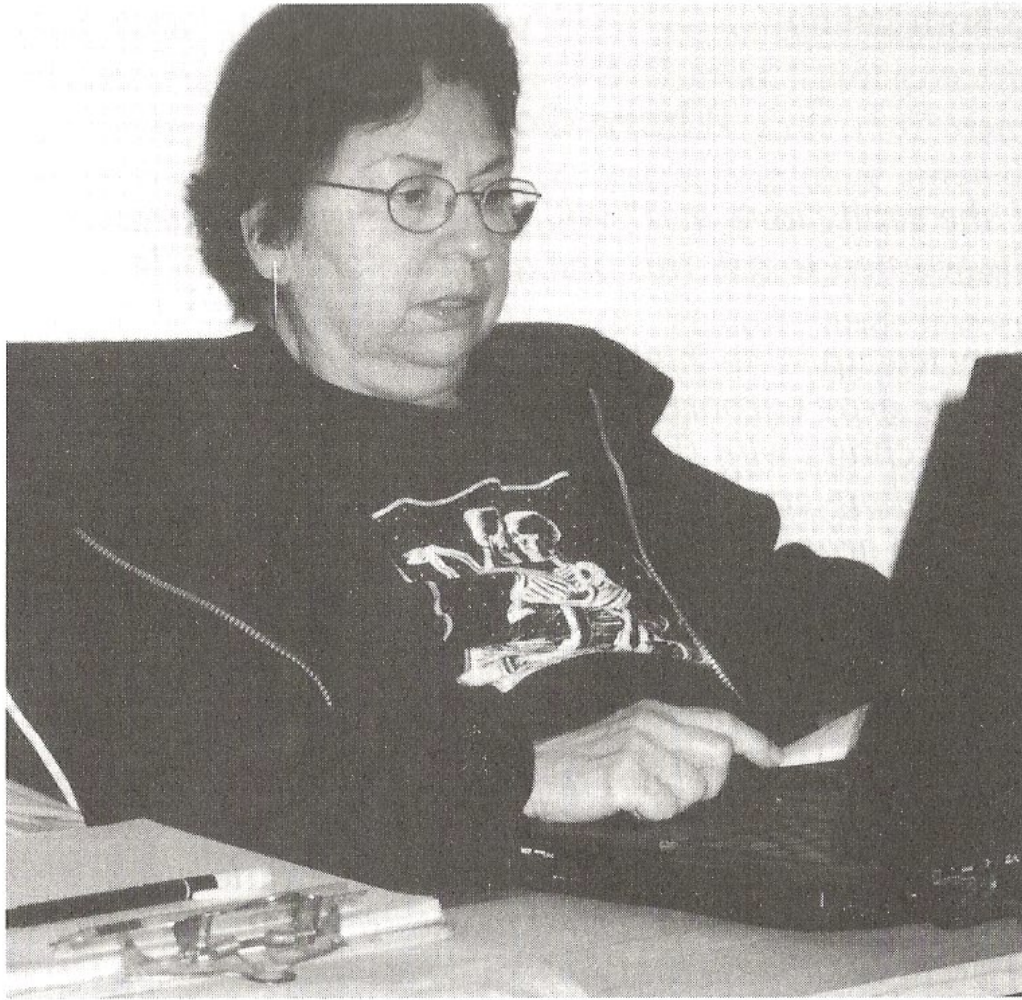
### **Where Go the Boats**

*“Did she really love me?” Willing to wait for the answer,  
Leslie wanted to ask this one question of the oracle.*

*With my teacup in my hand I look through my new screen door  
Out to the gray carport beams, the red petunia basket,  
The lawn chairs with their crisp striped covers, past  
The trembling-leaved birch trees and tall swaying spruces,  
And up the grassy two-track lane as it curves away into  
Endless sunny days of summer and patterned days of winter,  
One day following another, stretching out past my mail box,  
Up and down the simple hills and away down the river.*

*For a while I thought that I had only a few precious days left.  
My old love says she will soon be in heaven  
And in the meantime she is having another little affair  
As well as this glittering flirtation with my by mail.  
I feel great happiness that she still loves me.*





*Gloria Anzaldúa. Photographer unknown.*

## Gloria Anzaldúa

“As a mestiza I have no country, my homeland cast me out; yet all countries are mine because I am every woman’s sister or potential lover. (As a lesbian I have no race, my own people disclaim me; but I am all races because there is the queer of me in all races.) I am cultureless because, as a feminist, I challenge the collective cultural/religious male-derived beliefs of Indo-Hispanics and Anglos; yet I am cultured because I am participating in the creation of yet another culture, a new story to explain the world and our participation in it, a new value system with images and symbols that connect us to each other and to the planet. Soy un amasamiento, I am an act of kneading, of uniting and joining that not only has produced both a creature of darkness and a creature of light, but also a creature that questions the definitions of light and dark and gives them new meaning.”

*Excerpt from “La conciencia de la mestiza: Towards a New Consciousness”  
by Gloria Andaldua in Making Face, Making Soul/Haciendo  
Caras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Feminists of Color  
edited by Gloria Andaldua. Aunt Lute Books, 1990, p. 380.*



Win Weston

## Solo Flight

She was awake. She lifted her hand toward her cheek, but the fly was already airborne. Buzz - buzz - buzz. It circled the room, momentarily stopping by the shoe on the floor and a button on the blue sweater hanging on the back of the chair. The fly had arrived that morning with her breakfast. She was surprised that it was still in the room.

What time was it? She craned her head to see the clock, but it had been pushed sideways and she could not read the time. A glance at the window told her that it was still daylight, so it would be somewhere between lunch and dinner. She had been taken to lunch in the dining room. How close to dinner time was it? Or had they let her sleep through it? She felt uneasy at the thought that she may have missed dinner.

That she would worry about missing dinner was really comical. She no longer felt any joy in eating. The meals—breakfast, lunch and dinner—were the fixed points by which her life was measured out. There were variations on the theme: Tuesdays a bath before dinner; some Sundays her daughter Clair came and brought bored grandchildren.

She looked up at the wall where the white signboard was attached. There in Clair's bold clear lettering was her name: Anna Mayfair. Below it was written in a careless wobble: June 6, 2008 and Clear in AM, Thunderstorm possible afternoon, Temp 64°. Adjacent to this board was an ornate wooden picture frame chosen by Clair. Most of the images were of herself as a young woman; others were of friends and relatives. She had seen such frames in the rooms of other residents. Someone's idea of making their rooms more "homelike." Not Clair's idea she knew. Clair wasn't clever enough to think of it, but why would Clair think that she wanted to be reminded that she was once young and healthy? Why look at photos of people she hadn't seen for fifty years? Not one picture of Carrie, the only one she would like to see again. Was she purposely omitted by Clair? No. Probably not. She hated the assemblage of photos, but didn't feel she had the luxury of asking for its removal. She had come to terms with her past. If only the present could be eradicated.

Buzz-buzz. The sound was brusque and unrelenting. The fly was at the window. Panicked. it desperately struggled to get out. The predicted storm had arrived. Lightning flashed, thunder rolled. When the sheets of rain began to bounce off the window the fly left.



She thought of Charles Lindbergh and his solo nonstop transatlantic flight in 1927, the year she had been born. Most of the trip had been solo, but he did have a companion. A fly had joined him as he left the Atlantic coast. It buzzed around the cockpit until it took its leave somewhere over Ireland. Only on the last leg of the trip and his triumphant landing in Paris did he fly alone.

There was a rustling sound beyond the curtain divider. Someone must be changing Ethel's bed position. Her eyes lingered on the white fabric. She wondered what Ethel thought or felt, lying there day after day. At age 102 was she no longer aware of what was happening around her?

Anna pushed back the rising sense of panic at the thought that she herself might spend twenty years bedridden. "No!" she emphatically declared. "That won't happen!"

She was still staring at the divider when the end of a cart appeared. The cart had two plastic bags suspended in the center. Hooked on the sides were a series of fishnet pockets housing bottles, cloths and an assortment of cleaning supplies. Pushing the cart was a small wiry gray-haired woman twenty years her junior. The woman stopped abruptly with a look of surprise on her face. "Oh! I'm supposed to clean the room. I thought everyone had gone to eat except..." She nodded towards the other bed.

Scanning the room quickly the woman's periwinkle blue eyes came to a halt at the bulletin board. "Anna Mayfair. Yes?" A smile spread across her face as she moved toward Anna.

Anna shut her eyes tightly. Being addressed as "Anna" instead of "Ann" came as a shock. She had stopped trying to correct the staff. "Yes, Anna is my name." She felt a little heady as if she had won some kind of prize.

"I think they forgot you. I will get an aide to help you up and I will bring food for you."

Anna watched the woman leave. Out of habit she looked at the unreadable clock. Her eyes wandered over to the dresser and the raffia basket which Clair had brought to collect any mail she might receive. Beyond the dresser near the window was the wheelchair with her blue sweater hanging on the back. She looked at the button on the sweater where the fly had stopped. Through the window she could see heavy rain. The intensity of the storm had abated. The fly was back, walking across the top of the window.

"Sorry, Ann. Didn't want to wake you. Ina will bring a tray. Let me help you up."

She turned to look at the aide. Arnold. Arnold the Insistent. No chance of getting out of eating with him in attendance. He helped her into the



chair. When she was settled she looked back to see where the fly was.

“What are you looking at, Ann? Oh. A fly. I’ll get it.” He pulled a folded newspaper out of a pocket on the cleaning cart. “Thwack!” He hit against the window.

Her whole being screamed out, but no sound issued from her mouth. He had moved too quickly for her vocal cords to respond to her mind’s bidding. She shuddered in relief when she heard him say: “Oh, it got away.”

“Here, let me put your shoes on.”

“They are not my shoes,” she objected

“Sure they are. They’re under your bed.” He poked her feet into the shoes and then left.

She could no longer hold the tide of helplessness back. Tears trickled down her face.

“I brought a tray.” Ina stood in front of her. “You are crying, Anna. What is wrong?”

Anna wanted to scream: “Everything!” She managed to choke out: “These are not my shoes.”

“No?” Ina pulled off the shoes and inspected them. “No. These are not Anna Mayfair’s shoes. These are Grace Benson’s shoes. It says so right here on this tape.”

“Thank you.” Anna felt weak with relief after the effort it had taken to get someone to hear her.

\* \* \* \* \*

She picked at the food and finally pushed the plate away. She felt exhausted and her head began to drop to her chest. A low drone awakened her. The fly was back at the window. Its earlier scintillating motion was gone. Fatigued, it circled slowly to Anna’s abandoned plate and rested on the edge.

“The fly wants out.”

Anna was startled by Ina’s voice. “Just like me,” she said. Immediately she regretted speaking. She waited for the “oh, now, everything will be all right” platitude. But there was silence. Anna looked into Ina’s thoughtful eyes.

Ina placed her hand gently on Anna’s shoulder. Softly she replied: “Yes.”

She understood, Anna realized. There was a long moment of silent communication between the two women.

Then Ina held up a pair of shoes. “I found your shoes, Anna Mayfair.”

“Thank you,” Anna said.

Both women smiled.

“Ina! What are you doing here? You’re supposed to be in the kitchen.” Arnold’s shrill voice shattered the tranquility.



The room was so still after Ina's departure. The fly was gone. The rise and fall of her breath was the only movement. The soft hiss of Ethel's snore the only sound. The rain had stopped. Soon someone would come to put her to bed.

\* \* \* \* \*

She had been sleeping and had been awakened not so much by the sound of someone entering the room but by a scent. Something familiar, but something she had not smelled in a long time. Fresh, earthy, wet. Of course it is fresh... Air...Air fresh...Air after being washed by a summer rain storm. How long had it been since she smelled fresh air? How wonderful it was after the stale, recycled air of the nursing home. How could she ever have taken it for granted?

