

sinister wisdom 45



LESBIANS & CLASS

*Ann
Lee*



Sinister Wisdom 45
Winter 1991/1992

Publisher: Elana Dykewomon

Guest Editor: Caryatis Cardea

Editorial readers and advisors: Betty Dudley, Cath Thompson, Janet Capone, Jasmine Marah, Max Dashú, Monifa Ajanaku, Naja Sorella, Sabena Stark, Sauda Burch, Suz Fields, Terri Fredlund

Contributing editors: Gloria Anzaldúa, Irena Klepfisz, Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz

Typists and proofreaders: Angela Koenig, Cath Thompson, Laura Tow, Susan Goldberg, Susan Levinkind, Valerie Stoehr

Office help, correspondence, ads and accounting: Dolphin Waletzky, Laura Munter-Orabona, Leslie Rome, Sauda Burch, SJ Kahn, Susan Levinkind, Valerie Stoehr, Valerie Valuch

Thanks to Bobby Rothschild and Rebecca Kutlin of Tamed Technology

Distribution and mailing crew: Angela Koenig, Betsy Getaz, Betty Dudley, Cath Thompson, Denise Leto, Dolphin Waletzky, Elana Dykewomon, Jasmine Marah, Joan Margaret, Jessica, Judith Masur, Laura Munter-Orabona, Leslie Rome, Lisa Carlin, Nicole Appleberry, Mary DeLorenzo Pelc, SJ Kahn, Susan Goldberg, Susan Levinkind, Val Valuch and friends

Reader for the Womyn's Braille Press: Judy Freespirit

Cover art: Celia Rodriguez: This design is based on pre-columbian motifs: the flower/cruz combination symbolizes woman, the hand symbolizes work/change/effect, the eye within the hand symbolizes consciousness. You can think of this work as a prayer for the continued good work of *Sinister Wisdom* and the womyn who give their energy toward making it happen.

SINISTER WISDOM, founded 1976

Former editors and publishers: Harriet Ellenberger (aka Desmoines)
and Catherine Nicholson (1976-81)
Michelle Cliff and Adrienne Rich (1981-83)
Micheale Uccella (1983-84)
Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz (1983-87)

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ISSN: 0196-1853. Printed in the U.S.A. on recycled paper.

Sinister Wisdom, Inc. • PO Box 3252 • Berkeley CA 94703 • US

A Journal for the Lesbian Imagination
in the Arts and Politics

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Apology

We inadvertently omitted Judith Katz's name on the cover of 43/44, for which we apologize profusely. Judith's work appeared in issues 19, 21 and 34.

This issue of Sinister Wisdom was edited by lesbians from lower-class backgrounds: poor, working-poor and working-class. We are rural and urban; African-American, Jewish-American, European-American; mostly in our 30s and 40s, from the Midwest, South, and Northeast. About half of us are ongoing members of SW's editorial group; about half came on just for this issue. Our present situations differ much from our own backgrounds and from one another. We are in agreement on one thing: the tremendous impact of poverty and classism on our lives as lesbians.

This is not a special issue about class. This, like all issues of Sinister Wisdom, is about lesbians. It is about the ways in which lesbian communities and their working-class and poor members are touched by class, that is, by our cultures, manners, families, jobs, and dreams; and by classism, the discrimination we experience because of our cultures, manners, families, jobs, and dreams. It contains fiction, poetry, essays and personal narratives from dykes of lower-class backgrounds about our past and present lives, about how we think privilege can be shared and oppression combatted.

It could also have been about how the lives of the middle- and upper-class dykes in our communities are touched by class, how they think privilege can be shared and oppression combatted. But it is not. When we were approached at Sinister Wisdom by the Bay Area group, Revolting Lesbians, about doing this issue, I was reluctant. Lesbian journals having been largely the province of class-privileged dykes, I anticipated being deluged with articles which could accurately carry such subtitles as *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Caring*, *Stop the World I Want to Go Shopping*, *The Effects of Mega-Bucks on Moon-in-Virgo Lesbians*, and *A Funny Thing Happened to Lesbian Feminism on the Way to the Postmodern Academy*.

Well, I was wrong. It wasn't that bad. But much of what we received from dykes of class privilege was about the ways in which they had been denied the full benefit of the privilege they had been born into, the ways in which they believe they have lost or relinquished that privilege now, and the ways in which their sorrow about the existence of deprivation is as great as that known by the people who are actually deprived. Or, it was about poverty

and hardship portrayed through imagination. But scarcely a word about living on the right side of the proverbial tracks, or what they thought could be done about class oppression among us now. Much of the writing we received from middle-class lesbians was excellent, and by no mean class-oppressive. But none of it advanced the discussion of class in our communities and, in the end, when we discovered we had selected mostly work by poverty-class dykes anyway, we decided to use only that.

SW did receive two letters from middle-class dykes expressing their feelings about their class privilege today. The call for submissions we ran months ago specified that we would "particularly address the concerns of working-class and poor lesbians." Both letters protested this exclusion of their experiences. One said she wasn't surprised, it was "practically compulsory." Naja's reaction, "Oh, gag!" pretty much summed it up for me. Elana had suggested that lesbians with class privilege not confuse an "embarrassment of riches" with the "shame of poverty." One correspondent said we had failed to take into account her suffering over the guilt and shame of class privilege. How can I explain to her that lower-class dykes reading this are already groaning?

Many dykes assume that any issue (or anthology or workshop) on class must allow for full participation of lesbians of all classes. A complete dialogue must be established, mustn't it? What this often means is that we can speak of the grief you inflict on us only if you can tell us how much it hurts you to hear it. And the two pains must be treated as being of equal import. I can't get my mind around a sense of entitlement so great that one issue of a journal being "primarily composed" of the writing of one group would make me feel utterly excluded.

And anyway, every poem about a first crush met while vacationing at the seashore is an articulation of the privilege of class. Every narrative about the dread that old age will bring about a first-ever encounter with poverty is an articulation of the privilege of class. Every letter which opines, "While I support the right of poor lesbians to have a voice..." articulates the privilege of class, panicking at momentarily not being at the center of things. In all the books, conferences and journals containing only class-privileged voices, ours aren't even missed. In any issue containing only class-oppressed voices, how one-sided it is to have a single point of view represented. This has never prompted anyone to put an end to

our exclusion, though. Maybe they think we can live stifled because we're used to it. Or because we're braver than them. Or because they don't really think we have anything to say to them anyway.

Most calls for submissions, including the one for this issue, leave plenty of space for class-privileged dykes to write; this one contained about as much discouragement to them as many other calls, through their phrasing, present to us. Here, as in any issue of any lesbian publication, the middle-class community could choose to talk about class. They never do. (There's no need to write to me about the exceptions. I'm aware of them. Scarcity is a world of absolutes and I'm trying to acquaint you with its language: never, always, nothing.) Left to their own devices, they have had virtually nothing to say for the twenty years of this movement about their privilege or our oppression, except to accuse us of exaggerating both. Each and every time we weary of this attitude, which ignores, insults, shames and excludes us, and try to take a space for ourselves, they claim we have shoved them aside.

When we say we want to talk about class, we do not want you to tell us how you're not really that privileged, how you're tormented with guilt about your new house and yearly vacation in Hawaii, how the lesbian tenants in your guest house failed to do the yard work and you had to evict them. And most of all, how really *bad* you feel about all these things, and how your therapist is helping you feel better about yourself.

When we say we want to talk about class, we mean the kind of talk you will find in this journal: a discussion of poverty and classism with other lesbians who have lived both. We want to remember, and grieve, and celebrate. We want to accord respect to the values we developed and the ways in which they still foster our survival efforts today. We want to acknowledge the damage we endured, and how that sabotages our survival efforts today. Then, and only then, we want lesbians with class privilege — and you do know who you are — to pay attention.



The experience of editing this journal is one I will never forget: a summer spent with other dykes from poor and working-class backgrounds in intense discussion about the uses of language, the variety and the meanings of our experiences, the lack of opportunities we have had, in our lives as lesbians, to explore those

meanings; about the power of writing, of publishing, of editing. Every dyke in the editorial group made herself available to me for long, impromptu discussions, helping me figure out how to challenge certain writers on certain issues, what things to bring up in these notes, and what to do with all the feelings this journal and our discussions have stirred up. (They'll have to share responsibility for the unusual length of this essay. Each time a new issue arose, one of them would say, "Put that in the Notes!") In contrast to mixed-class setting, where the class division is seldom acknowledged to be more complex than middle-class-or-not, we had the chance, in this editorial group, to grant some recognition to the vast differences in the levels of the lower classes. The texture of our discussions was, if you'll pardon the expression, rich. And the authors, who had submitted their work not even knowing (as we had not) that it would be selected by a group containing no class-privileged dykes, frequently made the work of editing its own reward, responding to difficult political challenges, not with defensiveness, but with appreciation for the effort.

Our greatest regrets about the issue were the lack of racial diversity in the work submitted, and the low number of submissions in general. In an anthology, with a year or more to gather and solicit work, we could perhaps have achieved greater diversity; with a journal, we have available only what lesbians send in the space of the 6 months between announcement and deadline. Although we do feel a little embarrassed about it, you'll find that a good deal of writing is by lesbians who edited the journal, partly in an attempt to fill in the gaps in what we had received. We also accepted as many late submissions as we could, and eventually did have to edit for space.

Betty proposed running a blank page to represent all of you we haven't heard from yet. Jasmine suggests that we sponsor a workshop on writing for lower-class lesbians, because we know how hard it is to feel that we can and should write. Not only because we are muffled in our present communities, but because our backgrounds never, as Elliott points out, led us in this direction.

Because it has so often been used to exclude our writing, we decided to edit for Standard English spelling and grammar only if the author wished it, or if, by coincidence, that usage would help to express a thought more clearly. We received a great many more lengthy pieces than are usually submitted by poor and working-class dykes. Sauda noticed that several of us write our long prose

in short segments, which made me wonder if we had stumbled onto a style uniquely suited to poor and working-class folks. A style which, like poetry, can be completed in the short spaces of actual and mental time we have left over from our work lives. This is not to say that middle-class dykes don't work long hours also, but we are more likely to lack the education that can lead to jobs where our time, our environment and our work-flow is in our control.



Some of what I have written here, and much in my article, was sparked by conversations last summer with JMax, who was guest-editing the class issue of Lesbian Ethics. She seemed to be on the other end of my phone every other week last August and September, asking if I'd finished anything about class. I tried, but I was so tired of it all that I couldn't seem to complete any one piece. Moreover, I felt that my last effort, in 1983, might have contributed to the way the community had altered its language and a few attitudes and done zip about lesbian homelessness and hunger, isolation and exclusion. I didn't hear from her for several weeks, and figured that she and Lee and Shoney had gathered enough material. In December, I learned that JMax had taken her own life and everything changed. There would just have to be time. We would have to find the energy. And even though the class issues of LE and SW would not come out far enough apart to form a direct dialogue, both journals and their editors are committed to continuing the discussion. This is not the last time Sinister Wisdom will accept work on the subject of class. It is past time, as Max points in in her essay, for our institutions to include a concern for class and for the lesbians most affected by it. It is also past time to acknowledge and confront the meaning of this difference among us and start building a community founded upon all of our dreams.

— Caryatis Cardea

I am deeply indebted to each of the lesbians with whom I edited this journal, which may be the first-ever all-lower-class-dyke publication. Much gratitude to Elana for advice and counsel, and computer-wizardry, especially on the graffiti wall.

Upcoming Issues _____

#46 Open Theme issue, will be out in early May, 1992.