She looked up to see Ina standing by her bed in a wet raincoat. The scent of the outside air girdled her like an aura.

"Anna! When I took the garbage out the fly was in the kitchen and it flew out the door. Your friend the fly is free, Anna!"

The thought of the fly's escape made Anna feel free herself. She smiled at Ina.

"The storm knocked down some flowers. I brought – some." She handed Anna a branch of blooming lilac.

Anna pressed her nose into the flowers. She felt intoxicated by the fragrance. "Thank you, Ina. I will sleep well tonight."

As Anna slept that night she dreamed. In her dream she was a fly escaping from a malodorous cave. She floated down through the pristine air, landing on the emerald hills of Ireland. And there waiting for her was Carrie.



Ronna Magy

## Dear Jill,

There were those warm, Spring evenings in 1972, driving north up the 5, from San Diego to work, under the darkness of the moon. Ten at night, some thirty years back. East of the ocean, remember how the road roped its way next to rows of buildings piled stone upon cinderblock stone? Inside those factories, men and women were working the graveyard shift, their sweat attaching itself to the dark, people lifting, cutting, hammering, soldering, sorting, packing, shipping products to places with far away names. Those destinations, and the people living in them, having no connection to any reality most of us knew then, except for the pins old Matt placed along the map hanging on the shipping room wall.

After punching in, we'd button on white polyester lab coats with WIRE stitched in longhand above the pockets, and sit down on hard, black chairs in that clean cold factory. Sharpened tweezers in hand, sitting under magnified light, our team of women sorted capacitors, one from the other, separating the good from the bad, putting parts into piles. The lights in that warehouse so bright, you might have thought it to be day. But instead of a day of sun, ocean, and sand, we came together to share the brightly lit space of night.

Sometime in those early hours, between sorting parts and starting up the machines, Pam, an older lead the age of my mother, would come over and tell Sally, our lead, beautiful, tall Sally, the night's news: a mixture of company policy changes mixed with tidbits of who'd been fired for smoking pot on the job. The two conferred heads down next to Sally's workstation, pointing at work orders, company memos, and safety bulletins, making it appear they were talking of production and quotas.

A few minutes later, Sally would give us work orders, white papers sheathed in plastic bags, taped to tiny black and brown parts. With those in hand, Barb and I would walk across the concrete floor to set up our machines. Long-haired women like Grace, Sally scolded, "Pull your hair back." So Grace had to push her hair under a bandana to get it out of the way. In their safety memos WIRE said they didn't want any of us hurt on the job.

Barb Taylor, you remember I used to talk about her? Worked next to me through those nights. Long brown pigtail running down her back. We were tight, she and I. Remember that scar, how it snaked down the left side



of her leg? Her white husband shot his 'Injun girl' there, so she wouldn't escape. All the way from Oklahoma to San Diego she'd run to get away from that man. 'Cross the heat of New Mexico and Arizona. We had a lot to say about love and romance. Took breaks together until they started talking about us in the lunchroom, making up things about us, but she and I were only work friends. Only saw each other on the job.

Remember that Tupperware party, they held in the lunchroom? Where they gave you free yellow or red plastic containers with bows on them if you stayed to hear about the line? Square ones, round ones, all different sizes. Everyone on my team stayed for those things and came back late. We wanted the freebies. Boy was management mad. Some people were going to use them for their kids' lunches, and some to just toss odds and ends in them, like pencils and buttons. When the next payday came around, WIRE took the money out of our checks to make up for the time we lost.

One night, after the new machine was installed, Sally showed Linda, me, and Barb how to set up and coat the parts using it. "First, you set the silver level," she said and turned the dial with a flick of her fingers. "After that, you turn on the wheel," she told us, and flipped the switch. Then, as it turned and the ceramic heating coils glowed, she gestured clockwise around the wheel, moving her hand back towards the heat. That was when she caught her hand on a spoke and couldn't pull it off.

Remember I told you how those prongs dug in her flesh? How that wheel turned toward the red heat and she couldn't release her hand? Her screams were so shrill, it seemed as if everything around us stopped. Terror was in her voice. No one knew what to do. "Get Tony!" someone yelled. Tony, big Tony, the factory manager.

"Not there," Hilda said, when we screamed for him, and she checked his office. Later, someone said Tony was inside all along, sitting with the door locked. Wasn't going to come out and stop that machine, not his new toy. Not the one they'd spent so much money on. Wasn't going to get out that crowbar.

Finally, a white-jacketed foreman came over and pulled Sally's hand off the spoke. There was no nurse on duty, but they did find the first aid kit. Sally's hand bled and bled until some ambulance men in white coats swept past the time clock, bandaged her hand, and took her to Scrips. Maintenance cleaned up the blood. Red tagged the machine. Then another foreman told the rest of us to stop standing around and go back to work.

While transferring our work orders to the next team the following night, Mary Rose confirmed the gossip. It would have cost too much to destroy



the machine and build another. Tony had to decide between Sally's hand and destroying the new machine. And Mary Rose would have known, she was one of them, all dolled up in her blue jeans and high boots.

It was a clean place. We all wore white coats, like you did on your job. No one in management wanted Sally's screams hanging in the air. But those screams reverberated, and the echoes of her fear, too, rising above the open acetylene tank where we cleaned the parts, that tank everyone walked past every day as we crossed the shop floor, fumes that made us dizzy as we worked the nearby machines.

After a few days, after people on the factory floor had rehashed the incident, the talk died. People clammed up as if nothing happened. As if management had sent around a memo and posted it on the bulletin board near our work stations. As if anyone who wanted to keep their job should spend time concentrating on work orders and not feed on the gossip. As if there being no guards on the machines was a safety hazard no one should name again in front of those cinderblock walls. No one called OSHA.

Sally was gone. Linda heard Sally filed a lawsuit against the company and a claim with OSHA. They said she was going for the money. Sandy said Sally was going to use the settlement to buy a new house in Carlsbad. Within a few days, another lead, Gloria from first shift, took Sally's place. She was tougher, made sure the work got done. All business. No one mentioned Sally.

Several months later, Sally came back. Watched who she talked to and what she talked about. Looked over her shoulder. Things like that. Smiled at the foremen. Some said they'd made a deal to keep her silent, paid her a lot of money, but had to bring her back. A big red scar raised itself along the inside of her hand. She couldn't open or close it very well.

I was in the closet at work then, Jill, you and I having only just come out. In spite of that, the women in my department all seemed to know you were my girlfriend. Maybe it was that time I said I was meeting a friend for lunch, and you and I met at a coffee shop down the road. Maybe someone saw my blue Datsun pull into the restaurant driveway, saw us kiss by the car, and told the others. Maybe someone saw you picking me up in the parking lot. You, in your Levis and plaid work shirt. Me, in my white coat.

It was no secret I was a lesbian, and besides, they had their ways of finding out. But to me it was new, and when Sandy asked what I thought about being more than friends with women, I skirted around, not answering. I wasn't prepared to talk about the Flame and the Barbary Coast where women danced together and kissed in the corners, or your smile, blue eyes,



and long blond hair. Anyway, they were all straight, so what did I care?

How long ago was all that, Jill? Some 30 years? Yes, you and I have both moved on to other lovers, gone our ways. So, where are you now? What are you doing with your life? Do you have a lover? When can we get together and talk about those times?



Judy Grahn

## *A History of Lesbianism*

*How they came into the world  
the women-loving-women  
came in three by three  
and four by four  
the women-loving-women  
came in ten by ten  
and ten by ten again  
until there were more  
than you could count.*

*they took care of each other  
the best they knew how  
and of each other's children,  
if they had any.*

*How they lived in the world,  
the women-loving-women  
learned as much as they were allowed  
and walked and wore their clothes  
the way they liked  
whenever they could. They did whatever  
they knew to be happy or free  
and worked and worked and worked,  
The women-loving women  
in America were called Dykes  
and some liked it  
and some did not.*

*they made love to each other  
the best they knew how  
and for the best reasons*

*How they went out of the world,  
the women-loving-women  
went out one by one  
having withstood greater and lesser  
trials, and much hatred*



*from other people, they went out  
one by one, each having tried  
in her own way to overthrow  
the rule of men over women,  
they tried it one by one  
and hundred by hundred,  
until each came in her own way  
to the end of her life  
and died.*

*The subject of lesbianism  
is very ordinary; it's the question  
of male domination that makes everybody  
angry.*

*Reprinted with permission from Judy Grahn from love belongs  
to those who do the feeling: New and Selected Poems (1966 -  
2006). Red Hen Press, 2008*



Janet Lubeski

## Untitled

So—here we are in paradise except for the boys around us. This is a place of beauty & wonderful, powerful energy. I have been in redwood groves before, felt the energy from their roots laterally moving, surrounding their trunks. Felt the power of spirit coming from their branches. And it is good.

I am in a place in my life of serious transition. Strange words—serious transition. Is there such a phrase? I feel an urgency to change my goals, my way of being in the world. I recognize my limitations and am struggling to accept the things I cannot change—in the world, in me, in my friends & lovers. How best to deal with the things I cannot change. Maybe Pema will lecture on it tonight. For today, this moment in time I will concentrate on the things I can change. My attitude, my helplessness, my sense of fear of confusion of values, need for structure in a world of chaos. That is an important word, one of structure. When I am unorganized I feel this is my normal way of being in the world, yet I have been valiantly trying to move toward STRUCTURE. I feel so much more able to be at ease with Ida, she gives me structure to move with or against.

The idea of trying to be who I am & accept the changes I need to make in order to be involved in my life is awesome. I tend to just say FUCK IT and walk away—from responsibility to others & to myself. I am trying to hold still. Stillness. Sit with it. No judgment. This is what is at this moment. Sadness is OK. Changing involves openness. Openness involves nontraditional being in the world as well as structure—that delicate balance instead of either/or. I have been in this world too long to still be doing my life the same way I did my life as a kid.

SO ...

Breathe

Breathe out the confusion

Breathe in a sense of structure

Breathe in fluidity

Breathe out rigidity

Breathe in Stillness

Sit with it

No more judgement

This is WHAT IS in this moment.

Allow contentment

All happiness

Explanations not needed



Janet Lubeski

## Enthusiasm

My life consists of small victories, none of which are in themselves that important, but taken as a whole they are my life. I arise in the morning without help, get to the bathroom with no time to spare. Put the kettle on and make myself tea. Read the paper and then have breakfast. I love to sit on my deck and look at my garden, watch the cats visiting in the yard, watch the white birch trees changing with the seasons. I take my numerous morning pills, make my bed and then usually call friends & family. No more than a few phone calls until my voice runs out & I am too hoarse to be understood. My family calls to see if I am alright & have stories to tell about their lives and many times they want me to help them with problems or advice. Then it is time to dress and go out to greet my day. I do this enthusiastically, full of possibility, alert to the small changes in the neighborhood. People stop and talk to me if I acknowledge them. I love to walk around my block and observe the trees, gardens, animals. Little changes. Small miracles. Being able to walk freely, being free from pain in the journey. Loving life, anticipating each day, feeling it is a gift.