#47 Lesbians of Color: will be edited entirely by a collective of Lesbians of Color. We are a diverse group of writers, artists, community activists and readers. Our responsibility as editors is to serve as advocates for and supporters of the women who submit work for consideration. All contributors must identify as Lesbians of Color. Please submit a short bio with your work, including your ethnic and/or ancestral background so that we can show the wonderfully diverse peoples we come from. Submissions may be in any language. Please include an English translation if possible, for editorial purposes. If we are unable to find adequate translation for review, we will return your work. Submit two copies of written work on white paper, one side only, double-spaced. Include name, address, day and evening phone on the title page. Include title, name and page number on each subsequent page. Art work should be b&w or easily translatable into b&w. Send photographs or clear photocopies. Please include title, media and dimensions. SASE required. See back cover for more submission details. Deadline: February 11, 1992.

#48 Resistance: How do we Dykes resist, do political work, find ways to make the planet a better place for womyn, animals and the earth itself? If we don't go to political meetings and groups, how can we still contribute to the struggle? What ways besides going to demonstrations can we be politically active? Why have so many Dykes put emotional/physical/political energy into men with AIDS, and how do we encourage them to re-focus it on the Dyke community? What ways do our lives — our racial/ethnic and class identities, whether we are young or old, live in rural or urban areas, are disabled or able-bodied — reflect in our political work? Do we judge political work by its merit or by the status of those doing the work? How do we define effective? What have we felt as effective and encouraging? What are our success stories? Deadline: June 1, 1992.

Attention, Class

She's got class.
ooh what a classy joint.
this is some high class livin'.
don't you have any class?

yeah, I got class, you got class, we've all got at least one class. but some of us are ashamed. some of us are guilty. some of us are embarrassed. some of us are angry. some of us are scared. some of us don't want to talk about it. some of us are talking about it too much. and much too loud!

well there's my class and your class and if they're different levels then we get to take a look at class differences, also known as hunting for classism in all the small places. see, classism affects us all but it's usually the ones who are getting stomped on that are yelling about it. so where do we start? well, for me it begins at a gut level. am I comfortable being myself around this person? not am I comfortable showing her my tough dyke in the world self but am I safe showing her my mother's daughter self? the part that wasn't trained in the proper way to do. the one who feels ashamed when the whole gang chooses to go to a restaurant I can't afford. the one who avoids talking about my family. what they do for a living. the neighborhood I grew up in. how we ate out at Burger Chef when we ate out at all. it's knowing who will dismiss this information and who will identify. it's taken years of coming out about my background to people who pass it off, dismiss it, erase it with one fell swoop of turning the conversation elsewhere, to gain the skill of testing who is safe and who is not.

it's like when the women who come from privileged classes make decisions, make assumptions and basically run the show to their benefit and if I say anything I'm labeled angry and frustrated and if I don't say anything I feel angry and frustrated.

it's when some women are living off their families' money and some of us are working for everything we have. it's when they own their houses, businesses and land purchased with their families' money. or perhaps they are taking a sabbatical to write their latest book (suggested title— "Confronting classism or taking all the fun out of those cruise vacations").

it's when they are taught their whole life to exploit the labor of others so they can have more power, money or possessions.

it's when they shop for a woman to do the job that needs doing because she'll be cheaper.

it's being dishonest by not talking about where they get their money, how much money they have and what they are spending it on. the keys to success in this class are dishonesty and profiting from exploitation.

it's the women who talk a lot, take up lots of space and time at political groups, social gatherings and 12 step programs. the world was meant for them after all.

it's the women who raise the rent on their property without thinking about the financial situation of their tenants. it's the women who oppose rent control. it's the women who know how to dress for the occasion, speak the proper english and laugh at the appropriate times. it's the women whose anger comes out behind your back, or smooth and manipulative.

these are my sisters from privileged classes.

but wait, there's more. I have sisters from poverty level too.

those are the women whose daily grind with survival comes close to being on the front lines of a battlefield. it's the women who face humiliation standing for hours at the welfare office with their children if they have any. but since we all know how society doesn't bother to educate poor folks about birth control, safe sex and choices and who can afford an abortion anyway when she's barely putting food on the table for the children she's already got. and given that a lot of poor folks are african american native american latina and asian american we also can see how the big factor of racism grinds what little patience there is down to just about nothing.

you see, all this stuff costs money. food, public transportation, clothing, utilities, medical needs, cars if they have one.

these are the women who don't go to political meetings. who has time when she's holding down two jobs at minimum wage and trying to get her GED at adult school? these are the women who don't go to mixed social gatherings. what would she wear? bring to eat? or talk about the other people will appreciate? these are the women who may go to 12-step programs (because living with an addiction is a total drag) but she is the one who doesn't talk (doesn't stay afterwards to carve out 2 hours in a life of trying to make ends meet to sit and listen to the privileged women talk about their lives and the car they just bought that cost more than 4x her annual income. all in the name of recovery it's revealed that we have major differences, of how much money we have in the bank, how much property we own, how large our wardrobe is. but it's never directly addressed. it's never openly discussed without some heated argument ensuing.

yeah we're all supposed to be equal now that we're in a lesbian community, but we're not. we'll never be. but becoming willing to be honest about our privilege and power will be a start. to stop looking at other women as the enemy (if she knew I got an inheritance she'll try to get some of it). it's not always about money (tho it often is), it's attitude and assumptions and not educating ourselves about classism. it's being willing to take a look deeper at conflicts instead of passing them off as an issue of codependency or not important. some of us are assimilated, unable to put words to the pain because we're trapped in a privileged class world. some of us are beginning to take a look at class. some of us have known all this a long time. some of us are finding each other and growing stronger and giving fire to these long silent voices.

Terri Fredlund

I'd Rather Have a Running Vehicle Than Therapy

Driving
through soft hills
a valley outstretched
revives me
I'm grateful
to be here
"Privileged" I almost say,
being one accustomed
to scarcity

"Healing"
privileged wimmin say
"Is a matter of priorities.
You must choose
to commit time, energy,
money."
Don't they know eating
is not a matter of choice?

The laughter of friends
I travel far to see
my kitty's company
a woman's touch
campfire all night
drumming
Nebraska buttes
enjoying community
teaching wimmin
self defense
creating change
These are my healing

I am a van dweller
have no debt, pay no rent
or electric bill
share with cat
and occasional guest
bed, drawers, heater, stove
in my home, prize
of my tree planting labor
and luck
on the day of purchase.
Landlords, bus stops
restaurants, bad jobs
don't hold me for ransom.
But looking for a place to light
police hassles
late at night
remind me
I have not escaped.

Try therapy?
Both fascinated
and wary

I'm seeker
desiring
insight
healing
personal power
and skeptic
questioning
accuracy
of theories
and interpretations
recognizing power
imbalance
potential harm
through abuse
or well-intentioned
ignorance.

Submit to a professional's
speculation
manipulation
attitudes;
choose this
over a sunset?
But seeker prevails,
the search begins
for a woman
competent, trustworthy
affordable
I commit time, energy
"Forty dollars minimum"
see some therapists twice,
before I am cured
of gambling
such large wagers
on long shots.

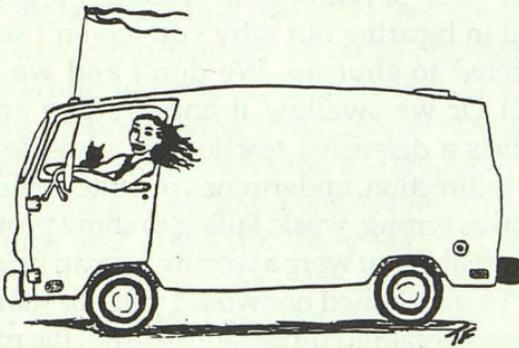
One quarter the cost
of her van wasted,
the poor woman
reevaluates
her priorities.

"Positive attitude
can help carry us
to our dreams."
Until then
what are your ways,
when being poor
and surviving
are against the rules?
Let's share our secrets.

How do you juggle
limited choices
which needs
do you trade
for which freedoms;

how have you escaped
running mazes
integrity intact?
I want to know.

Healing, travel,
shoes that fit,
food, music,
shelter, fun
Shall we share our "secrets?"
Were it not
a matter of priorities
we would choose
them all.



This poem is dedicated to all wimmin, who, when there's nothing else, run on courage.

Thanks to Sabena Stark and Jasmine Marah for editorial critique.

Most Women

How do you put the issue of class on the table? For it to mean something, not to be totally abstract and general, you have to give particulars and get personal. This is hard to do. Too many truths unspoken. You risk being insulted by someone who doesn't even know they're giving offense. If you are angry then you will tend to hold it in, knowing you will be taken as the aggressor. Raising the issue means being exposed yourself.

You may have a hard time speaking about the things that bother you the most. Because of the way class sets things up, these things reflect badly on you. Are used to shame you, define you as lacking in some way. Why are you complaining — must be something wrong with you. Your expectations are too negative. "We" assume that everyone has money like "us." "Why don't you just..." Create your own reality, choose prosperity. If only you were hardworking and responsible, you would have money. Those who do have more initiative and talent. If you don't have their sense of entitlement, it's a problem in your psychological makeup; a good therapist would be helpful in figuring out why you haven't succeeded.

We are expected to shut up. We don't and we pay a price. (Troublemakers.) Or we swallow it and we pay another price. Experience predicts a defensive reaction, or a hostile one. Painful silences, shifting, redirection, undermine your intent and meaning by characterizing you as wrong, weak, failing to show proper initiative. The assumption is that if you were a worthy human being, then your worth would not be questioned nor would you question it. What are you "worth?" Possessions and professions are not the measure of the woman. The center of gravity should not follow privilege.

I'm choking on the bitterness of class and the way it's shut up in this country, even as it stares us all in the face. It is about how much money your family has, what work they do, or do they get work at all, where they live and how much space they have. It is also about resources, networks, social ranking (who is your family), whether what you do is prestigious or despised (a teacher or

a doctor, a choreworker, a clerk, manager or business owner) or, at the harshest levels of the class system, are you struggling to survive on welfare or otherwise outside the official economy. There are also mixed-class, upwardly and downwardly mobile people. In the women's community (and in the left) we've seen the paradox of middle class values predominating even as people downplayed their privileges.

The United States denies that a class system exists, and upward mobility is the official model. At the same time this country operates on a racial caste system set up to downgrade people of color even when they achieve professional or wealthy class status. Racism makes for huge differences in the way white women and dark women experience life in various class backgrounds, and creates more intensely oppressed classes among communities of color. Having said that, the women's community often assumes white women are middle class, or that their class is irrelevant. This follows assumptions of the U.S. caste system in which class is made invisible except when it's tied to race. But white women do live in poverty, and many raising children on welfare, or homeless, are white. Even though race oppression sends far larger proportions of women of color to prison, poor white women are doing time in prison. They are also poisoned in toxic worksites, go without medical treatment and die for lack of it, and live other unaccounted-for realities.

It is good to see efforts to reflect racial diversity, and way past due, but still white women often treat that as a symbolic effort without changing underlying structures of racism. What's more, the white middle class women who are trying to achieve "diversity" in their events and organizations seem content to think only in terms of race and ethnicity. They take no account of white women raised poor or working class, and don't seem to miss our contributions and voices, blocking our greater participation by sheer inertia. When events are being produced, their formula for diversity equals some women of color, maybe an old woman or disabled woman, but the majority of white women will be middle class and up. I find it disturbing that class is almost never a factor, or considered to be of any consequence.