2006



## Interviews

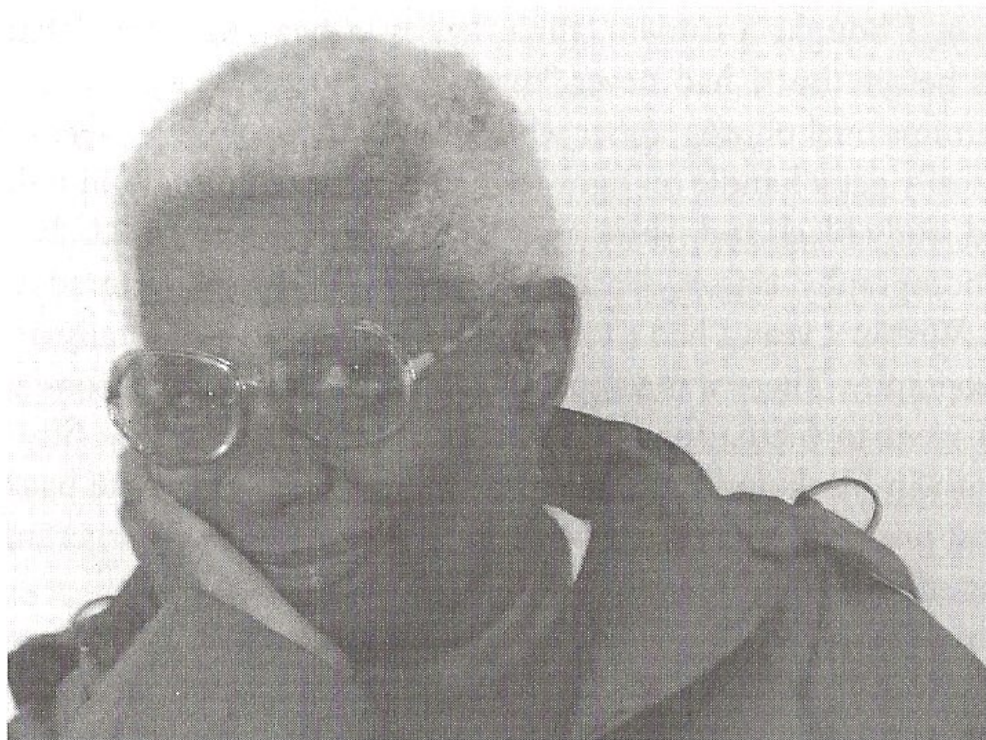


Photo by Sandy Tate

### Virginia Harris

Interviewed by Fran Day  
Spring 2009

Introduction: For many years my creative life was separate from my “real” life. I majored in chemistry in college and went on to get a master’s degree. For 12 or 13 years I worked in nuclear chemistry research and then on a dare changed careers to personnel (now called human resources). Chemistry and personnel were battlegrounds that afforded little to no recognition for a job well done. I longed for passion and definition in my life. I found them in creativity—photography, writing and finally quilting and fabric art. Through art quilting I pushed away the substitutions I have lived by and this has given me the recognition I never got in the “real world”. One of my pieces was chosen for the permanent collection at the Renwick Gallery, part of the Smithsonian Museum of American Art. In 2004 I received a Sister of Fire Award from the Women of Color Resource Center. Let’s hear it for passion!

**Fran:** Hello, Virginia. Welcome again to the pages\* of *Sinister Wisdom*. Would you start out by telling us about your photography and writing?



**Virginia:** In 1977, standing at an overlook on the Oregon coast, I said to myself, “I am going to be a photographer.” When I got back to San Francisco, I bought a camera, three lenses, a bag and film. I had taken pictures before, but I had never “made” a picture. After a few months, I met a professional photographer who told me that color was very forgiving and to really get a handle on light (which is what a photograph reduces to) I should study black and white photography. Off I went to UC Extension, took photography classes, learned to use a darkroom, printed my own photos. Within a year, I had a darkroom at home and was totally immersed in photography. There was a show of my work in the Extension gallery in 1980. I went to China for two months in 1982, shot about fifty rolls of film, both in black and white and color slides. When I came back I only made test prints of some of the work and realized I was no longer interested in doing more with photography.

Writing and photography overlapped. In the early 80s I was struggling with a powerful need and desire to get out of the corporate world. I was incensed at what and how things were done and my part in it. My first essay, “On Not Being Sufficiently Grateful” was published in *Broomstick Magazine*. One of my early bosses told me that I needed to be sufficiently grateful for what white men had done for me. No, I didn’t hit him. I said that white men should be grateful to me for what a great statistic I was for their organizations. The essay put in perspective what my experience had been in corporations. It still took two or so more years after before I left in 1983.

Essays led to fiction, to novels. I had some short stories published in *Common Lives/Lesbian Lives*; an essay on cross-racial hostility with Trinity Ordone in *Making Face, Making Soul*, edited by Gloria Anzaldua, and a few others. By 1991 when I started quilting I was working on a novel. At Hedgebrook (a two-month writing retreat on Whidbey Island in WA) I realized I enjoyed quilting more than writing. The fact that the novel was completed and had no emotional landscape probably had a lot to do with that decision.

**Fran:** Please tell us more about your quilts. How, when, and why did you start quilting?

**Virginia:** In 1991 I made a quilt square for a friend’s 50<sup>th</sup> birthday. I had never thought about quilts before, had no idea where to start, so I went to the library and checked out six books. Made a square—awful, so made another one that was much better. The next day I bought fabric to make



a quilt. I knew nothing about the equipment available. I have sewn my own clothes since I was 11, but quilting is very different. Clothes are much more forgiving. It never occurred to me that quilting was a 5 billion dollar business—fabrics, books, equipment, classes – on and on. Not to mention quilt shows! I was accepted in my first show in 1992.

**Fran:** I love your quilts! Please elaborate for our readers who haven't seen them: what styles, how many, where are they now etc?

**Virginia:** I began with traditional American patterns, got bored very quickly. I wanted to do something “different”. I had no idea what that meant. A book on traditional African designs came to me and I was fascinated because in every design I saw a quilt. For a time, I converted some of those designs, then was confident enough to try some original designs. A Japanese American friend introduced me to origami. The unfolded origami was a whole new source of design. The quilt at the Smithsonian is a pattern from unfolded origami.

Politics from 2000 and 2004 was what seemed a never-ending source of rage that needed someplace to go. About ten quilts resulted from those fiascos.

How many? I refuse to count. I spent my life quantifying everything I did and I was determined that quilting would be different. I know the number of those quilts because I hung a solo show of just political quilts.

**Fran:** How do you feel while you are working and when you are finished?

**Virginia:** The reason I loved quilting was it was one of the most joyful things I had ever done. And it put me in touch with many emotions and concepts that I knew about but had never explored. The one thing I found most shocking is that I am not attached to any of my quilts. When they are done, I am done. Then they can go wherever they are supposed to go.

**Fran:** How do you stay centered? What keeps you going when you are frustrated or discouraged?

**Virginia:** When I am engaged in something creative, I am very centered. Creativity is life's blood to me. When I am frustrated, which I have been a lot since I stopped quilting, I read mysteries and other “trash”. That way my mind can still work without requiring too much concentration.

**Fran:** What advice do you have for someone who is interested in making quilts?



**Virginia:** I am self-taught. There are lots of books in the libraries, quilt stores are all over the place and have classes, lots of magazines where you can find workshops and retreats, or just sit down with some fabric and a sewing machine and see what happens.

**Fran:** Please tell us about your other projects/interests.

**Virginia:** Right now I am engaged with making raw food. Requires a lot of creativity and patience. The one thing I've learned already is I need a much larger kitchen.

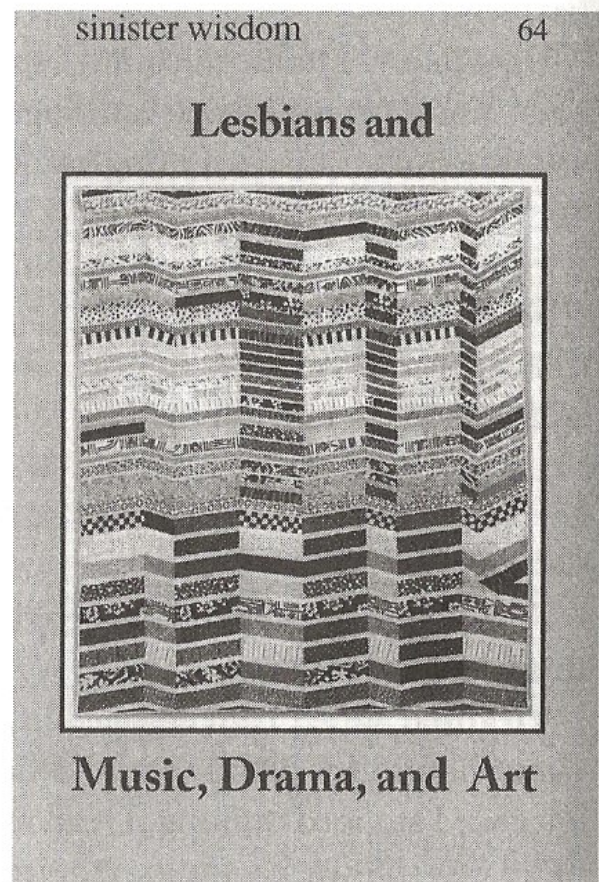
**Fran:** Thank you, Virginia!

Note: In 2004, Eve Goldberg made a beautiful documentary titled "Virginia R. Harris: Quilt Artist." The DVD is \$20, including shipping. Contact Virginia at [vhquilts@sonic.net](mailto:vhquilts@sonic.net).

\* Virginia Harris's quilts have been featured on the covers of Sinister Wisdom 58 and 64 as well as within the pages of issues 71 and 73.



*Quilt design: Mask IV  
by Virginia Harris*



*Quilt design: Either/Or  
by Virginia Harris*





*Photo by Cathy Cade*

## Judy Freespirit

*Judy's Notes on Art (from an interview with Cathy Cade March, 2009)*

My art is always connected to people; I don't do art for art's sake. It's either that I want people in general to be reading it, seeing it, experiencing it, or I'm making it for a specific person. When I make art, I am making love—which is not the same as sex! Art isn't something I do; an artist is something I am. When I get out of my way, the art reveals itself.

Since the 1970s I've been known in the lesbian and feminist communities as a writer and performer. To a large extent, my writing is meant to be read out loud. It's meant for me to read it out loud, and for other people to read it out loud to each other.

I'm discovering that creativity comes in many forms. I had done very little visual art in my life before moving to The Jewish Home a year and a half ago. I have no collection of visual art over time like there is with my writing. In the past I did one or two paintings and then fifteen years later another one. I'm just now beginning to feel I'm an artist and that my art includes both the visual art and my writing.

When I moved to The Jewish Home in San Francisco, there was this art room that was open to me with equipment, supplies, and staff support. I was told to come and do whatever I wanted. I tried to do some paintings and was really frustrated and unhappy with what I came up with.



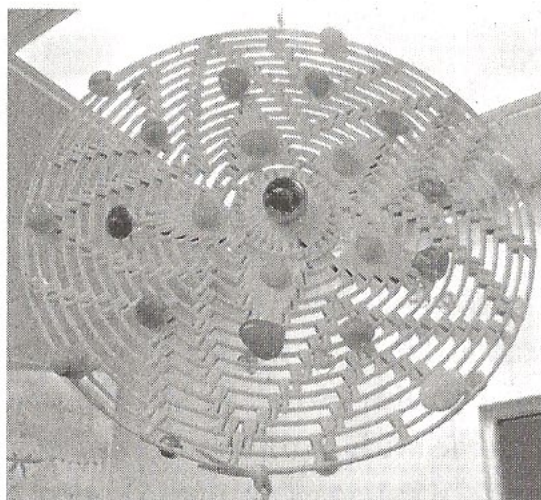
Then I discovered the nearby Dollar Store. I get a lot of my art supplies at the Dollar Store. One day I bought a bunch of colored stones, a couple of hundred marbles, and a bag of shiny small disco balls. Then I went to the Goodwill where I found a circular bamboo trivet about ten inches in diameter. I glued marbles on one side, stones on the other, and hung it up with some silver disco balls dangling below it. It became “The Mobile” that’s now in the art gallery at The Jewish Home.

Ah, my beautiful doll! She’s named “Gilda Z. Lily.” I started with a washboard that I bought years ago at an antique store in Seattle for \$4. Somehow I’d saved it through all of my moves. I bought it to use as a musical instrument and I have no idea how I thought to make a doll out of a washboard. I wanted to make her funky. All of her clothing came from the Dollar Store. I’m working on another doll made with a toy piano, and am looking for an old ukulele for the body of a third doll.

When I made Gilda Z. Lily I was making it for a particular person. I absolutely felt love was being put into that doll to give to this person. I get the extra bonus of having other people enjoy it too, but it was really made for this staff person who is supporting my work.

There was a time in my life when I felt that seeing my art as a gift was arrogant, like I didn’t have a right to want that. I told myself, “It is just stuff I’m doing.” I used to think it was wrong to want people to like what I do, or to praise me, or to value my art. Now, I don’t necessarily get all I want, but I feel I have the right to want it—which is an improvement. The truth is I get a lot more appreciation than I ever expected.

I don’t fully understand what’s happening with art and me as my creativity has become more than just writing. I can’t really separate visual art from writing and there’s an overlap that’s undeniable.



*“The Mobile” by Judy Freespirit. Photo by Cathy Cade*





*Ida Red and Jess McVey. Photo by Lynn Brown.*

## Jess McVey

*From an interview with Jess McVey, September 2008 by Ida VSW Red.*

I'm 90 years old and I find that it [age] makes quite a difference in my life. I have no car and I can't go on the bus, which I don't like at all. I had planned a lot of trips on that bus. Well anyway, here I am and I get taxis. Through San Francisco I can get taxi script to pay for the taxis. I pay something for it but not much. Friends are very helpful. I am slow and right now there's a great controversy—I have two daughters here in this city and one of them is in the same apartment building that I'm in and there's a lot of controversy about "What shall we, should we do with 'the mother' and how long will she be able to get up the stairs? Should we make arrangements ahead of time for 'mother'?" And it's really weird. So anyway that's what it's like now. I've forgotten what it used to be like. That took a while to do that. Now I'm another person, another person now who I don't really know. It doesn't seem to matter if I know that person or not.

I'm in a group that we call "the koo-koo club." It's for brain-injured persons. There are twelve of us in the group, all kinds of people with brain injuries of all sorts. So I know them. I feel very comfortable with them. . . . There are all kinds of people in it, all types, from bankers to a guy that works on the ferries. Not very many women. So my life . . . that helps me. I



like them. We have parties at different people's houses and it's nice to know there are other people who understand when I say something about what my life is like now. They know what I'm talking about. They're suffering. So my life today is a little different than it used to be and I've forgotten a whole lot of stuff that I used to think was important that I don't now. I just kinda go along now and I'm diagnosed as having had a stroke and getting Parkinson's disease... They say I'll probably die of... old age before I die of Parkinson's... I can't say if that is cheerful or not...

My art is turning out to be very important to me. It's a goal that I have and I'm trying to use each day. I walk a certain amount and then I work on my art so to speak. But it's amazing how much time is spent going to doctors or taking the walk or doing this or that. I still have that as a goal and it makes me very happy. I'm getting closer and closer to it. I know what I want to do. It's just taking the time to do it. So, everything is done more slowly now and takes more time—just getting washed or trying to find somebody to help me with something but that's the way it is. And I try to live each day—sounds like I'm in church or something—try to find something good about each day. Ok, the way that works out is if I can find time to do some of the quote unquote art then I'm quite happy.

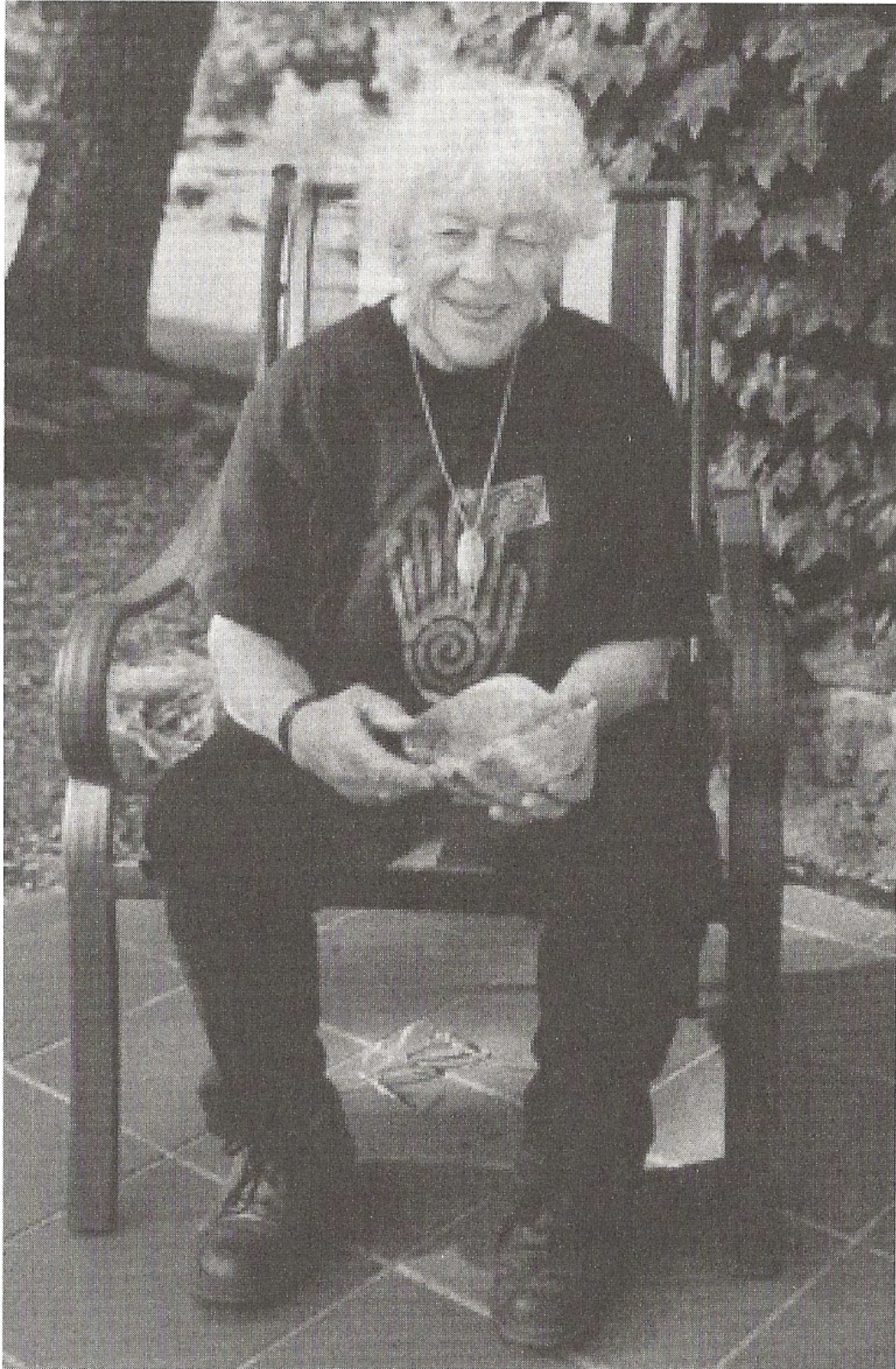
For a while I wasn't sure about that [the OLOC support circle] after I'd had the stroke and I looked at people and they looked like aliens to me in the support circle. Those were women, older ones, that I had been with for nine years and it was a little weird to look at them as though they were strangers. And I got over that. I got in the koo-koo club where I was happy to be and then it didn't seem so strange to be with the women I had been with for nine years. It didn't seem so strange after that. It's like I had found a home with the koo-koo club, where I fitted in there and that was good. Life at this stage, when you get this old, I find it's kind of difficult... I'm still going up and down those stairs without so much trouble. There's some concern about that type of thing, which had never occurred to me before.

I miss my paintings. I had slides of them, the ones I had in here, in the bathroom and in the bedroom—they're gone [burned in the apartment fire]. But I feel like I've lost my best friends. You know. So the resilient part you just have to be. You get knocked down otherwise, knocked down and run over. So you have to try to exist as best you can. And the thing that helps me exist, which I've made up and try to stick to is making the time to walk... I have a walker that is a great help, and to do this art. Which doesn't amount to anything, it's just doing it. It's part of me. There isn't a whole lot of me left it seems like, what I consider me. I think of that person as dead



and dying. You know. Maybe she isn't. I don't know. We'll see. The art will make me feel ok I think. To find the time and energy to do it. So I've set up a program and I'm hoping that will work...

It seems like there ought to be some kind of classes in getting old...I had no idea any of this stuff would be happening or that I would feel this way and it would have been nice to have known something about it...

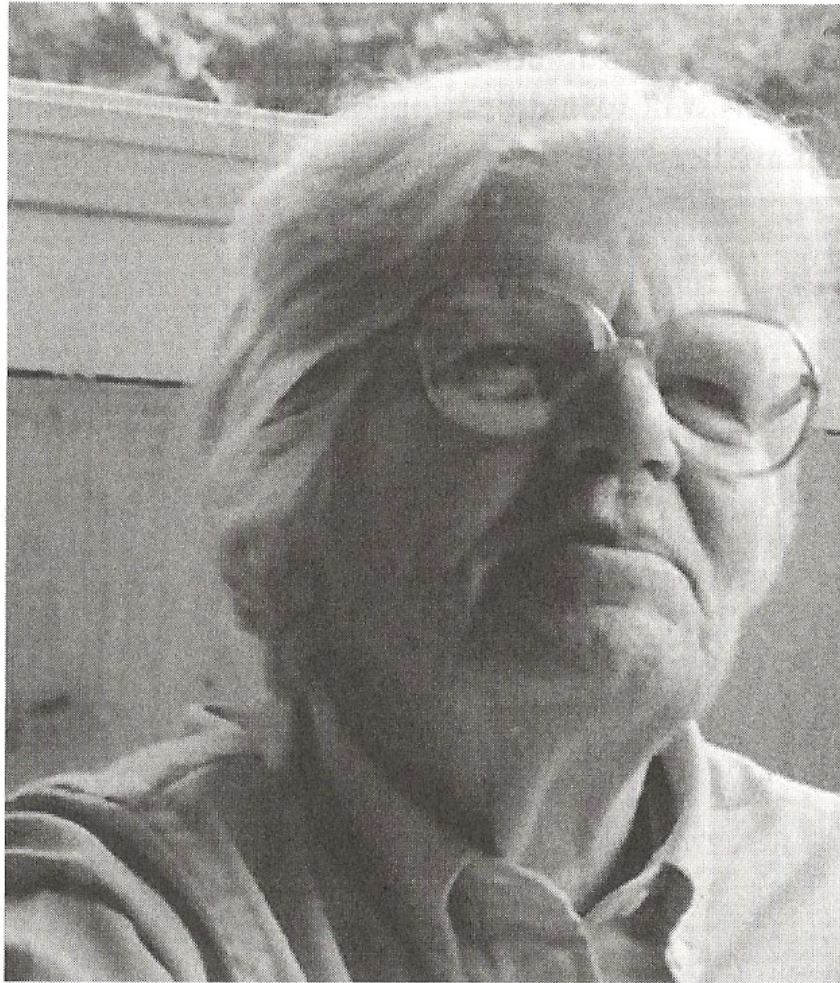


*Jess McVey and her pot, 2004. Photo Credit: Cathy Cade*



## Remembrances

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*Photo of Del Martin. Photo Credit: Jill Posener*

### Del Martin

(1921 – 2008)

#### *This Is for Del Martin by Jayne Snook*

I didn't know Del  
But she knew me  
I first flew into San Francisco, in the late 60s  
With my duffel bag in tow.  
I came from the east coast—Staten Island.  
I left lovers, job, family and friends.  
I didn't know Del  
But she knew me.  
When I got off the bus in downtown San Francisco  
And ended up in a room over Ted's steakhouse in the tenderloin



With one dreaded light bulb swinging high in the air  
 I didn't know Del  
 But she knew me  
 I called the daughters of Bilitis.  
 Where did I get that number?  
 Where did it come from?  
 When I called the number, someone said Come right over; there is  
 someone else here who is in the same boat  
 I didn't know Del but she knew me  
 When they handed us a list of places that we could  
 look at and go see to find a place to live.  
 I didn't know Del but she knew me  
 When that night I had found a room to live in a residential boarding  
 house for women. And it was right around the corner from Mauds.  
 I didn't know Del but she knew me  
 And she went on and on knowing me for the rest of her life  
 She never forgot me at every turn, at every highlight of our lives, every  
 twist and turn the world threw at us.  
 She sent me the "ladder"  
 She knew I had been raped  
 She knew I was far from home  
 She knew I needed a community, a place to belong  
 where women loving women was real  
 She knew I needed healthcare and somehow the Lyon Martin clinic  
 was there for me  
 She knew we needed her and Phyllis in  
 Washington to tell them what it was like  
 She knew I needed to have the right to marry the woman that I love  
 and she contributed to making that that happen and she married  
 the woman she loved, twice  
 I never knew Del personally but she knew me and you and all the  
 mothers, daughters, sisters, lesbians, women whose lives she  
 and Phyllis touched  
 Somehow she knew  
 Somehow she never stopped caring  
 Somehow she touched us all.....She and Phyllis.  
 I can only in gratitude say thank you to her and to Phyllis and hope that  
 we all in turn will learn from them and care for our younger sisters and  
 the old lesbians who are in places that do not know women loving women  
 I didn't know Del but I will never forget her as she never forgot me.