This is hard to say, though I know it's true, because some might choose to take it as an attack on racial parity, or a denial of white-

skin privilege, or an attempt to cash in on women of color's hard-fought progress against racism. It isn't. Racism is a more severe consideration, and it does not have to be a given that dealing with it precludes any discussion of class. Women of color have been most vocal about class issues in the context of their struggle against racism, and everyone knows it. I am addressing class-privileged white women who tend to smother consideration of any other white reality but their own. Overturning this assumption of middle class privilege is long overdue in the women's movement. Especially since the Reagan decade, things have gotten worse and survival is harder than ever. I'm appealing to class-oppressed women to talk to each other, to assume that there are others like us in this movement, and to speak up for ourselves. Our visibility has been nil, and we've had a hard time getting our issues out there, or even allying with each other across the barriers. Too often we've spent our energy trying to convince the middle class that things aren't right.

Out of all the feminist anthologies, where are the ones on class? As few articles as get published on the subject, there's been less action. Class was not mentioned in any of the materials I saw for the National Lesbian Conference. Michigan and many other important feminist events work along the same lines: it's a total non-issue. Allowing those who can afford to go to put on their own (unpaid) workshop is *not* the same thing as access, for which there is no substitute, and does not take affirmative steps toward change.

Just lately I picked up a brochure for a group called Women's Alliance, which charges \$625 for its women's solstice camp. That's expensive any way you look at it, even for a week. They do have a Women of Color scholarship fund, though I can't say how many are able to attend as a result. Technically, there is a work-exchange program, but you still have to pay over \$300 while working during the conference! The brochure says, "We aspire to represent diversity among women in terms of age, race, sexual preference, ethnic background and beliefs in general." This is a good example of the limits of diversity as many feminist institutions practice it today. I can't help but question the value of economically elite gatherings that systematically exclude most women. Do they think that low-income women have nothing to offer? Are lacking in insights and

skills that could be of spiritual benefit? (Do they have any idea what \$300 means to us?) How can this exclusion "support the development of women's inner self as a foundation for personal and planetary healing and consequent social action?" Actually that's it right there, the social action comes later, afterwards.

I would not be as angry about this if it wasn't for the fact that these kinds of events have become powerful institutions in the women's movement. I have been working in this movement for 21 years and I refuse to be passed over. But we are being passed over, often by women who are relative newcomers but whose class privilege catapults them over our heads. And if they haven't heard of you, then what you accomplished does not count, does not exist. They get to define what is important because they are propertied, can publish, have startup capital, can afford to take off work, fly around the country, attend expensive workshops and conferences and have their own elite networks funneling opportunities to them.

Access. Are we going to judge each other on abilities, or by income and professional titles and other privileges? We have to make sure feminists are not kept locked out by class-created barriers. I see those barriers all around us, affecting who speaks from platforms of events, is invited to perform, receives grants, can afford to attend conferences, is interviewed in feminist papers, or is hired to do professional work in the movement. This is an example of the kind of statement you can't make without somehow becoming suspect: she must want to be invited to speak from platforms, that's why she's saying this. Most class-oppressed women just tighten their jaws and keep quiet because they don't want to be insulted by this type of attitude.

If this state of affairs continues, we will fail to build the firm alliances that the women's movement needs to succeed. And our movement will not survive without the broadest range of alliances. Although white working class women are the largest group of women in this country, you wouldn't know it from the feminist press. Nobody seems to really know who we are, certainly not the mass media, not academia, not middle class leftists. Denying the existence of poor white women is more than counterproductive, it does harm. Lives are being violated, women's power wasted and defiled when they have crucial contributions to make. Both groups

or rather this continuum of poor and working class whites do have some common ground with women of color, even considering the difference race makes in the U.S. class system and acknowledging our racism. Sometimes we are working the same jobs, breathing the same fumes, lugging groceries on the buses and clothes to the laundromats. In building such alliances, it is now for white women to prove ourselves.

Feminism has evolved under a state of siege. While fighting for women's rights and sovereignty, we've grappled with this society's oppression on many levels. Hard work, not finished. Meanwhile the attacks from outside did not lessen, and I hear from the young generation that feminist is taken as a dirty word. I think that the feeling of being on the defensive, criticized from all sides, was a factor in creating today's image of the feminist who desperately tries to be politically correct. I have often read comments in the press from men (straight and gay) calling feminist lesbians "stalinists," or "fascists," and so on.

This trend is booming in the mainstream media nowadays, and one interesting thing about it is that the accusations of political correctness are being hurled at people of color, multiculturalists, feminists and lesbians alike. It has become a club used to silence protesters against oppression, who are now being compared to McCarthyites. We're not unfamiliar with these clubbings: who could forget the years of taunts about "bourgeois feminism?" This refrain functioned to drown out the voices of women of oppressed classes who spoke up for women's rights. The New Left insisted we did not exist and tried to define class issues without reference to women's oppression, or worse, in opposition to women's interests. In the early 70s, when feminists took over RAT (a leftist paper in NYC) one of the male editors ordered a battle plan to unseat them: "This is a class fight. Don't give in. Argue class against feminism."* As if they had heard and agreed, leftist journals all over the country claimed us (class-oppressed women) as their ideological property, a weapon to be pitted against feminism. They would not print the words of poor feminists or working class

**Uncovering the Sixties: The Life and Times of the Underground Press*, by Abe Peck, Pantheon Books, NY 1985, p. 215.

feminists, preferring to create the impression that all of us found women's oppression irrelevant to our lives.

I bring up the siege because I know how discouraged and fragmented many women feel, and I am trying to talk about class. Oh no, more divisions, hands thrown up in the air. Just listen. The survival of feminism is staked on our ability to deal with race and class. Are we serious? Can we afford not to deal, or have you decided women's oppression is over? It won't be unless we can unify large numbers of women. Elite, media-visible women can not be allowed to define what feminism is about, as the dress-for-success episode has shown. That, along with you-can-have-it-all-job-&-family, became people's concept of feminism. When more women than ever staggered under a double work load, feminists got blamed, not husbands.

Professionalization has undercut feminism. (Place here all disclaimers about how I am not attacking individual professional women with honorable principles around class.) After this decade of backlash, rank and titles have gotten to be very important again, to the point of who are you without them. Political collectives have been replaced with administrators and consultants. Where once self-help and peer groups flourished, now women with letters after their names charge hefty sums to lead groups and workshops. The takeover of many women's shelters from activists by boards of directors and city administrators is another example. With feminist theory too, the center of gravity has swung heavily toward academia. Doing feminist scholarship outside university affiliation is nearly unthinkable to many. The climate is worse than it was ten years ago. Inside the academy, it's not unheard of for nonfeminists to get appointed as directors of women's studies, or to retitle it gender studies. And let's not even get into the classism of the new age stampede.

Because of the complexities and evasions around class, it is difficult to come up with criteria that would ensure better representation of poor and working class women in our movement. I don't have easy answers, because unless class-privileged women are willing to open their hearts, we can't make them change. They can continue to withdraw into their privilege, hide and hoard their resources, resist. I would like to see them realize that sharing skills, knowledge, opportunities, job information, contacts and privileges

will strengthen feminism. It's rightful access and has nothing to do with generosity or charity.

Look around: how many of the women who are invited to speak or hired for movement jobs are class-privileged, and how often behind-the-scenes (crucial) work gets done by us "others." It doesn't have to be like this. Publicize opportunities, extend information networks. Don't assume everyone has regular jobs, cars, credit cards, financial resources, health insurance, or disposable income. If you don't know about poor women's issues, find out. Add your voices to theirs, protest cuts in AFDC and no-cash voucher systems, GAIN's enforced "training" without childcare, and fraud prosecutions of women attempting to survive far below official-poverty-level. For example.

Honor the spirit of sliding scale. (The low end is not designed for professionals back from vacation or recovering from a down payment on a house.) Make feminist conferences accessible to low-income women, and seek out their participation, not only as attendees but as presenters, performers, and craftswomen. Policies for waived/reduced fees for conferences, etc., should be clearly and fully stated, and carried out with decent respect for women who need them. These women should not be shunted aside as if they were lesser beings, and shamefully, this happens more than you would think. Work exchange participants should have a chance to participate, not made to work more hours than the actual fee would come to if they were being paid a fair wage.

This talk about class is tough going. I feel vulnerable talking about it but no way around it. Just have to risk it. My chosen allies are deeply prowoman, antiracist commoners, grounded in Eorthan Mother, alongside all her international peoples, lands and beings. Justice is the only real feminism. I want to hear silenced classes, have the realities that we are living be known, feel them acknowledged in a way that involves recognition rather than permission. (It's not about convincing the classes "above" you of anything.) Recognize too how we stand in relation to those more oppressed than ourselves and figure out what and how we need to change. For us to speak to each other and hear and establish a consensus that takes these realities into account, so that we don't have to start from zero over and over again. We need unity and community.

Spit Shine

Sal sat on the pumpkin colored cushions of the bench in her kitchen, and propped her foot on the table. She was pleased with the harmonious pattern her khaki trousers made in the fading sunlight. She wasn't pleased with the way Fran was questioning her about her work history.

Sal had agreed to talk with this well-meaning interrogator because Fran and Carmelita, Sal's oldest friend, were sweeties. The improbable relationship seemed to be working, despite cultural, class and age differences.

Miriam reached over and took Sal's foot in both her hands. Her touch relaxed Sal and helped her to concentrate. Miriam and Sal had been lovers since Rosh Hashana four years ago.

"Look, Fran, I don't really know what good it will do to talk about this stuff, but I'm at the end of my line."

"Sal, I do this all day long. I like doing it and I'm good at my job."

"How — I mean what — what is it that you exactly do?" Sal played for time.

"Yes, Fran, please tell us about your work." Miriam shifted slightly and rubbed Sal's ankle.

Carmelita brushed at crumbs with a teal napkin, as though to smooth the interchange between Sal and Fran. "Fran's job is quite interesting. I was surprised to find out that someone working in a social work agency could actually help people."

"I don't know how other job counselors work, but when someone comes to Fran Shapiro for career counseling, I find out what strengths that person has, and what she could do to fit into a position that she likes and can be effective in." Fran beamed.

Sal tried not to be annoyed. Social workers!

"Well, like, you know, the first job I had was cleaning people's houses. I was employed by the State of California to go into old people's houses and clean. The State was supposed to pay me. I went to a lot of different houses. Sometimes once a week, sometimes only once a month. I had papers everywhere to get signed by the people I was cleaning for. They signed the papers, but I never got paid."

"Why not?"

"The State just dragged their heels. They just never issued any checks."

"Are you sure you turned them in properly filled out? And to the correct department?"

"Well, Fran, after all these years, how can I be sure? I was 19 then and I'm forty now."

"But there weren't enough hours allowed to do everything. I always worked extra time, so that I could leave the people comfortable. At the same time, I was working modeling for art classes, but that got weird. One of the professors tried to rape me, so I quit."

There was a silence. Fran yawned and stretched. Miriam jumped up and Carmelita went to open a window. Sal suddenly felt exposed. "Would you care for some tea or something else?" Miriam was already taking down cups, gathering up spoons, and getting out the milk.

"Well, I'd prefer coffee, if you have it."

"Sure, Fran, no problem. Sal has coffee." Carmelita worked companionably with Miriam, setting out pots of coffee and tea, toast and sliced cheese.

"Thanks for the coffee, Miriam, Carmelita, this is great bread, but I never eat butter."

"Sal, you had a hard time when you started out, a lot of uneducated girls do; but what is really more important is what you've been doing recently. Didn't I hear that you went to some school or was it a training program or something?"

"Sal attended the University, and she holds a degree in architecture." Sal shot Miriam a grateful look, her own mouth was full, and she was embarrassed at the question.

"Architecture...isn't that very difficult?"

"Yes, it was hard to do, especially as I had to work full time while I was doing it. I hadn't graduated from high school when I started to work."

"And you have different disabilities to cope with, too."

"That's true," Sal answered Carmelita, "but I worked around them with the help of you and Miriam. Anyhow," she said, turning back to Fran, "I was supporting my sister during that time, she was sick and there were the three kids that I was mothering a lot

because she was so sick. The school was not too fond of an out dyke either. But I got my diploma in May two years ago. For a while I did my own business, trying to get jobs designing, and doing the construction, but you need a network for that.

"One day I met this dyke at a support group. She was just a little younger than I, and we became friends. She was a single woman. It was during the time that Miriam was away in Japan studying, and I had a lot of weekend time. Lynn — that was this woman's name, Lynn Reed-White — she understood that I could spend the time as long as Miriam was away, and we were just friends. Well, she had a lot of money, and a big house in the Marin headlands, view of the ocean, three bedrooms, huge garden, all to herself and three cats.

"She started talking to me about how she wanted to have some remodeling and some redecorating done. I'd never been to her house, she always came to my house, or we met somewhere else. She knew that I had been working on and off as the jobs came in, and that I hadn't worked in a while, and I was still taking care of these five people. She knew I was in dire need of work. She looked at some photos of the work that I had done before. I guess she liked it a lot, she asked me to come look at her house. Only thing was, she didn't want me to be offended by the mess, she said."

"I can never understand why people say that," Miriam offered. "Teither will be offended or not, but it is not helpful for them to say..."

"Yeah, and if they think that you're going to be offended, they can clean it up," Carmelita responded.

Carmelita and Miriam exchanged glances. Fran tapped her coffee cup, and encouraged Sal to go on with the story.

"When I got there, the first thing that I noticed was the overwhelming smell of cat pee. Next, I noticed that there was no furniture, or hardly any. There were seven cat boxes in that house, all full. She said that she was training the cats to go outside, because the cat boxes led from the third floor down to the side door into the garage from the kitchen. But shit ...

"So, I was talking with her about doing the remodel. I sketched out a few plans, and we talked about fabrics, colors, the kind of look that she wanted to have. Lynn said that she was waiting for a big bonus check, and for the dividends on her stocks to pay on the

first of the month. In the meantime, I spent about six hours with her looking at fabrics and furniture, paintings, antiques.

"Three weeks went by, we talked on the phone, and I went out to her house again. The mess was still there, dishes all over the place, a loaf of bread scattered from one end of the house to the other, and books! She had literally thousands of those — how do you call them, dime paperback romances — thrown all over the house. I was trying to set up a crew to do the remodel, line up times. I was really needing the work by that time. So I asked her, 'When do you want to start?' And she tells me that the checks have been delayed, but we can work on the drawings. But I needed a deposit for the drawings, and she wouldn't agree to that. Finally, I sketch out a rough plan for her, and write down a schedule of work. Then I begin to feel like she's not trusting me. So I say, 'Lynn, get yourself some other estimates.' You know what I mean?"

"A very wise suggestion, and very ethical, to be sure," Fran commented.

"Yeah, that's what I thought. And she tells me, 'I can't have other contractors come here with the house like this.' So, I tell her that I have another job that will take me a couple of weeks, and can she clean the house during the meantime, and call the other contractors?"

"And didn't she say that she'd check at her job to see who her friends had used for their remodels?" Carmelita added.

"Right. So, a few more weeks go by, and in the meantime we're going to the movies once, and talking on the phone, like that. Every time I ask her about the other contractors, she's evasive. Finally, I pin her down. She hasn't cleaned the fucking house! So, I say I'll clean the damn house for her, just to get the ball rolling. And I make sure that she knows that I'll charge her. We agree on a price, and she leaves me the key, and I spend two-and-a-half days with Carmelita here, cleaning. Right?"

"Right. That house was disgusting. Sal did bathrooms and kitchen and the cat boxes. She said it was because it was for her benefit. And I did vacuuming and the laundry. We both polished all that teak trim. And gathering up the books, and sorting out her clothes and putting away her jewelry. I was always afraid that she wouldn't be able to find something, and then blame us. Sal said she'd make sure that that didn't happen."

"What I did was leave her notes about where I put everything," Sal said. "So, she loved the clean house, and she paid us. But she never called the other contractors, and she didn't want to go ahead without the other estimates. She was paying me and Carmelita about \$300 every other week. We cleaned and shopped and did the laundry. Did windows inside and out."

Carmelita laughed. "Yeah, I scared Sal, cause I climbed out on the roof and did the second floor windows. The roof made a ledge."

"And that's when we discovered the roof damage. I left a detailed note and drawings.

"So, Lynn kept putting me off, and one day I got angry. I began to get a premonition that she wasn't going to have the work done. And when I asked her about it, she hemmed and hawed and told me the check was late, and she owed her ex money. Shit like that. Then there comes this convention she has to go to. She needs a formal dress for a dance, and she pulls out a gorgeous piece of sari fabric. She asks me to design a dress to match the fabric. Again, we set a price — \$100 for the design, \$200 for the sewing."

"Why were you still dealing with this woman? It seems like you're angry even now as you tell it. I've never understood why you went on with Lynn," Miriam asked.

"Well, you know..."

"That's a good question, Miriam," Fran interrupted. "But before you answer, Sal, let me guess. You wanted to recoup some of your professional status. Dresses aren't houses, but design is design."

"Thing is the twit went out and spent \$450 for a dress off the rack."

"Well, by then was I *ever* angry." Carmelita sat up straight.

"It's true what you say, Fran, but more to the point is that I make money in chunks when I'm working as a designer/builder. I hadn't worked in a while. I had five people to support and I was desperate for money. Any work was better than no work. So we cleaned her house every other week for three months. Also, if I kept encouraging Lynn to get the estimates and start the job, I would make a big chunk of money."

"Sal and I were really pissed at Lynn," Carmelita explained. Sal confronted Lynn about how she was jerking us around. She asked her when she was going to get the job started, and told Lynn that we were housecleaning because we were desperate.

"So how did she respond?" Fran asked.

Carmelita continued. "She called Sal and said that she'd talked to her therapist about it. Her therapist said she wasn't in the space to be confronted. Said to tell us to accept her as she was."

"Then what did you do?"

"Went on feeling angry and working for her. At first, it was that we just couldn't stand her sheets. Her sheets were really ugly and we knew if we had the money, we'd have better taste. So, we'd spend the day trashing her behind her back. Then, we decided to put the sheets on inside out to see if she'd even notice. She never did. We wanted to see how little she cared about her own surroundings. We moved everything. And finally, we felt she couldn't tell clean from dirty. We used the bath towels to clean the sink and bath tub, and mop the floor.

"Then, we just threw them in the dryer, folded them and put them away. She never noticed."

"She never noticed?" Miriam asked.

"Well, they did match the dark blue bath tub." Miriam laughed with Carmelita and Sal. Fran crossed her legs and stirred her coffee.

"Tell the rest, girl."

"OK, so I decided the chrome in the three sinks, two tubs and shower, and the handles on the toilets ought really to shine. So what better than a toothbrush? The only toothbrush handy was Lynn's."

"She did say the bathrooms really looked great."

"Yeah, and her teeth were whiter, too."

Fran put down her spoon. "I can understand how you felt, but do you really think behavior like that is going to get you anywhere?"

"Fran, we didn't want to get anywhere as housekeepers. Don't get me wrong. I have great respect for wimin who work as maids, as housekeepers, and/or as attendants. It's hard, honorable work. Getting an education is hard work also. I want my training to be as meaningful and useful to me as a middle-class woman's is to her. Anyhow, Carmelita got accepted to the master's program a couple of weeks later. The point is sometimes middle-class women can't see lower-class women as anything beyond personal servants to them. Lynn saw me as a personal servant, despite my six years of university training. Nothing feels changed."

"Nothing?"

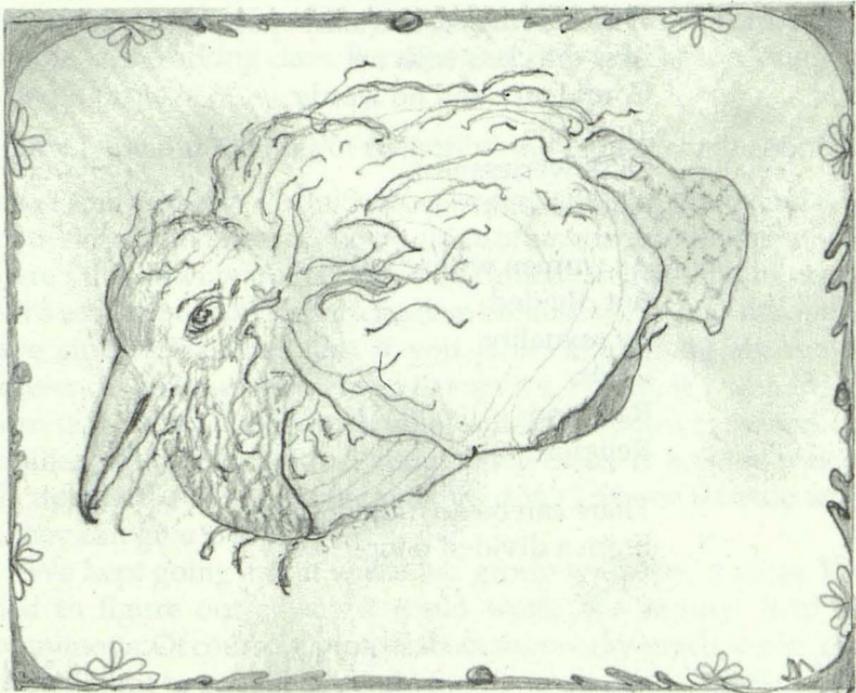
"Well, something has changed. I've stopped blaming myself. I know that until lower-class women have access to the same resources and get the same respect as middle-class women, every achievement will be at a greater cost, a more concerted effort, than the same accomplishment for middle-class women.

"You know, Lynn did recommend me to one of her co-workers."

"She did?"

"Yeah, and when they called me, I said I don't know how you got my number. I'm not a housekeeper, I'm an architect! I would have given Lynn hell for that if I'd ever seen her again."

Fran asked if anyone wanted more tea. She scalded the cups, and poured.



Dove chick
Jasmine Merah

Nanette Herbert

Invisible Barriers

There is the love that dare not
Speak its name,
with the all pervading
Saturating
Fear
of the
Unknown,
then

There is the class that dominates,
With confidence and silky speech,
And the class with no
Confidence and no words
To speak
Of powerlessness
And despair.

As women we are united
But divided
By sexuality
Class
Race and
Religion.

There can be no united action
From a divided people

Anonymous Money Redistribution: Prolo Dykes Making Real Change In West Berlin

Debby Feli has been telling me about a poor and working class lesbians' group she is in in West Berlin. The group made a bank account. Lesbians who could spare money put it into the account. Lesbians who need money then could take it out. It's open to all lesbians. Feli, what does the name of the group mean?

Feli It originally comes from the Marxist word "proletarian," but now "prolo" is used in a classist way to put people down. We wanted to reclaim it for ourselves and also to find a word that includes all of us — from typical working-class, from poverty class, from impoverished farms, and some even come from mixed middle and working class. Because that all would be too long, we called it prolo.

Debby How did the idea of redistributing money come about?

Feli From a joke! We would sit in our prolo lesbian group and talk about class differences and it would so often come down to money. There's this downward mobility scene among middle-class women — it's easy to be oblivious to classism because we all look alike and have similar lifestyles. But if you look closer there are major differences in how we manage to survive. For us, it was hard to learn that there were women who could get resources from their families but would feel bad about using them. It was too much! We'd say, if they have money and they don't know what to do with it, they can give it to us.

We kept going and it was a fun group with lots of ideas. We tried to figure out a way it could work. We wanted it to be anonymous. Of course, a prolo lesbian may really need money, but doesn't want to go and say can I have some money, I really need it. So we tried to figure out a way to make it work because our basic idea was that it is a politically good thing to share privilege.