As Del now dances with the stars and Bilitis too,  
 She looks at us through the vale and she never forgets.  
 She smiles at us and does not hesitate to tell us to make sure  
 we vote no on 8  
 And to tell every one we know to do the same.

*Blog by Terry Baum*

October 1, 2008: Back to City Hall for the celebration of Del Martin's life, which had ended. This time we had the whole beautiful rotunda for the ceremony. What a great public space it is, with the soaring central staircase making a perfect stage. The guests were seated below and crowded on three stories of balconies, sweeping up into the sky. Everywhere I looked in that magnificent hall were people whose lives had been changed by Del Martin and her wife. We surrounded Phyl and the other mourners with our love.

Hanging on either side of the staircase were two giant photos of Del—one of her young and brash, ready to take on the world (which she did) and one of the mature Del, with that steady gaze. These photos swayed back and forth gently throughout the ceremony. Where did that breeze come from? The doors were closed. We felt Del's spirit with us.

What a great coming together. What eloquent speakers. What beautiful music. The wedding in June had been for the whole WORLD. But this ceremony in memory of Del was for US, the people of San Francisco who had loved her and shared her great fight to change the world.

For me, the most amazing event was the color guard. Oh, the color guard. Four uniformed people from the San Francisco police and fire departments and the sheriff's office marched in carrying the national, state, city and rainbow flags. Crisply, in unison, as the voice of an unseen person called out "Hut...two...three...four..." They turned smartly on command to present their flags and stopped. Never in my wildest dreams had I imagined a color guard honoring the life of a lesbian activist.

I never think about the wounds that I've received over the years as a lesbian. But now, as I watched the color guard march for Del, I felt those wounds—because they were healing, just a little.

It was a glorious, precious event. Yes, we were sad. But mostly we rejoiced in a life so well-lived and well-loved.

*In Homage to Del by Marcia Perlstein*

I'd like to add some memories about Del Martin. Most of you knew Del as the icon she was and her spouse Phyllis (partner for 56 plus years) is. Nyla and I were among the many privileged to have called her our friend. Part



of Del's charm was that so many of us considered ourselves her "friend". She truly was a community treasure. There were many closer to her than us but we did share some very personal moments and, most importantly, her longevity since 1966. I'd like to share just a few personal impressions and special memories.

When I was Director of Alternative Family Project, an organization that helped same sex couples bring children into their lives through custody from ex-straight marriages, adoption and insemination; and, we trained interns to work with these couples and families. As you can imagine, in San Francisco any glbt organization was part of a complex set of politics. Every few months I'd get a home phone call from Del warning me of something that was probably coming down on our fragile organization. After sharing what she knew she would always say to me, "What are we going to do about it?" Another set of frequent calls was when she put out the word to me about where money was available for glbt organizations: ie. if she met someone whom I could call for donations; when she heard about requests for proposals with grant money, etc.

Nyla and I were at many of Del and Phyllis's birthdays and anniversaries. We were among the sponsors of the film about them. In short, we partied, plotted and planned with them about all things glbt—especially lesbian. Death had to come at some point; I'm taught to learn spiritual acceptance, but it is going to take awhile to realize that there won't be any more phone calls. I'll miss Del's heart and smarts; her acerbic wit and ready chuckle (she almost ALWAYS laughed at my jokes.)

**DVD FOR SALE: Interview with Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon:**

Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon are featured in an exclusive interview, which I conducted with them at their house in San Francisco in 1994. It is now available for the first time on DVD. The 30 minute long interview features Del and Phyllis talking about their significant contributions to Lesbian herstory, including their part in the formation of The Daughters of Bilitis, their fight for LGBTQ rights and particularly, senior rights, as well as their contribution of their materials and ephemera to the San Francisco GLBT Historical Society. To order this original documentation of Lesbian herstory, please send a check for \$20 (which includes postage, made out to Susan Kay Gilbert) to me at:

Susan Kay Gilbert, 237 Wayne Ave. #306  
Oakland, CA 94606-1215.

Please allow from 2 to 4 weeks for delivery.  
*And thanks for supporting Lesbian Herstory.*





*Janet Lubeski at the San Francisco Dyke March. Photo by Lynn Brown.*

## Janet Lubeski

1933-2008

A Loving Tribute from Ida VSW Red 2009

*She knew how to live  
and how to help others live  
She knew how to express love  
and how to receive love  
She knew how to die  
and how to help others die*

*Janet Lubeski was  
a compassionate & fiercely loyal  
friend to many*

*an active parent & grandparent to  
five children & ten grands  
a strong-willed, wisely opinionated  
visible lesbian feminist*



*a talented healer & fearless  
end of life guide*

*a high-spirited peace activist  
& dedicated rule-breaker*

*a dedicated volunteer &  
community builder*

*an independent traveler,  
avid birder, hiker, swimmer  
& camper*

*a passionate and skilled lover,  
joyfully sexual & ecstatically orgasmic  
to the end of life*

*a generous spirit, always ready  
to share feelings and  
full-throated laughter*

***Janet Lubeski,***  
*a proud old dyke!*





*Photo by Angela Brinskele*

## **Yolanda Retter Vargas, Activist & Scholar** **1947 – 2007**

### *Tribute by Jeanne Cordova & Lynn Harris Ballen*

A memorial to celebrate the life of pioneer Latina lesbian activist Yolanda Retter Vargas was held in West Hollywood on September 29<sup>th</sup>, 2007. Vargas passed away from cancer at her home in Los Angeles on August 18, 2007, after a short illness which stunned family and friends.

An activist and scholar, Yolanda was a major force in the early Los Angeles lesbian movement as a fierce advocate for lesbians of color. In her last two decades Yolanda became a highly-educated and much sought after librarian, archivist and editor.

Yolanda worked as head Librarian/Archivist at the Chicano Studies Resource Center at UCLA for the past four years. Her supervisor, Chon



Noriega, at UCLA Chicano Studies Resource Center, says, “Learning mattered to her because it could help change the world. Yolanda exemplified the CSRC’s mission ‘Research that makes a difference’ in everything that she did at the Center, and in the many other things that she did in the world.”

She co-edited and contributed to a number of significant books on lesbian/gay culture and history, including the Lambda Literary award-winning *Queers in Space: Communities, Public Places, Sites of Resistance* (1997). Her most recent (and somewhat autobiographical) essay, “Sisterhood is Possible” appears in the anthology *Time It Was: American Stories from the Sixties* (Prentice Hall; 2007).

In her early years, and by self-definition Yolanda was “a lesbian history and visibility activist.” Her life’s work was dedicated to collecting, preserving and honoring overlooked history. She is the author of the high-respected Lesbian History Project website, a content-rich archive containing important chronology and hundreds of entries celebrating lesbian “herstory” and notable lesbians. It was rated by Lycos in the top five percent of websites and is linked to by GLBTQ sites worldwide.

Yolanda saw her purpose in life as being “a gadfly on the body politic.” She challenged movement leaders and was ahead of her time in raising consciousness on behalf of Latina lesbians and women of color. Her confrontational style earned her the proudly worn nickname “Yolanda the Terrible” or “Y the T.”

Born in Connecticut of a North American father and Peruvian mother, Yolanda spent much of her childhood in El Salvador. The racism she experienced when she returned to school in Connecticut at age twelve set the tone for her activism on issues of race in the lesbian movement. After moving to California for her Bachelors Degree in Sociology at Pitzer College, she became involved in the embryonic Southern California lesbian movement.

In the early 1970s Yolanda was among the lesbians who formed radical civil rights organizations and was a founding member of Lesbianas LatinaAmericas in 1974. She was a board member at the founding conference that attempted to create the National Lesbian Feminist Organization. A member of the National Conference Planning Committee of Lesbians of Color (1978 to 1983), Yolanda was also a founding member of Lesbianas Latinas in 1980, and later involved in Lesbianas Unidas.

In these years Retter remained proudly and exclusively committed to working on issues for and about women. She was a board member of the



last Lesbian Center in Los Angeles, Connexus/Centro Mujeres. And in 1988, through her job as Director of Women's Programs at GCSC's Lesbian Central, she appeared on "The Oprah Winfrey Show."

Yolanda worked as a volunteer in the prison and parole programs of the Gay & Lesbian Community Services Center, was manager of GCSC's Liberation House in 1972 and was director of the Pasadena Rape Hotline in 1977. In 1978 she co-founded the "Los Angeles Women's Yellow Pages." She also devoted herself as founding archivist of the Lesbian Legacy Collection at the International Gay & Lesbian Archives (USC) and spent many volunteer hours at the June L. Mazer Lesbian Archives (West Hollywood.)

Yolanda brought her lifelong love of books and identity politics together professionally in the last twenty years of her life. She earned her Masters in Library Science at UCLA (1983) and a Masters in Social Work at UCLA(1987) with a thesis on Latina Lesbian Identity Development. In the early 1990s she moved to New Mexico where she earned a PhD in American Studies with her dissertation, "On The Side of Angels: Lesbian Activism in Los Angeles, 1970–1990."

From 1989 to 1991 she ran the Los Angeles Public Library Chicano Resource Collection where she created the first "Latino Biography" database. Pursuing her devotion to people of color issues, Yolanda became a research consultant for exhibits and for films such as the HBO movie "Walk Out," the story of how East L.A. Latino teenagers protested in 1968. She lent her critical cultural eye as a diversity content consultant to gay and feminist historical books such as *Feminists Who Changed America, 1963-1975*.

Yolanda's many awards and honors include a "Lifetime Achievement" award at the USC "Queer Frontiers" conference in 1995, a Monette-Horwitz Award in 2000, a Call Mattachine Scholar Award and Mary Warner Award for her co-authorship of the book, *Gay and Lesbian Rights In America: A Documentary History*. In June of 2007 she received a Rainbow Key Award from the Lesbian and Gay Advisory Board of the West Hollywood City Council for her contributions and dedication to "making lesbian and Latina lesbian history materials widely available to researchers and the writers who tell our stories."

Among her more personal and eccentric talents, Retter was a carpenter and a licensed airplane mechanic. In her private business she bought and sold rare books. She often captained security as a chief monitor for community events. She was security coordinator for the people of color contingent for the First Lesbian and Gay March on Washington in 1979.