Debby And you wanted to break out of the charity way?

Feli Yes. It's too hard to have it be on an interpersonal level — it affects relationships. We tried to think of a way it'd be easy for a woman in need to be able to ask for it. And that it'd be anonymous and the women with money wouldn't get these strokes for giving it. So we came up with the idea to make a bank account.

Debby How did you put the idea out so women would put money in?

Feli It's a small community, a network. We thought of it as a big experiment. When it went from a joke to an idea with the details of how it could work, we presented it to the big group. It was received really well. We wanted to try it, but not set up some legal organization. We didn't intend to make it some alternative to welfare. We just wanted to deal with some of our class differences — to make change on a real level in our community. Of course, it was typical that coming out of a prolo group, it would be more practical.

Debby Did women come with money and make donations?

Feli No. When we made the bank account we made it that anyone who had the number could make a deposit, so we don't even know where it came from. Then three prolo dykes are authorized to have the checks to give out.

At first, there was quite a lot of money — no one would take any out. We tried to keep it just within our community. If it was strangers we'd have to ask more questions.

In the first 3 months, we said it was only for very basic needs — rent, food, health care. It's open to all lesbians. But we encourage middle and upper class lesbians to think if they really need it or if they could get it from other resources. Of course, equalizing access to money doesn't break down lifelong oppression. The attitudes of deserving and not deserving will affect whether or not a dyke will take out money.

Only the three lesbians who are authorized with the checks would know who took money, and they are not to talk about it. The lesbians who came for money had to be personally known, but don't have to say what they use it for. You wouldn't have to be directly in the network, but be known by someone so there is no

abuse. We want the money to be for lesbians. When a lesbian is in need, she gets referred to one of the women with the checks. They tell her how much is in the account and that we like to keep a certain amount for emergencies. We don't know how much the woman takes out or for what — she writes that part of the check. The individual woman makes all the decisions for herself.

Debby What's the status of the account now?

Feli It's been used a lot more. It's still working. We can't provide for long term things like therapy because the money's unstable — we don't know how much will be there next month.

Debby So the money from the account goes more for things beyond the basics?

Feli It's still the idea to use it for basic things. From my involvement, I know it hasn't been abused. We don't know what it's used for. And a woman can also get out a loan or take money for an emergency.

Debby What's making it work so that women are actually putting money in the account?

Feli One reason is the political consciousness of the network — these are dykes committed to change. Especially in the beginning, there was a lot of enthusiasm around it. Personally, I wonder if it's a good idea to have it open to all lesbians, because after a while, when everybody gets used to having the account, lesbians are more likely to use the money and it's usually a lot easier for middle-class lesbians to do that. Especially since a lot of them are broke all the time too, but their situation is still very different. It would take a lot of education about class to make it clear, and that hasn't happened so far. But it is working anyway and it's been really good to see it happen — see real change.

Money is one of the most basic differences and this is truly affecting lesbians' lives. It's helped me not feel so frustrated or resentful to see that lesbians are really willing to share privilege instead of just talk about it. It's still working now and it's been almost two years.

Elliott

Funeral Food

*for Mari on our 5th anniversary
of talking each other from silence to survival*

I didn't necessarily want to be a writer. I wanted to be an artist, but in a way that counts, like being in a bluegrass or string band, or having the best garden, or sewing everything I needed, including quilts, or keeping a truck running after it has rolled 100,000 four or five times. But I never learned to play a banjo or dobro or fiddle, much less a *mean* one, and I don't sing or sew or garden or fix stuff. Instead, words pour through me; I'm a writer, from a world that judges you by what you do, not what you say. How the hell am I supposed to write out of my experience and values when writing itself was not part of them? At home, our lives didn't have to be reflected in print to have value to us and so it never occurred to me to want writing by working class and poor wimmin until college prep and college english, when I was suddenly alone. I still have a hard time valuing my ability with words; this is neither a false modesty nor a problem with my self-esteem.

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I really swear that one of these days, after I've said something about being working class and some womon comes up to me and starts talking about how she really understands what it's like being poor now that she herself is broke or about how hard it's been for her to understand and confront her class privilege, and she doesn't even know me, that I'm going to turn to her and say, "Look, bitch," — which will prove to her, depending on who exactly she is, either that 1) I am hostile, 2) I am not really a Separatist, 3) Separatists are hostile, or 4) working class wimmin are hostile and not really feminist — but anyway, I'll say, "Look, bitch, unless you are going to pay me either as much as you pay for tuition or as much as you pay your therapist, I don't wanna hear you whine." Later, I might feel a little bad about how I treated her, but only if it doesn't happen again that same day.

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How much control do you have over whether or not you make rent, bills and food next month? How refined are your money management skills?

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Egg Noodles

1 lb. frozen egg noodles
2 cans Campbell's cream of mushroom soup
salt and pepper
milk

To cook

Mix soup with milk in large pan until smooth. Add salt and pepper. Add package of noodles. Cook over low heat until noodles are tender.

To deliver

Put mixture in large glass noodle bowl. Cover with two layers of saran wrap. Set on a plate and cover the bowl and plate with tin foil. Take along a serving spoon with your initials on masking tape on the handle.

To reheat

Cut some of the noodles away with a fork. Place in a bowl with a pat of butter in the bottom. Salt. Microwave until hot.

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It seems to me that my middle- and upper-middle-class friends spent their entire childhoods being trained to leave home — summer camps, religious/cultural camps, sports camps, music camps, prep schools, trips abroad, trips alone to see grandparents or divorced parents, and so on — to get them ready for their adult lives of going away to college and away to follow their, or their husbands', professional lives. Somehow, once they were grown up, physical and emotional and economic independence were to be interchangeable for them (all polite lies, of course, that cover what class privilege actually does for you).

The only leaving I ever witnessed was about death or violence, including the economic violence of losing a farm or a job. I grew up six blocks from where my dad was born, a mile from my grandparents, and a hoot and a holler from my aunt and cousins. When I did go somewhere I borrowed a suitcase, since I'd always be coming back.

Now I've left home, to join the ranks of "orphans by choice." But I, too, left because of violence, not by choice, and I didn't get out with my heart whole. Sometimes I wonder if there will ever be enough dykes in my world to fill the emptiness of leaving home. I know there will never be enough family — dykes will be there when I'm in trouble, even if they don't much like me, just because that's what we have to do to survive.

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I'm on my way to being a bitter woman. I write because I can, because I enjoy it. But I always write knowing that what I say might never be taken seriously by the community I perceive myself as part of. My words won't get into academic journals and be a hot topic; women's festivals won't pay me to lead workshops and lesbians with their notebooks ready won't flock to ones I participate in; I won't be getting big name, big bucks grants (check the biographical notes in any feminist/lesbian/gay anthology if you don't already know what I mean). What does it mean to be creating theory and stories that won't be read, or understood and valued even if they do get into print?

It's so easy to just stop writing, to be angry and to refuse to give any more of myself. Times when I need all of me just to get by, this is not a self-defeating attitude. I've had strength and integrity when I've been joyful and included; I've also been strong and honest when I am bitter and cynical and removed. What I do best at any one time is whatever I need to do to survive; calling this self-centered implies that I have a choice.

I could live a long time without having some middle class lesbian tell me how much "our" community *needs* my words.

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Greenbeans

Dump a couple quart jars of greenbeans in a large pot. Add a quart of so of water, a hambone, some chunks of bacon and salt. Cook over low heat for about an hour. Pour the beans, the juice and the bacon into a deep bowl; serve with a slotted spoon.

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Two years ago I was at a Society of Women in Philosophy conference in Minnesota. During one session when they were all

talking about owning their privileges, I fled outside to be appalled and snide with my girlfriend, who is middle class but willing to think about it. I started the "Middle Class Academics' Theme" which I've been working on ever since. Here's what I have so far. It's sort of bluesy, set vaguely to the tune of "Cause I'm a Woman:"

I don't want to own my classism (ba da da da dat)

I want to sell it for a profit (ba da da da dat)

You might work for your money (ooooooo)

But my money works for me (let me tell you baby)

and so on. To be sung only when appropriate, of course.

¢ ¢ ¢ ¢ ¢

I was 27 and in grad school before it clearly dawned on me that I grew up "rural." After all, my parents didn't farm, and I lived in the second largest town in my county (more than 1,500 people). I don't find my shock of realization charming or quaint.

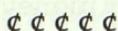
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At a Young Separatist/Young Radical Feminist Lesbian conference this spring, we went around the room introducing ourselves. One of the first dykes talked about where she was in college and what she was doing there and everyone after her did the same. Partway around, a dyke named Mary spoke out about how identifying ourselves by our educations was really elitist and made her uncomfortable and sad. Most of us agreed but we kept doing it, and I was part of that we. I've thought a lot about that ever since. When I'm in a group of mainly middle and upper class wimmin, I don't want to talk about college because it pisses me off that of all the things I've done school is the only one all of them will value. In a group of all working class and poor dykes I don't want to talk about school because it is such a privilege and gives me a status I don't like. But I also want to talk about college with these dykes cause they get it, they don't treat it as a given, they understand what it meant for me to be there. So mainly I hang out with other working class and poor dykes who also went to college, in a world where we are always balancing between home and strangeness. It seems to me that we are always tired.

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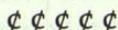
Ham Sandwich

Take leftover ham, mayonnaise, lettuce, tomatoes, cheese, butter and pickles from the fridge. Get bread or hamburger buns from the breadbox. Spread mayonnaise on one slice and butter on the other. Slice some ham, salt it, and put it on. Unwrap a slice or two of cheese and add it. Put on some lime pickles, some lettuce, and some salted tomatoes. Serve it with a coke and potato chips.

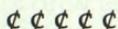


Since I came out I've written about all kinds of wonderful and horrible things, but almost nothing about my birth culture and even less about the moments of shock, confusion, embarrassment and shame that too often surround me in my now mainly middle class world. The stories I have to tell don't fit on a page, because the language isn't right, forced into Standard spelling and constructions or mangled by the apostrophes and quotation marks that scream, "Warning! Substandard dialect ahead!" and if I leave these little marks of deviance out, some well-meaning editor — lover, friend or stranger — is bound to put them in, assuming, I suppose, that I don't know what I meant to do, and even if this doesn't happen the written form is still only an approximation of real talk, anyhow, and my story lines and logic don't seem to work, cause if I don't put explanations in someone will say, "I don't get it, what does this mean?" and if I do put them in then it's no longer the story I'm tryin to tell but a story about the story I'm tryin to tell, and that makes me a translator when what I want to be is a writer.

Whenever a dyke asks me why I think there hasn't been a really good anthology about class and classism (the kind of dyke I'm thinking about would probably use the word "definitive"), I want to turn to her and not say a thing and see if she gets it.



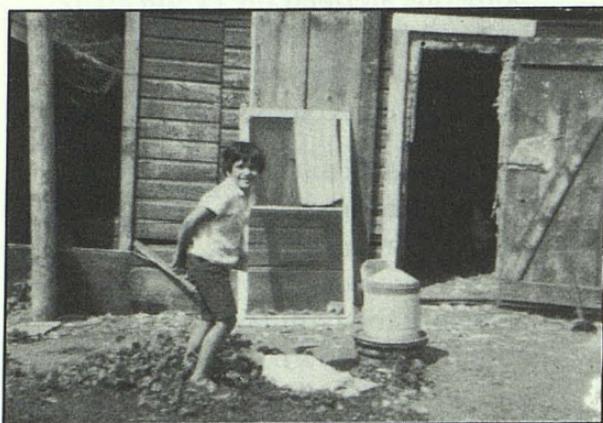
If you were reading this because you have an investment in the lesbian community, do you feel that it has been worth your time?



In order for any oppressed group to get through life with their hearts whole, their culture must be able to replace what the world strips from them every day. I don't know how much lesbian

cultures do this. Are we, as Dykes, willing to sustain each other? And I mean *really* sustain, not just entertain, challenge, instruct, appease, or even please and delight each other. Stopping class oppression isn't about needing a better philosophical understanding of privilege. It's not about being anti-oppressive or being a more effective ally, because class isn't about theory. Class is about survival, about which of us will and won't make it.

In order for any oppressed group to get through life with their hearts whole, their culture must be able to replace what the world strips from them every day. So that is why funeral food is salty.



Corie feeding chickens

Contributed by Corie Lamere (photographer unknown)

Adrienne Lauby

Denial

(from "Disability Series 1")

The day had one hour
of effortless calm
and still I pushed until
those minutes dissolved.

I had to work.
How else to live?
Had to labor every day
sit shaking at my desk
too tired to stand,
forgetting once I lifted
a telephone receiver easily.

Janet passed out
at the hardware store.
Someone stepped on Yvette
in the subway entrance.
Carman drank every night
to forget her accounting mistakes.

We were sick and hoping
we still had use.
Illness drew us further
from ourselves yet
we chose the familiar
over the unknown
and our bodies pursued us.

Toiling until we dropped,
dying on our feet
we swayed and
went to work.

Ulcer Surgery

Years of stress
she guessed

It was mothering
or worrying about the shape
of the world we're in

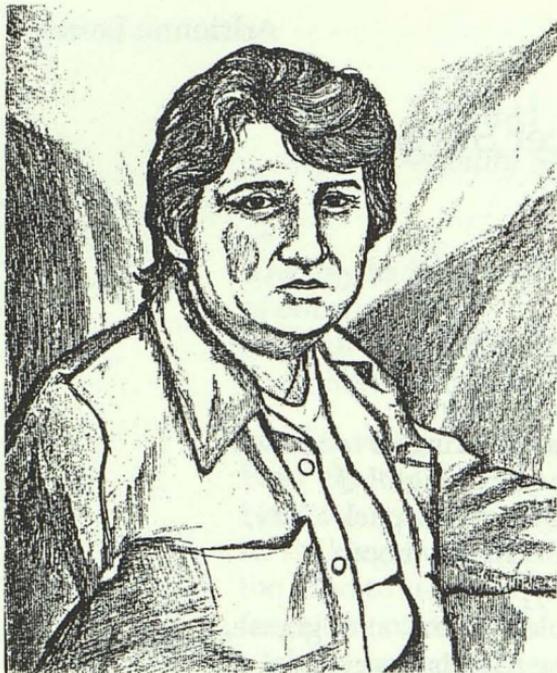
It was daughtering or too much
brilliance, the lie of high I.Q.

It was poverty, the pack a day,
the newspapers, baby boom
generation hype

It was cold winters, auto grease,
you call these friends, rural
late nights, the Europa Cafe

Now, like the sensitive nerve
years cut, by-passed,
forgotten with the pain,
Traded in on a spice of plans,
a tangy new town,
a full gut of battered cars,
one more chance,
the free way

Max Dashu



Midge



MAX DASHU

Kendra

Portraits
Max Hammond Dashú

Janet Capone

East 50th Street Scream

(Chapter 12: Excerpt from a Novel in Progress)

Franny Martimucci is a young working class dyke trying to make a transition in her life. She's a New York Italian-American, living in the Southwest, and trying to move out to the Bay Area. In a fog of love, she left her family behind in New York and followed her first girlfriend, Dee, to Texas on a Greyhound bus. But soon afterward, their relationship "went to shit."

Recovering from the break-up, Franny takes a room in a little house with one other woman, "in the middle of the frigging airport flight path, but hell, the rent isn't killing me. I'm saving my dough so I can get the fuck out of Texas altogether." She quits a relatively secure clerk job with the idea that she's moving to California, "where all the lesbians are." But her moving plans fall through, her finances are drying up, and she has to start working immediately to raise money to survive. "Trapped again by the goddamn almighty dollar!" She wonders: "Am I ever going to California or am I just bullshitting myself and everybody else?"

I flopped on my bed in a depressed stupor the minute I got home from work. I was exhausted and needed a thirty minute nap. I knew I should be using this hour and a half break between shifts to wash my uniform at the laundrymat, but I was too exhausted. I'd just have to smell like French fries for another twenty-four hours. Somehow, using my precious hour and a half to wash my uniform felt too much like I lived and died for Burger King. I hung the uniform from my bedroom door on a clothes hanger, where I could observe it from a safe distance on my foam mattress. It was suspended there, a rust and gold polyester pants suit right next to my map of Italy, with Napoli highlighted in red.

I lay there staring at my uniform. The top was a loose-fitting gold tunic with rust-colored flecks on the sleeves and collar. The pants were solid rust. A flare-legged number with an elastic band in the waist. To top it off, they issued the women these two-toned, perky little hats. It was a visually stunning ensemble, to say the least. I lay back on the foam and stared and stared at those rust-colored flecks in the sleeves.

When I wore my uniform, I matched the plastic trays and the upholstery on the chairs at Burger King. I subtly echoed the designs on the cardboard cartons of French fries and salt and pepper packets. I was the walking, talking, color-coded extension of Burger King, a fake food empire of international proportions. I was one of a multitude of Burger King minions, all dressed alike. What a capitalist mind fuck uniforms are! Then I thought, hell people wear uniforms in socialist countries too. But at least having a uniform job, I never had to put on high heels and a dress, which was another kind of work uniform for women. Hell, I'd take the polyester pants suit over the dress any day.

Thank Goddess, I finally got drowsy, turned over, and fell asleep. I slept soundly for a few minutes.

Expecting the roar of the mid-day TWA, even in my unconsciousness I had burrowed my head under my pillows. Sure enough, as regular as clockwork, the big aluminum bird exploded over my roof, grazing the goddamn treetops. The cracks in the walls of the cinderblock house lengthened a few invisible millimeters, accommodating the blast. It was no good; pillows or not, I was shaken from my sleep. I rolled over, facing the ceiling as the last few vivid images of a dream shimmered like cobwebs, disintegrating. I had been walking in a palace. My bare feet touched the cool stone of the floor. I was aware that before me was a throne on a raised platform, and I was walking toward it. I raised my head slowly, gradually moving my eyes up the jeweled chair to meet the eyes of the seated figure. It was Dee! She was sitting calmly, a smile on her face. In one hand she held a silver sparkled baton, in the other, a labrys on a cord, which she swung in circles above her head. I couldn't believe it! Shit, we had some class differences, but this was a little extreme. I raised my head to get a better glimpse of the palace hall. The stone floor was polished to a shine and there were enormous, circular throw rugs here and there. I looked more closely. The rugs were actually giant hamburger patties six inches thick. Slivers of green pickles sat in the middle.

I shook it off, forcing myself to wake up the rest of the way. Crawling forward on my belly, I propped on my elbows and looked out the bedroom window to the street. Jesus, was she gonna haunt my dreams now? It had been almost ten months since the

relationship went to shit. This was the fifteenth dream I had of her. She was always some weird ass figure: queen on a throne, screeching parrot with a human head, Quaker on a Quaker Oats carton. She wasn't the Mona Lisa yet. I guess that was a plus.

I swung my legs over the edge of the bed. I was wide awake now, and got up to throw some water on my face. I had less than thirty minutes before I had to be back to work. From one nightmare to the next. Why was I alive? My grandmother's voice came into my mind. She was singing mournfully in Neapolitan. "Miseria! Miseria!" I heard her sing that sometimes when we would visit her in the nursing home toward the end of her life. She hated it in there, isolated from her family. I missed my family too. Texas was no place for an Italian.

As I passed my aquarium, I stopped to shake some food flakes into the tank. I tapped the glass with my fingernail. At least my angel fish were doing fine, swimming through the floating stems of plants. Their little world seemed like it was in the same peaceful state it always was. I turned toward the window to get my uniform off the hanger and I saw it. Dee's pale blue Volkswagen bomb was passing by the house at a slow cruise! I ran out the bedroom to the front of the house to catch her in the act. What the fuck was she doing? Just as I made it out the door and to the edge of the grass, her car turned the corner and disappeared. I caught a last glimpse of it. It was definitely her car. She lives way the fuck on the other side of town. Why would she drive by here? I knew it! No wonder I'm dreaming about her. She's been vibing me. I'd recognize that pale blue old bomb anywhere! I walked back inside. Pale blue car. Pale blue house. Why was everything wrong with my life pale blue?

I stuffed my uniform in my backpack, locked the front door behind me, and got on my Honda. I stopped to plug my ears. A second TWA was exploding in the sky up a few yards above my head. You could almost see the heads of the passengers bobbing as it passed. Even with my ears covered, I could hear one big blast, followed by a second smaller one, which someone once told me was the air rushing to fill up the vacuum created by the first blast.

I put my bike in first gear and rolled out of there for work, still obsessing on Dee. Rumor had it she was seen dancing with some guy at a het bar on a Friday night. It was a bunch of bullshit, I'm sure. She was a screaming radical lesbian.

As I rolled outta there, I noticed three cans of housepaint behind me at the top of the dirt driveway. Well, holy hell! The landlord finally got off his ass and picked up that paint! He said he would give me a break on the rent if I painted the house for him. He must've come by when I was asleep. Hope he got the color I wanted. Dark turquoise, the color of the Mediterranean Sea.

Back at my work station, I was counterperson today, chained to the cash register. Thankfully it was a slow afternoon. I re-stocked plastic cups and caps into their dispensers. Small, medium, large, extra large. Small, medium, large, extra large. It was very meditative. Because it had been so slow, I'd already finished my counter cleaning routine. I had finished washing out the shake machine, restocking the ketchup, salt, and pepper packets, and refilling the napkin dispensers. Two fresh pots of coffee, one regular, one decaf were already made. I was all caught up. It looked like one of those rare days when I actually had time to take a ten minute break. I leaned back against the counter, grabbing a couple of French fries from the salted, freshly cooked pile in the rack.

"Who left the cheese out?" Neil was yelling from the back room. He walked into the front, holding a package of unwrapped, sliced American cheese. "Did you leave the cheese out on the counter?" He stood in front of me, his plastic manager's badge drooping from the pocket of his white shirt.

"Not me. Maybe Roosevelt did. I haven't been back there."

"Well, what are you doing?"

"Whaddaya mean what am I doing? I'm running the counter."

"Standing around?"

"There aren't any customers. Should I be tap dancing?"

He looked at me this time. "You know, you have a smart mouth, but you're gonna learn a few things if you expect to work here!" He pointed his index finger at me threateningly. "Have you been eating French fries?"

"No." I met his stare without hesitation, wondering if there were French fries in my front teeth.

"409 those countertops," he said, turning around.

"I did already. Everything is cleaned and re-stocked."

"Clean them again," he said, grabbing a rag and stuffing it in my hand. "I can see grease."

He stomped off. "Dickhead!" I said under my breath as he walked away. Goddess forbid I should have a few minutes break. Fucking makes me clean something that's already clean! Petty fucking asshole! "I can see grease!" I said, mimicking him. Whenever it's slow, he either makes me clean things twice or I have to clock out early and go home. He doesn't care if you need the fucking hours. All he cares about is whether Burger King is making or losing money.

I was bent down, under the counter, looking for the 409 and cursing that son of a bitch when somebody rapped on top of the counter for service. I came up too quickly and banged the back of my head.

"Shit!" I stood up, holding my head in pain.