She directed monitoring at the Los Angeles Dyke March and was in charge of Security at Sunset Junction Street Fair for 25 years. As her partner Leslie Stampler relates, "Yolanda used her mediation and social work skills to ensure a peaceful event, an event which brought together diverse cultures, gang members and law enforcement."

Another memorable sideline of Yolanda's was a talent for turning a phrase into the unique and ironic slogan buttons worn in the 70s, which she hand-made using her own slogans. "One sister's butch is another sister's femme," "You've just been served by a Lesbian" and "Marimacha, y que?" were among her original slogans.

Yolanda Retter added her mother's maiden name, Vargas, to her own in the early nineties in the Latina tradition. She made several research trips to her ancestral Peru. Her essays on Peruvian photography appeared in exhibit catalogs and Latin-American photography journals. And her essay on marginalized groups and archives is upcoming in a collection from Libraries Unlimited.

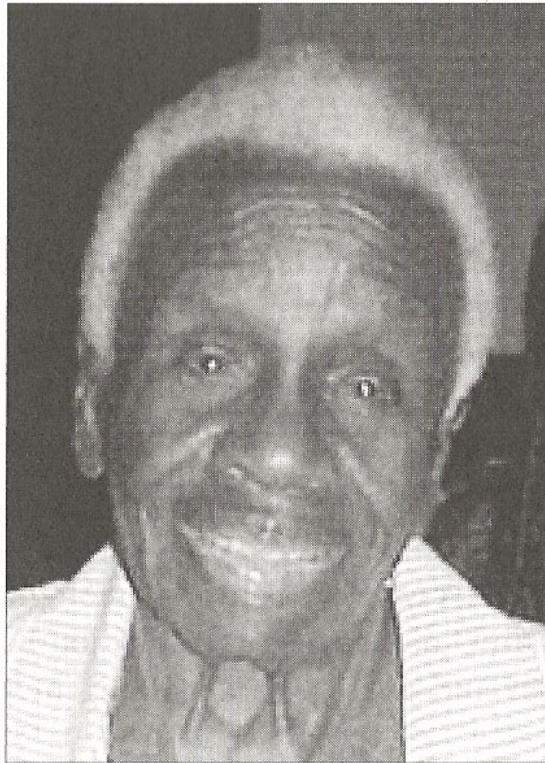
Yolanda is survived by her life partner of thirteen years, Leslie Golden Stampler, Leslie's children and her beloved dogs, and her father, stepmother and six siblings.

Donations in Yolanda's memory can be made to the Yolanda Retter Foundation, c/o The Law Office of Karen L. Mateer, 618 S. Lake Ave, Pasadena CA 91106

Yolanda has left her memoirs and scholarly papers to the UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center. Her websites on lesbian and women of color history will be back online by late August.

For further information contact Lynn Ballen at [lynnhballen@aol.com](mailto:lynnhballen@aol.com).





*Photo of Ruth Ellis. Photo credit: Catherine Crouch.*

## **Ruth Ellis**

**1899 – 2000**

Ruth Ellis was the subject of a documentary titled “Living with Pride: Ruth Ellis at 100” directed by Yvonne Welbon. This one-hour film chronicles Ruth’s inspiring life, growing up in Springfield, Illinois and moving to Detroit. She was involved in the process of making the film which includes vivid narrative recreations. She talks about coping with hard times by getting involved in something that engages us: she took up photography to help her get through a difficult time in her life. In addition to exploring Ruth’s rich life, the film offers a rare opportunity to experience a century of our herstory as lived by one inspiring African American Lesbian. By example, Ruth shows us what is possible and what can be realized, if we live with pride.

### **The Ruth Ellis Center**

The Ruth Ellis Center honors the life and work of Ruth Ellis, and is one of only four agencies in the United States dedicated to homeless LGBT youth and young adults. Among their services are a drop-in center, street outreach program, transitional living programs, and emergency housing shelter.

For more information go to [www.sistersinthelife.com](http://www.sistersinthelife.com).



## Old Lesbians Organizing for Change

### Suggested Readings and Videos

#### AGEISM

- Bird, Caroline. *Lives of Our Own: Secrets of Salty Old Women*. NY: Houghton Mifflin, 1995.
- Copper, Baba. *Ageism in the Lesbian Community*. Freedom, CA: The Crossing Press, 1987.
- Copper, Baba. *Over the Hill: Reflections on Ageism Between Women*. Freedom, CA: The Crossing Press, 1988.
- Heilbrun, Carolyn G. *The Last Gift of Time: Life Beyond Sixty*. NY: Dial Press, 1997.
- MacDonald, Barbara and Cynthia Rich. *Look Me in the Eye: Old Women, Aging and Ageism*. Expanded ed. SF, CA: Spinsters Ink, 1991.

#### GENERAL

- Adelman, Marcy, ed. *Lesbian Passages: True Stories as Told by Women Over 40*. LA, CA: Alyson Pubs., 1996. (Previously published as *Long Time Passing: Lives of Older Lesbians*.)
- Clunis, D. Merilee, Karen I. Fredriksen-Goldsen, Pat A. Freeman and Nancy Nystrom. *Lives of Lesbian Elders: Looking Back, Looking Forward*. Haworth Press, 2005.
- Coleman, Penny. *Village Elders*. IL: University of Illinois Press, 2000.
- Cruikshank, Margaret, ed. *Fierce with Reality: an Anthology of Literature on Aging*. St. Cloud, MN: North Star Press, 1995. (Includes "Seasoning" by Ida VSW Red and "Memory is as Uncertain as Grace" by Mary Meigs.)
- Cruikshank, Margaret, ed. *New Lesbian Writing*. SF, CA: Grey Fox Press, 1984. (Includes "Casting a Net" by Elsa Gidlow, "The Making of a Deviant" by Monika Kehoe, and "Excerpt from The Medusa Head, Pt. II" by Mary Meigs.)
- Durable Dauntless Dykes. *Selections from the Writings of Durable Dauntless Dykes*. San Francisco, CA: GLOE, 1987.
- Gershick, Zsa Zsa. *Gay Old Girls*. LA, CA: Alyson Books, 1998.
- Jay, Karla, ed. *Dyke Life: A Celebration of the Lesbian Experience*. NY: Basic Books, 1995. (Includes "We Never Promised You Role Models" by Jeanne Adelman, "RV Life Begins at Seventy" by Shevy Healey, and "About Being an Old Lesbian in Love" by Mary Meigs.)



- Martin, Del & Phyllis Lyon. *Lesbian/Woman: 20th Ann. Ed.* S.F.: Volcano Pr., 1992.
- Murphy, Marilyn. *Are You Girls Traveling Alone? Adventures in Lesbianic Logic.* LA, CA: Clothespin Fever Press, 1991. (Includes "Old is In" and "And the Walls Came Tumbling Down".)
- Neild, Suzanne and Rosalind Pearson. *Women Like Us.* London: Women's Press, 1992.
- Rich, Cynthia. *The Desert Years: Undreaming the American Dream.* SF, CA: Spinsters/Aunt Lute, 1989.
- Sinister Wisdom* 10 *Special Issue: On Being Old & Age.* Lincoln, NE: 1979.
- Sinister Wisdom* 53 (Summer/Fall 1994). *Old Lesbians/Dykes.* Berkeley, CA: 1994.
- Sinister Wisdom* 68/69 (Fall 2006). *Death, Grief and Surviving.* Berkeley, CA: 2006. Includes "Coda" by Cynthia Rich, "Grief" by Sandy Tate, and many other poems, stories and essays.
- Sinister Wisdom* 70 (Spring 2007) *30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration* Berkeley, CA: 2007. Includes many essays and photographs by and of old lesbians.
- Sinister Wisdom* 71 (Summer 2007). *Open Issue.* Berkeley, CA 2007. Includes "Combating Ageism: An Organization or a Movement" by Shaba Barnes.
- Sinister Wisdom* 72 (Winter 2007–2008) *Utopia: In This Place Lesbians Come First.* Berkeley, CA: 2008.
- "Women and Age," in *Off Our Backs*, the feminist newsjournal. Sept.–Oct. 2005 issue. (pp. 22-50 deal with Women and Aging, much of it lesbian, includes piece on OLOC).
- Women and Aging: An Anthology. In *Calyx, a Journal of Art and Literature by Women.* Winter 1986. (Vol. 9, Nos. 2 & 3) (Includes "Both Feet in Life: Interviews with Barbara MacDonald and Cynthia Rich" by Jean Swallow, "Growing to be an Old Woman" by Shevy Healey, and "Voices: On Becoming Old Women" by Baba Copper.)

## ESSAYS

- Adelman, Marcy. "Quieting Our Fears: Lesbians and Aging". In *Out/Look*, Fall 1988 (Vol. 1, No. 3).
- Auger, Jeannette. "Lesbians and Aging." In *Lesbians in Canada*, ed. by Sharon D. Stone. Toronto: Between the Lines, 1990.



- Barnes, Shaba A. "My Life in a Lesbian Community: The Joys and the Pain." In *Lesbian Communities: Festivals, RVs, and the Internet*, Edited by Esther Rothblum and Penny Sablove. NY: Harrington Press, 2005.
- Corinne, Tee A. "Remembering as a Way of Life." In *Lesbian Culture: An Anthology*, ed. by Julia Penelope and Susan Wolfe. Freedom, CA: Crossing Press, 1993.
- Dunker, Buffy. "Aging Lesbians: Observations and Speculations." In *Lesbian Psychologies: Explorations and Challenges*, ed. by Boston Lesbian Psychologies Collective. Urbana, IL: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1987.
- Kehoe, Monica. "Lesbians Over 65: A Triply Invisible Minority" and "A Portrait of the Older Lesbian." In *Historical, Literary, and Erotic Aspects of Lesbianism*, ed. by Monica Kehoe. New York: Harrington Park Press, 1986.
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- Meigs, Mary. "My Evolution as a Lesbian Feminist Writer." In *Bringing It Home: Women Talk about Feminism in Their Lives*, ed. by Brenda Lea Brown. Vancouver, BC: Arsenal Pulp Press, 1996.
- Nestle, Joan. "I Lift My Eyes to the Hill: The Life of Mabel Hampton as told by a White Woman." In *A Fragile Union: New & Selected Writings by Joan Nestle*. SF, CA: Cleis Press, 1998.
- Nestle, Joan. "Surviving and More: Interview with Mabel Hampton." In *Sinister Wisdom 43/44*, Summer 1991. Berkeley, CA, 1991.
- Poor, Matile. "Older Lesbians." In *Lesbian Studies, Present and Future*, ed. by Margaret Cruikshank. New York: The Feminist Press, 1982.

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- Grumbach, Doris. *Coming into the End Zone*. NY: Norton, 1991.  
*Extra Innings: A Memoir*. NY: Norton, 1993.



- Grumbach, Doris. *Fifty Days of Solitude*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1994.
- Grumbach, Doris. *Life in a Day*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1996.
- Grumbach, Doris. *The Pleasure of Their Company*. Beacon Press, 2000.
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Joan E. Birin (JEB), 2003.
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- Strangers in Good Company*. Cynthia Scott. 1990.
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Madeleine Muir. 1991
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- Web of Crones* (ed. by Emma Joy Crone, Hornby Island, B.C.), 1985–1988?
- We Are Visible* (ed. by Vashte Doublex, Mendocino, CA), 1989–1998.



## WEBSITE ADDRESSES

OLOC [www.oloc.org](http://www.oloc.org)

*Classic Dykes Online* [www.classicdykes.com/bib.htm](http://www.classicdykes.com/bib.htm). Available through this web address is an excellent Lesbian Aging Bibliography, dated 1999

[www.Lesbian.com](http://www.Lesbian.com) (link on left side for “elders/crones”)

[www.Lesbian.org](http://www.Lesbian.org)

Suggested Reading and Viewing List was compiled by Sally T. Duplaix for OLOC in February 1999. It has been updated regularly and is available upon request by email at [tashi1174@verizon.net](mailto:tashi1174@verizon.net), or by mail at P.O. Box 1174, West Chatham, MA 02669.