"Oh no! You hurt yourself?" I heard a woman's voice say as I straightened up. I had barely a moment to feel grateful for the sympathy before she launched into a long order. "Listen," she said, "I'll take three cheeseburgers to go, two chocolate shakes, one diet Sprite, and—" She stared at me, stopping in mid-sentence while I still clutched the back of my head, my two-toned hat sitting lopsided. "I recognize that face," she said, scrutinizing me. It was Betsy, my supervisor from my old clerk job at the university. I could have died. She was the last person I wanted to know I was now working at Burger King. Well, maybe not the last person. My seventh grade English teacher, Miss Barrett, who always had such great expectations of me, was the last person. But, Betsy McMeyer ran a close second. "Frances Martimucci! What are you still doing in Texas?" She stared at me. Her bleached strawberry blonde, poofy hairdo and thick blue eyeshadow had a macabre cast under the fluorescent lights.

"How ya doing Betsy?" I said, rubbing the back of my sore head. I could already feel a knot forming. My face heated up and was probably bright red. I repeated her order back to her as I punched it into the cash register. "Three cheeseburgers, two chocolate shakes, one diet Sprite to go. Anything else? French fries?"

"Large," she answered me, still looking stunned as I was bagging her order. "Why don't you see if James will give you your old job back?" she whispered. "He hasn't filled the position yet." Behind her, the line was lengthening halfway into the diningroom. So much for slow afternoons.

"It's okay, really."

"I'm sure he'd hire you back," she continued. "You were just about the best we had." A worried look spread across her face as she took in my surroundings.

"Betsy!" I said, my patience wearing thin. "I'm leaving for California in one week. Right after my next paycheck here." I glanced over my shoulder to make sure Neil wasn't within earshot. He didn't know shit about me quitting. "Ketchup?" I held up three "to go" packets.

"Yes, thanks," she said, paying me. She snapped her purse shut and grabbed her bag of food. "I'll put in a good word for you with James," she said, in a conspiratorial whisper, walking out the front door in her heels.

"Don't bother Betsy, really!" I called after her. I smacked the countertop with the palm of my hand. "Goddammit!" I walked up and then down in the six feet of space behind the counter.

"Hey!" some bald-headed guy from the back of the line yelled out. "How about shaking a leg up there? This is the slowest fast food I've ever seen!" He poked his head out from behind a long line of bodies standing in front of him.

"Wait your turn Bud!" I snarled, stopping to shovel somebody's large fries into a cardboard carton. "I only got two hands!"

"Where's the manager?" he said, indignantly. "I wanna see the manager."

"I'm the manager," I said, pointing at myself. I turned to face him. "Next question?" He didn't answer. The other people in line shifted uncomfortably. I went back to stuffing French fries in cartons, bagged an order, and rung it up. I looked up. Three more customers came through the front door. Shit! So much for slow afternoons. I spun around and jabbed my thumb into the buzzer under the counter, ringing the back room for more help.

A Poor Girl Comes Clean

This friend is sitting in my living room. Her face is red, her voice is high pitched, and she is clearly angry. She's angry about lesbians not working together. She's angry about poverty. Mainly she's angry about her poverty and she's pissed at lesbians who aren't helping her enough. Normally I get a kick out of her free floating anger: tonight I'm not amused. I move around her, I change a light bulb here, I straighten a doily there. Something is getting underneath my skin. I already know that the something is the old bitterness I feel towards middle class girls who complain about being poor. I can usually tell what class they came from by how loudly indignant they are about doing without and how shocked they look that poverty has actually happened to them. This is a pretty normal scene for me, most times I just shrug it off. Sometimes I'm dishonest enough to commiserate with them. Tonight I don't feel very normal. Tonight I know what is expected of me. I just can't seem to pull it off. I want to slap this woman. I want to break glass and make a lot of noise. I tighten my mouth, but an old sardonic look swims out from the corner of my eye before I can stop it. It's too late, she has seen the look and stops midsentence. I leave the room in a hurry. Why can't I say something. There are so many garbled half said things racing behind my eyes. I have swallowed all these words and all the rage that makes them remain. I have subdued myself with bargains hastily made. "Shut up and you will be respected and loved." "Shut up and you will be rescued." "Shut up or they'll talk about the time you stayed at the Pagoda and didn't pay."

I still have a high investment in not being found out. My mom taught me that it was important to hide being poor. I can see my mom sitting tentatively but starchily upright in the rich relatives' chair. She is arching her ankle, clearing her throat, flourishing her pinkie with every dainty sip from her China tea cup. She is bristling with animation and armed with a whole repertoire of gestures. Maybe if she works hard enough, the group of refined ladies sitting

with us will ignore her 10 year old fortrel dress and the last minute mending job on the run in the nylons that she never throws out.

So what if my mother had to wear old cheap clothes? Well that's not it.

The sadness in this picture is that I am only 6 years old and even I can see that we are only allowed to talk as long as it suits the charity of these women. I can see that for all my mother's effort — she has failed at this illusion of gentility and that at the hostess' convenience my mother will be exposed and put in her place. What's even sadder is that neither my mom or I will see anything wrong with this nor will we mention it. That's the trick of charity, it's designed to make only the recipient feel squeamish. I have incorporated this lesson so well that even around friends that I have known for years (who are almost always middle class) I am almost always on guard. I am a well trained captive of the tone of voice dripping with the power of a woman who knows how to handle the servants caught stealing.

My silence is the price I've paid for acceptance all these years. So the loudness of the nouveau poor is unsettling to me. I want to scream you have no right to lay claim to poverty. You don't know the price poverty exacts. Some people don't choose poverty, some are born to it. Some people spend their lives trying to get out of neighborhoods they grew up in or occupations they were slotted for by grade 4.

I remember the countless old women I worked with behind countless counters. We all had to wear stupid hats and silly aprons in institutions colors. I loved many of these women. They taught me alot about doing what you had to do. But the only way that I could stand to look at them smiling and serving all day is if I told myself that I was going to get out of here. My life was going to be better than this.

Now I'm a grown woman and I clean houses and lots of my friends clean houses. We still talk about doing other things, but it's different for me. Those old ladies show up in my hips and my knees when I look at myself in the mirrors I clean. I am doing what I was built for.

When I think about it deeper I don't want my friend to stop being angry about being poor. Everyone should be angry about

poverty. It stinks. What I resent and envy at the same time is that I have no voice unless it accompanies hers. I can talk about not being able to afford food now and I have people in my life who understand that. But its not the present that eats at me. Where do I go to talk about these things I have no words for? Who do I tell the stories that aren't about good, strong, contented poor people. Oh, there might be one or two dykes. We'll be in a crowd and we'll make brief reference to "the neighborhood I grew up in." But we never really talk about our lives back there in those neighborhoods. Or there are dykes who I don't even make eye contact with but I've heard in low tone voices that so and so "had it tough growing up."

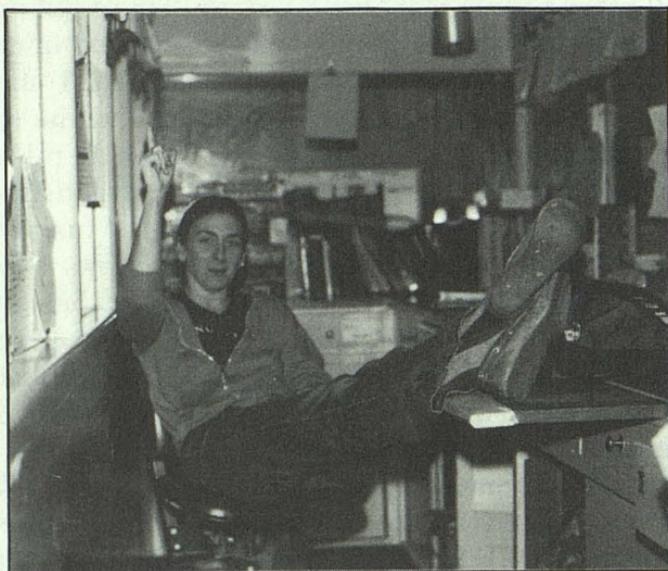
I know that I had it tough growing up. Sometimes I see myself with a desperate look in my eye and my hands flapping. I'm trying to convey what it was like but I draw a blank. I don't remember.

Now I'm sitting in my bedroom, still so angry and not knowing why. There is a difference, there is a big difference between the way most of the women I know grew up and the way I grew up and it has to do with class. But what is it? What's eating me? I'm thinking how my house used to be full of people; full of big grown men. I always tell other people that Uncle Ted and Uncle Bill and later Billy and Raymond and Jimmy and Lorne all lived in our little house because we were helping them get on their feet. Tonight I am remembering that this generosity is right around the time my mother dates as "When your dad was laid off from the railroad" or "when your dad was laid off from the clean towel delivery" or "your dad was sand bagging." I've never bothered to think about this but tonight I put together that this list of lay-offs is long and they all happened shortly after my parents bought their very first house and Uncle Ted and Billy and Raymond and Jimmy and Lorne all came to live there and Jimmy and Lorne and Billy and Raymond gang raped me around that same time and they kept on living there after they raped me.

It is a fact that my mother knew they raped me. It is a fact that she threatened to literally bury me alive if I told the secret to my father or anyone else. But tonight, for the first time, I realize that my mother was faced with the choice between my safety and the only money that was coming in, while my dad was laid off. She chose the mortgage and our food.

There, there is the bottom layer of this rage I have never understood. There is one of the little secrets I have been trying to hide behind my self-righteous silence about poverty. I would rather not call attention to the decisions my Mother made under its tyranny or the ones I will make as I stand in her shoes. Tonight the burden of the chasm between me and most of the lesbians in my community weighs heavy on me. All the times they "just don't get it" makes me ache with loneliness.

The telephone rings. My friend wants to apologize for dumping on me. I take a deep breath and I say "I think this is about class." She begins to whine "I know." I get brave and tell her "No, not our class, my class — where I came from and you didn't." She shuts up. I talk. We make a good beginning.



Elaine Bliss (color photo)

Corie Lamere

Two Short Pieces on Home

1

She was sitting on the floor rocking, holding her stomach where the hurt was. The air was wet with chicken fat and carrots fogging up the windows with endless boiling. Her braids, once tightly woven on each side of her head, hung limply, one in front, one in back, with several stray hairs flying wildly and unrestrained around her face. Perry Como was singing faintly in the background, a dull bluish-grey light from the "livingroom" where her crib was still living in the corner. The evening explosion had come and gone. Muffled voices, feet stamping, doors slamming, the sound of pots crashing from the floor above and the many floors below seeped through the walls. This was silence.

She was already six, but still banished at night to her crib after another terrible chase, threats, the belt being removed, as a final warning, from Daddy's pants — "GAY SHLUFEN!"* — this louder and louder was the nightly lullaby. Her face was burning, a familiar feeling, from getting slapped. But tonight her belly, her tender, soft belly, hurt and hurt. Because Daddy got so mad, he forgot to stop hitting. Even when she layed on the floor, pleading in Yiddish, in English, for him to stop. His rage was bigger than her tears or pleas could reach. She couldn't believe this was possible; this man that colored in her coloring book with her at the park didn't even know who she was. She rocked and rocked, with a cold numbness, and the imprint of the tip of a leather shoe in her precious, round, soft little girl belly.

2

The cord didn't reach across the floor to the outlet behind the bed, so they didn't watch television that night. The TV was too

*Go to sleep!

heavy to move again and the boxes of books and the nightstand stood between it and the outlet which was much closer. Her back muscles ached and her hands started to swell and tingle from carrying furniture and boxes down the stairs from apartment #4 into the borrowed truck. The bed was the only island in the sea of chaos, and she didn't care about anything else when she finally landed there. Her lover was still taking an extended shower when she fell asleep.