September 2008



## 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>

**Gloria E. Anzaldúa** (1942–2004) was one of the first openly Lesbian Chicana writers. She published essays, poetry, short stories, interviews, anthologies and children’s books and was recognized as an innovative feminist thinker and social activist. Her writing shaped the imagination and ethics of our generation. Three ground-breaking anthologies — *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (1981, with Cherríe Moraga), *Making Face, Making Soul/Haciendo Caras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Feminists-of-Color* (1990), and *This Bridge We Call Home: Radical Visions for Transformation* (2002, with AnaLouise Keating) — provided crucial space for women of color to develop theory and community. *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987) is a collection of poetry and prose that meshed the personal with the political in breathtaking depth. *Borderlands/La Frontera* was named one of the 100 Best Books of the Century by *Hungry Mind Review* and *Utne Reader*.

Gloria played a major role in redefining contemporary Chicana and lesbian/queer identities and in developing an inclusionary feminist movement. She was awarded a posthumous Ph.D. in literature from the University of California, Santa Cruz. Gloria gave her loving support to numerous social change organizations; *Sinister Wisdom* was one of her many beneficiaries. In 1984 she became a contributing editor and in 1987, participated in the first *Sinister Wisdom* West Coast benefit.

“**Avotcja** is a unique voice among our poets, musicians, playwrights and other creative folk today. She combines a fierce, persistent and consistent passion for justice with a beauty of words, sounds and image that can take your breath away. To put it simply, Avotcja is a national and international treasure.” Elizabeth (Betita) Martinez-activist, author, educator.



**Shaba A. Barnes** has been a community activist most of her adult life. After moving to the West Coast in 1969, from New York City, Shaba joined the National Organization for Women and quickly became the secretary of the Los Angeles Chapter. She also joined the Feminist Theatre which was active doing guerrilla theatre or street theatre as well as performances at Universities in California. Shaba has been active in theater, acting, and producing. She was instrumental in achieving Domestic Partner Rights for all members via the Lesbian and Gay Association at Kaiser Permanente Hospital in Los Angeles. She was a CO-Director for Old Lesbians Organizing for Change (OLOC), the only organization of its kind dedicated to combating Ageism; OLOC was founded by and for Lesbians over 60 years old. Shaba presently lives in Albuquerque, New Mexico with her partner of 38 years. She enjoys poetry readings as she continues to seek avenues of expression by sharing insights on the spiritual and the power of being an Old Lesbian. She is still available to teach workshops and classes with a spiritual theme.

**Tracy Baim** is the publisher and managing editor of Windy City Media Group (Windy City Times, Identity, Windy City Queercast and QueerTVNetwork.com). In 2009, Baim marks her 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary in LGBT media. She received the 2005 Studs Terkel Award, and is an inductee to Chicago's Gay and Lesbian Hall of Fame. In 2008, she edited the first history book of Chicago's gay community, *Out and Proud in Chicago: An Overview of the City's Gay Community* (Surrey Books, 224 pages), a companion to [www.ChicagoGayHistory.org](http://www.ChicagoGayHistory.org). Baim executive produced the film *Hannah Free*, starring Sharon Gless, on screens Summer 2009.

**ila Benavidez-Heaster:** Born in a little mountain town called Tierra Amarillo, New Mexico: my tribes are Navajo, Ute, along with Sephardic Jew. Taken from my people at the age of 5 years old and placed in Americanize English-speaking white foster homes where I was cut off from my home, people, language, roots, and cultures. From 1958-1961 painted and sculpted in Greenwich Village, New York. Received my master's in Arts and Consciousness in which I lifted up my expressive movement and tonal sounding. When asked when I knew I was a lesbian, I reflected on my art and what I entitled the pieces. From the inception of my art, I had been depicting women's bodies/stories and many of their titles were "Vestal Virgin, Madonna and Child, Voluptuous Beauty, etc."



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

**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.

**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](http://www.CathyCade.com).

**Tita Caldwell** is a 77-year-old lesbian living in San Francisco, part of a community of seven lesbians living in senior housing. A life-long activist, she is an active member of OLOC (Old Lesbians Organizing for Change) and helps organize a monthly anti-war vigil.

**Chrystos**, writer and Native Rights activist, won the Audre Lorde International Poetry competition in 1994 and the Sappho Award of Distinction from the Astraea National Action Foundation in 1995.

**Emma Joy Crone:** I am now 81 years of age and still writing. Most of my work I've sent to the Canadian Lesbian Archives; the book I self-published in 2005, *A Common Woman*, is out of print. I started a newsletter called *Web of Crones* and published it from 1985 to 1989; it later merged with a publication called *Visible*. I live on a small island in Canada, in elder housing.

**Alix Dobkin:** Beginning as a passionate folk singer in the 1960s, Alix grew up in the heart of American folk and ethnic as well as jazz and Broadway musical traditions. In 1970, Alix became a feminist, fell in love with a woman and began to sing and write songs about the forbidden love of women for women. For over thirty years she's been bringing blatant Lesbianism into the lives of Lesbians and anyone else who wants to know why Lavender Jane REALLY loves women. Producer of the groundbreaking 1973 "Lavender Jane Loves Women," Alix has six additional highly praised



albums and a songbook to her credit. Her memoir, *MY RED BLOOD: Radical Singer Takes On Her Times*, will be published by Alyson Books due out in Sept, 2009.

**Sally Duplaix**, age 73, created this list originally for OLOC's website as a resource for old lesbians. She is a former librarian, and a lifelong avid collector of Lesbiana material. She is now limiting her collection to material by and for lesbians over age 60.

**Arden Eversmeyer**, 78, lives in Houston, Texas with her partner of 22 years, Charlotte Avery. After the death of a partner of 33 years in 1985, Arden became active in her community. She founded LOAF (Lesbians Over Age Fifty) in 1987 with a current membership of 150 old lesbians. She served on the OLOC Steering Committee for fourteen years, seven of them as Co-Director with Vera Martin. She served with Houston's Area Agency on Aging for six years. And for the last ten years she has been collecting the life stories of wonderful old lesbians over the age of 70. Old Lesbian Oral Herstory Project [www.OLOHP.org](http://www.OLOHP.org); [arden1931@yahoo.com](mailto:arden1931@yahoo.com)

**Dorothy Fowler**: 81 years old, completed an MFA in Creative Writing at 77 with a belief that it's never too late to go to school and hone one's skills.

**Lee Ann Freilich**: Born into a family of Southerners with writing tendencies, I am from Tennessee and grew up in Florida. Have lived in NYC since '59, starting from the hetero Beatnik on, I kissed whom I could. Cancer, MS survivor; dancing as fast as I can.

**Pat Gilmore** lives in West Sonoma County in California and writes with the sage guidance of Skye, her companion schnauzer. She finds him perfect but only wishes he were a better speller.

**Antonieta Gimeno**: Is a 66-year-old Mexicana-Salvadoreña, born in Panamá, raised in México, who immigrated to the U.S. forty years ago. Her complex identity includes being a multiracial Black self-identified, lesbian, single mother of 29-year-old twins. She has been a community organizer and educator for the last thirty years and a writer and creative artist for the last ten. She sees art and spirituality as integral parts of our struggle for social justice.

**Jewelle Gomez** is an author and activist who was proud to celebrate her 60th birthday with Old Lesbians Organizing for Change. She has published seven books including the double Lambda Literary Award-winning novel, *THE GILDA STORIES*, which has been in print since 1991. She has



taught creative writing and popular culture at educational institutions across the country from Hunter College to San Francisco State University. Her forthcoming novel is entitled *TELEVISED* and she is currently at work on a play about James Baldwin.

**Judy Grahn** is a poet, cultural theorist, and teacher. She edits an online journal, *Metaformia*, at [www.metaformia.com](http://www.metaformia.com). Her newest books are *love belongs to those who do the feeling* (a collection of short poems from 1966–2006) from Red Hen Press; and *The Judy Grahn Reader* (prose and longer poems) from Aunt Lute Press. She teaches her own theoretical work in a Women's Spirituality Master's Program at the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology. She performs her own poetry, in collaboration with musicians; and teaches writing and literature in Writing, Consciousness, and Creative Inquiry, an interdisciplinary MFA program at California Institute of Integral Studies in San Francisco.

**Bethroot Gwynn** has been living at Fly Away Home lesbian land since 1976—growing food and poems, tending road/waterline/buildings, creating theater and ritual. Her poems and essays have been published in several journals, including the *We'Moon Datebook*, for which she is Special Editor. Her poetry chapbook and CD *Under the Heart-Stone: Poems from a Lesbian Love Spell* is available from POB 593, Myrtle Creek, OR 97457.

**Jane Herman** has been a lesbian feminist political activist since the early 1970s, when she was a member of the Los Angeles Radical Feminist Therapy Collective. When she became disabled by Environmental Illness (E.I.) in 1993, she brought the skills and insights she had gained in the Women's Movement to bear upon her activism on behalf of people with E.I.; as a member of the Ecology House Board of Directors in San Rafael, California, she helped plan and design the first federally-funded safer apartment complex for people with E.I. Jane now lives in Santa Rosa, California, where her political work has of necessity become increasingly personal. She devotes much of her energy caring for herself and her friends, helping them to live healthier lives, and she educates her local Community about environmental health. This winter she established the first fragrance-free, cell-phone-free, OLOC chapter.

**Maggie Leigh:** I was born to a Jewish mother and Irish father in Los Angeles during WW II. I grew up in Europe, came back for a few years to the US and then settled in Florence, Italy. I got my political education there in the sixties and briefly lived in a feminist commune. In 1975 I came to San



Francisco to have and raise my son and have been in the Bay Area ever since. I am a proud member of Old Lesbians Organizing for Change (OLOC). Retired from teaching children to read, I now spend my time sharing the present with my partner, painting watercolors, gardening, researching my secular Jewish roots, writing about and reflecting on my life.

**Simi Litvak** is 67 years old and lives with her spousette, Pnina Tobin in Berkeley, California. She wrote these poems to be performed as part of Mother Tongue Reader's Theater's Disability Script. Simi has participated in the Disability Rights Movement for over 30 years as a researcher, policy analyst, advocate and organizer. Currently she is involved with Fabled ASP, a project to collect, document, archive and celebrate the innovative art, culture and history of the S.F. Bay Area disabled lesbian community and movement from the civil rights era to the present. In addition, she is an active member of the fabulous Bay Area chapter of OLOC.

**Janet Lubeski** (1933 – 2008): Janet was well known in the community as a Lesbian activist, healer, writer, avid birder, gardener, and world traveler. She leaves behind many dear friends with whom she shared her insights, love and laughter. She was proud to be a member of Old Lesbians Organizing for Change. Janet served on the advisory board of Gay and Lesbian Outreach to Elders and on the board of directors and advisory board for New Leaf Outreach to Elders.

**Ronna Magy** began writing after she entered mid-life. Her short fiction, poetry and memoir pieces have appeared in several anthologies including *My Life is Poetry*, *Oasis*, *Best Lesbian Love Stories 2009*, *Hers 2*, and the *Bilingual Review*. She lives in Los Angeles.

**Margaret Mann** is a 63-year-old, bi-racial, single, lesbian, Buddhist in a wheelchair who lives in Honolulu, Hawaii, where she currently is the coordinator of the Hawaii Breast Cancer Coalition. She has spent the last 40 years as community organizer, twenty of them in Washington DC in the national offices of women's organizations. She has been disabled for eleven years with a spinal cord injury.

**JaLainia Mar (Jan McLaughlin)**: I am adopting a new artist name in memory of my mother. Formal Education: BFA, MS in art, film, performance and cultural services. I love hearing from "tribal sisters." I live with my partner, Laverne Gagehabib, and our fur children fifty miles southeast of Eugene, Oregon.



**Pat McCutcheon:** In the years before sunscreen, I grew up a redhead in the Southwest. We moved often, one fundamentalist church to another, from asphalt-covered trailer parks to tract homes that held three *Readers Digest Condensed Books*, several *Bibles*, and the swelter of family tensions. School, library books, scholarships, and teachers who, amazingly, encouraged me to write, all pointed to more promising possibilities. Now, having raised three kids, my partner of twenty-four years and I joyously married the first day we were given the chance this past July. I teach at the local community college, and we live in the redwoods of far northern California with two cats who help to keep any demons at bay.

**Neta Melton**, biological age 73, behavioral age? Dubbed a Militant Female 1960s—amused Dyke. Judged by feminist lesbians 1980s—confused Dyke. I call Southern Oregon home in the here and now, while my lusty suitcase packs for anything.

**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.

**Marge Nelson** is busy reinventing 80, leading consciousness-raising groups for Old Lesbians Organizing for Change and writing her memoir. A founder of OPTIONS for Women over Forty and OLOC, she's also collecting the early history of the "older women's movement," or older women's liberation (OWL) with attention to lesbians born before 1930. If you want to send her information, do so at [marjoryn@sonic.net](mailto:marjoryn@sonic.net).

**Marj Norris** has written for many years and taught at Women's Studies Poetry Workshop at SUNY Buffalo. She teaches writing and journaling in Buffalo and has published three books: *Two Suns, Two Moons, Resilience*, and *Trees of Surprise*, an anthology about a sudden storm, all available on Amazon.com. Latest poems have appeared in *Maize* #88 and *Rain and Thunder* #40. She recently attended the Old Lesbians Organizing for Change national gathering in Los Angeles and Silver Threads in St. Pete's Beach in Florida.

64-year-old **Marcia Perlstein** is a proud member of National Old Lesbians Organizing for Change and Puget Sound OLOC in the state of Washington. She has been a practicing therapist, trainer of new and



veteran therapists in Berkeley and San Francisco since 1967; and now, Sequim, Washington. She is a national consultant in areas such as diversity, preventing and addressing burn-out and coping with feelings around grief and loss (to name a few).

**Sharon M. Raphael** has been an “out” Lesbian and Lesbian Feminist activist in the Los Angeles area since 1971. She is Professor Emerita of Sociology and Gerontology at California State University Dominguez Hills. Her primary area of interest has been establishing interest in the topic and developing the area of study “Lesbian and Gay Aging.” Sharon is the official Research Gatekeeper for and is a proud member of the organization Old Lesbians Organizing for Change. Sharon has been life partners with Mina Kay Meyer, Co-Director of OLOC, since 1971. Both were married officially in Long Beach August 24th, 2008.

**Ida VSW Red** performed this year in *Special* (a short excerpt from Ann P. Meredith’s forthcoming film about childhood abuse) at the Fringe of Marin, and is working with OutLook Theater to create a performance piece based on the oral histories of LGBT elders. Trying to honor past work when not writing much currently, she posts a poem each month on her retirement community bulletin board and is gradually exposing explicitly lesbian images in publicly displayed pieces. *Changeling: A Lesbian/Feminist Fable*, Ida’s first film, was created in a Frameline Generations Workshop and shown in the ‘08 Frameline Film Festival.

**Senecarol Rising.** I have never married anyone but have earned a good-dyke keeping award from my wonderful partner of 27 years. I love women, plaid flannel shirts, gardening, and gathering rocks at the beach, painting pictures, creating stepping stones and watching Rachel Maddow with dyke friends. Most Fridays I stand on a street corner with Women in Black. My heart aches over the abuse of our precious planet and its beautiful beings. I believe in active self-defense the throwing of shoes and in the throwing of rocks. Silence hurts.

**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](mailto:Lilithrogers1@juno.com). Aloha.



**Susa Silvermarie:** I was born in 1947, the year the Others landed in Roswell, New Mexico. Our government still has a “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy about them, too. In 1977 I had a poem in *Sinister Wisdom #4*. I’m truly happy to share this one now, as I begin the youth of my old age.

**Jayne Snook** is a 66-year-old Lesbian Dianic Witch. She lives in the San Francisco Bay Area and is a general aviation Pilot, a Spring Forest Qigong teacher and competes in Same Sex International Style Ballroom Dance. She will be competing in the senior division of Ballroom Dance in the OUTGAMES 2009 in Demark in July. She is presently writing a book on her Dancing experiences.

**Sandy Tate:** Born 1935, Jewish, working class, member of Old Lesbians Organizing for Change (OLOC), member of “Why Wi-Fi,” a group of concerned people trying to alert the population about the dangers of Electromagnetic Radiation from cell phones, cell towers and wireless Internet.

**Jean Taylor** is a Melbourne-based writer and publisher who also paints and knits. She enjoys travelling and attending lesbian community gatherings and is sometimes taken by surprise remembering how long she’s been around.

**Cristina Vegas:** I was born in Peru where I lived until I was 10, since then I lived in various countries abroad before coming to the United States. When I turned 40 I decided that I had to start living my life (not just wait for my parents to die before doing so) so I came out to myself and others as a Lesbian. I met Barbara Kalish and have been, happily, with her for 24 years now. When Old Lesbians Organizing for Change was initially formed, I started videotaping the meetings (from 1989 through 1991) and now that I am retired, I plan to edit them and make them available to OLOC.

**Win Weston,** born 1936, a writer and artist, a member of the Out to Brunch Writers’ Group, Minneapolis, MN. She has had stories published in *Sinister Wisdom*.

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



*Socialist*. A selection of her poems, entitled *Yellow Woman Speaks*, was published by Radical Women Publications (rwseattle@mindspring.com).

**Ruth Zachary** is an artist working in many visual arts media. Since 1977 she has created Women's Heritage etchings, mixed media collage and paintings, and vintage photo montages. She was a news reporter for seven years in a suburb of Grand Rapids MI. She now lives in Greeley, Colorado, where she continues to create art and write. Her art is exhibited at Madison and Main Gallery. See more of her work at <http://www.rzachary.com> or visit her blogs, <http://ruthzacharyart.blogspot.com> or <http://rzwitestuff.blogspot.com>



*Jo Hiner. Photo by Win Weston.*



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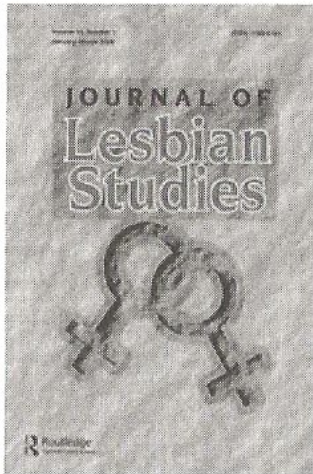
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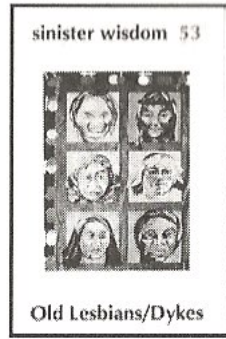
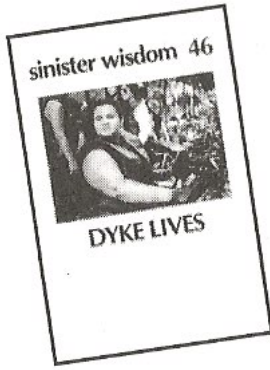
- #77 *Environmental Issues Lesbian Concerns*
- #76 *Open Issue*
- #75 *Lesbian Theories/Lesbian Controversies*
- #74 *Latina Lesbians*
- #73 *The Art Issue*
- #72 *Utopia*
- #71 *Open Issue*
- #70 *30th Anniversary Celebration\**
- #68/69 *Death, Grief and Surviving*
- #67 *Lesbians and Work*
- #66 *Lesbians and Activism*
- #65 *Lesbian Mothers & Grandmothers*
- #64 *Lesbians and Music, Drama and Art*
- #63 *Lesbians and Nature*
- #62 *Lesbian Writers on Reading and Writing\**
- #61 *Women Loving Women in Prison*
- #59/60 *Love, sex & romance*
- #58 *Open issue*
- #57 *Healing*
- #55 *Exploring issues of racial & sexual identification*
- #54 *Lesbians & religion*
- #53 *Old dykes/lesbians-guest edited by lesbians over 60*
- #52 *Allies issue*
- #51 *New lesbian writing*
- #50 *Not the ethics issue-find out why!*
- #49 *The lesbian body*
- #48 *Lesbian resistance including work by dykes in prison*
- #47 *Lesbians of color: Tellin' It Like It 'Tis*
- #46 *Dyke lives*
- #45 *Lesbians & class the first issue of a lesbian journal edited entirely by poverty and working class dykes*
- #43/44 *15th Anniversary double-size (368 pgs) retrospective*
- #41 *Italian American Women's issue*
- #40 *Friendship*
- #39 *Disability*
- #36 *Surviving Psychiatric Assault/Creating emotional well being in our communities*
- #35 *Passing*
- #34 *Sci-Fi, Fantasy & lesbian visions*
- #33 *Wisdom*
- #32 *Open Issue*

\* Available on audio tape



Also available  
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**Sinister Wisdom — A Multicultural Lesbian Literary & Art Journal**

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## Upcoming Issues: Call for Material

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### 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](mailto:creep toes@yahoo.com).

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

Forthcoming

Editors: Anah Holland-Moore, Ardella Tibby, Barbary Clarke, Cathy Wheel, Claudia Huber, Jean Taylor, Lorraine le Plastrier, Rosalinda Rayne

### #81 Lesbian Poetry – When? And Now!

Due March 1, 2010

Guest Editor: Julie R. Enszer

Poetry has long been important to lesbians, lesbian publishing, and lesbian identity. The Daughters of Bilitis took the name of the organization from the lesboerotic poems of Pierre Louys, *Songs of Bilitis*. From the Sappho fragments to the words of Gertrude Stein, Alice Dunbar-Nelson, Renee Vivien, Michael Field (two women writing with a pseudonym), Adah Isaacs Menken, Emily Dickinson, Angelina Weld Grimké, Muriel Rukeyser, May Sarton and hundreds of other mid- and late- twentieth century poets, what it means to be lesbian is often expressed and understood through poetry. This issue of *Sinister Wisdom* seeks poems by thirty to forty contemporary lesbian poets, each paired with a poem by a lesbian poet of yore. Think about what work inspires your work and submit creative, eclectic, interesting, and unusual pairings for consideration.

#### Some notes about submission:

- Each pair should include a poem by the contemporary poet and a “poet of yore.”
- The submitter should provide a bio of both poets included in the submission.
- Poets are encouraged to submit up to three pairs of poems for consideration.
- Pairings of poems and visual art work are also welcome.
- Other creative responses to the theme are welcome.
- Permission to print both poems must be secured by the submitter. Please discuss copyright and permission with the guest editor well in advance of deadline.

Submit manuscripts to Julie R. Enszer, 6910 Wells Parkway, University Park, MD 20782 with SASE for response or email [JulieREnszer@gmail.com](mailto:JulieREnszer@gmail.com).

### #82 Hope

Date and details to be announced

Editor: Fran Day [fran@sonic.net](mailto:fran@sonic.net)

### #83 Call for Guest Editor(s)



# Submissions Guidelines

**Submissions:** See page 208 for themes. Check our website at [www.sinisterwisdom.org](http://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: three 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 women. All work must be on white paper. **Please proofread your work carefully; do not send changes after the deadline. Be sure to get permission before including names of people.**

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.

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. Do not send large files electronically – send each piece separately or send a cd. **Be sure to get permission before including a photo of someone. (We include photos by and of Lesbians only.)**

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.





*Turtle by Jess McVey. Photo by Cathy Cade.*

**\$10**