The landlady wouldn't refund all of her deposit money because, she said, there were extra costs involved since she had lived there so long. The apartment would have to be repainted, she said, but the owner never got around to having this done for the four years she lived there. But this woman, who owned four other buildings, all of them equipped with historic electrical wiring and greenish-brown rugs, did promise to return a month's worth of rent and \$125.00 of the original deposit. This seemed like free money after all of these years, since most landlords had found a way to steal her deposit money in the past with typical landlord excuses. The check would be sent to her new address in ten days. When she stood in her emptied apartment, it seemed that the promise of that gesture barely compensated for paying for the mortgage on a building that was long past paid for and barely a legal domicile. She wanted so badly to line all the walls with honey and invite the bugs to finally and forever take over her apartment. She did, however, think mercifully about the next prisoner of this hovel and restrain that impulse. She had found a job she liked near her new home so it was possible to drop the key in her mailbox on the way out without hesitation; her survival didn't depend on whether or not she got that damn check.

Her lover did most of the driving for the first hour or so, because her hands were not sore and she loved driving long distances. The radio sang out above the growling of the surrounding traffic. Feeling so tired and so excited left them both in a daze. This ride was the resolution of such a deep longing. Anything more verbal than hollering out the window of the truck was unnecessary. When they stopped at their final destination it was truly an act of love that gave them both the energy to unload the truck of their belongings.

Creating instant order was not possible at this point in the day. She did remember to open the livingroom windows before barricading that side of the room with unruly stacks, but the lamp was out of reach behind a dresser and a stuffed chair that faced the wall. Her lover reminded her that the light switch was behind a picture leaning against the couch, just as the room greyed into early evening. This space had shrunk considerably in size since their first visit here. But there were many rooms, with doors that could lean open or swing shut into their own thresholds, and that's what mattered.

The heat lingered in the room despite the breeze entering from the opened windows. The walls were thick. The difference between inside and outside was not just an illusion created by a combination of modesty and a rent check. When they left to get something to eat, she noticed that there was only one lock to turn on the door.

She drifted out of a dream into panic and couldn't remember which way her head was facing. Every muscle felt worn. Her hands were asleep, painful. Slowly the sounds of birds trickled in the window. Until this moment, she hadn't really left Oakland. The smell of trees and quiet soaked into her head. She cried awake and watched her lover sleeping so deeply, finally home.

Anonymous Dykes
from the Netherworld of Class

If You Could Say Anything...

We asked lesbians from the lower classes to say anything they wanted to, in complete anonymity, to the class-privileged dykes in their communities. Solemn, sarcastic, sincere: this is what came back. — ed.

Embrace Lesbian solidarity — we are each others' strongest potential allies.

Learn to appreciate sarcasm. At least learn to recognize it, and don't accuse us of threatening violence every time we make a wise crack.

No honest work is below anyone's dignity.

Sometimes I wonder if the community attitude that we can never truly understand each other doesn't come partly from the fact that the dominant middle-class lesbians don't know how to understand anyone but themselves.

I refuse to revere or glorify your bourgeois trappings.

Don't tell me how you wish you were from a family like mine, so you wouldn't feel so driven by family ambition to get your Ph.D.

Is your greatest aim a society or world consisting of only the upper, privileged classes?

You can't convert to working class

Lesbians: Demonstrate your recovering class guilt, share your financial and other resources.

Your class privilege prohibits you from working for total destruction of patriarchy!

Dropping your father's and former husband's names and renaming yourself doesn't alter your economic reality or your access to financial well being.

It's one thing to change your food habits or to make some conscious choices about what's good for you to eat; it's another to ridicule the foods that poor people have no choice but to eat.

Why are your wallets and bank accounts full,
and your hearts empty of compassion?

We're tired of talking about this too, y'know!

Your inability to acknowledge the benefits
derived from your class privilege hurts me.

I'm tired of insulting dynamics, to wit —

Prosperity/New Age: Take responsibility for the world's class
oppression, create your own reality and live in another world.

Therapy Model: You have to adjust to middle class norms and values.

"I'm OK, you're not OK, but I'll never cop to this attitude."

The magic momma myth: The middle class woman who cries trashing "from below"
when inequalities of privilege are questioned.

Stop scolding — the humiliations dished out to us are never dignified with any notice.

Abundant money does not equate to abundant joy.

Aw c'mon, don't be so hoity toity!

Your self image of superiority is an illusion.

Keep your stereotypes to yourself.

I'm mad as hell but it doesn't mean
I don't have any fun!

I hate when I talk about
my difficulties due to
being working class and
I get *advice* from a
middle class woman.

FUCK YOU!

Stop pretending to be working-class when you're not, goddam it!

I don't want your damn car, I want you to stop stepping on my face.

Give me your car!

When we want you to change your attitudes, you're afraid we
want your money, and then, when we tell you we need money,
you offer to clean up your attitudes. Talk about a class act!

Lies, Lies & More Lies

Being disabled, living on SSI and Medi-Cal* is exhausting to say the least. I'm worn out with everyday survival. The attitudes of some Lesbians towards those of us who're poor, on government assistance programs, and/or disabled, makes it that much harder. There's so many societal lies and myths about those of us on assistance programs, and Lesbians seem to have swallowed them whole.

One of the basic attitudes that influences how America in general, and Lesbians specifically treat us, is that work equals worth. How much a person works, the type of work they do, and how much they're paid for it, determines their value. Along with this goes the Great American Myth: the USA is the land of plenty and there's equal opportunity for anyone to be successful if only they work hard enough. Not only is this classist, but ablist (and racist, and ageist, etc.). Along with the Great American Myth comes the lie that the government is taking care of all the poor, disabled, and old people that need it. The government has plenty of assistance programs for everyone who really needs it and even takes care of a lot of people who don't really need it but are gettin free rides off the government. There are plenty of Lesbians who believe these myths and lies.

The Myth of "One Simple Phone Call" or What's Taking You So Long?

Lesbians, along with everyone else, believe that the government is waiting with open arms to give you assistance, and all you need to do is make "one simple phone call," or "just apply," and presto! you're on Welfare, Food Stamps, SSI, etc. I fought for four years before I finally got SSI. Lesbians kept asking why I wasn't on

*SSI is Supplemental Security Income, a federal program for poor disabled people, and Medi-Cal is a California state medical program for poor womyn with children and disabled people officially on SSI.

it yet, and when I'd explain the difficulties, they were suspicious. Again, along with the rest of society, some Lesbians believe that if *you're* not getting government help, there must be something personally wrong with *you*. After all, the government takes care of everyone who really needs it. Maybe you're not as poor as you claim or as disabled. Or perhaps you didn't really try hard enough, or you didn't do it right. Or the best one of all, you don't even want to help yourself, and you're so lazy you didn't even bother to apply in the first place. If you'd really applied like you claim, then you'd have it by now.

The truth about any assistance program is that it's damned hard to get on. It's almost a 24-hour a day job, and requires incredible health and stamina (which we don't have) to do all the work involved. I've lived on Welfare, Food Stamps, SSI and Medi-Cal. Mostly I'll refer to SSI and Medi-Cal, since I've dealt with them longer and am more familiar with them. It's estimated that 30% of the disabled people nationwide that are eligible for SSI actually get it. SSI, like other assistance programs, sets the criteria so as to eliminate most applicants. There are very few disabilities and chronic illnesses that are in the code book SSI uses to determine who gets SSI. Basically, they want you either totally paralyzed or dead in six months. If your illness or disability isn't in their code book, you're outa luck. And from my experience, I tell you, that code book ain't worth shit. My experience, and that of most Lesbians who try to get SSI for something not listed in the code book, is that we fight them for years before finally getting accepted. And not all of us win. I've heard of middle-class Lesbians that used connections (a family friend who's a lawyer, psychiatrist, politician, etc.) that got them on SSI quickly, but I don't know of any poor/working-class Lesbians who've had this kind of privilege.

If you're sick/disabled and apply for any kind of assistance, you gotta have a doctor fill out forms that verify you're not fakin. If you can't afford to see a doctor, you don't get the forms signed. Usually, many, many visits to different doctors, mostly high-priced specialists, and expensive tests are required before a diagnosis is found. And this can take years. And until you have an official western medicine diagnosis, don't even bother hoping to find yourself in SSI's code book.

Let's say you're a poor Lesbian and can't afford all those fancy doctors. You end up at community clinics or county hospitals, which are underfunded and offer minimal care. The misogyny inherent in traditional western medicine is reflected in the lack of knowledge and research about womyn's diseases, and the tendency of doctors to not believe womyn's physical complaints and misdiagnose them, or more commonly, tell them it's all in their heads. Clinics and county health programs don't provide any alternative health care such as acupuncture, homeopathy, chiropractic, herbs, etc. Instead, they offer surgery (which can be life-threatening), and drugs (many are highly toxic). Once you refuse these treatments, your refusal goes into your charts, and the clinic or hospital is no longer obliged to offer you any further services. Now your goose is really cooked! When you apply for county, state or federal assistance programs, they get your medical charts and can deny you assistance because you refused a treatment that supposedly would make you healthy/able-bodied, and able to work again. The attitude is that you refused the surgery and/or drugs because you don't really wanna get better and go back to work, you just wanna free load off the government.

When you're rejected by assistance programs, you can appeal, but appeals take years, and some kinda lawyer to help you figure out how to do the damn appeal. Who can afford that? Meanwhile, you got no money to live on. So you force your butt to work, while the appeals slowly grind their way through the bureaucracy, *but then*, they consider you able-bodied because you worked. If you're totally unable to work due to illness/disability, and are fortunate enough to have a family member or friend to live with while you wait for Welfare or SSI, then you're disqualified for the assistance because you have someone who can support you. Of course, if you're not fortunate enough to have some place to stay while you wait, your butt's still in trouble, because you can't get government assistance without a street address!

The myth of making "one simple phone call," or putting in one application for assistance is a joke. Anyone who's had to deal with the system knows better than that. When I went to Welfare, I got up at five in the morning, took several buses for an hour or more, to arrive as early as possible before the office opened at eight. If you

arrive at eight, too bad for you. There'll be 70 to 100 people in line before you. They go in first, get their number first, and if you're number 106, you might as well take the bus back home. The first time I went, I didn't know this. I sat from eight in the morning until four in the afternoon in a smoke filled room, sick as a dog, and waited and waited and waited. At the end of all that waiting, I didn't even get to fill out an application. I was too ill to make it back the next day, so weeks later when I could deal with the buses, smoke, and sitting all day, I got there at seven. I did get my application in that day, but that wasn't the end of that. Over the next month or two, I went back many more times, again spending the whole day there, before I got the Welfare. On top of all that, I had to sign a form sayin I'd pay the Welfare back whenever I got any money. When I finally got SSI in 1988, every dime Welfare had given me was automatically taken out of my retroactive SSI payments. So much for a free ride!

The Disappearing File Act

It's not uncommon for applications and complete files to be lost. About two years into appealing SSI, I discovered they'd lost my file. They'd never heard of me, had no file anywhere on me, and I had to start over. Workers will also say they've lost your file when they don't wanna get up and go look for it. It's also not uncommon for workers to give you wrong information, if you're lucky enough to get ahold of them at all! (I've left messages for weeks before getting my worker.) Workers will tell you to do such and such or call such and such department and when you do that, the workers at such and such a department say no, that's not what you're supposed to do, you're supposed to do this and that instead. This game can go on for months. The one I hate the most is when I call person and/or department A who tells me to call person and/or department B, and when I call B, they tell me they're the wrong person/department, I'm supposed to call A. I explain that A told me to call them, but B insists A is the right person/department. I call A back, and of course, A is emphatic that B is the right person/department. And they both insist there's nothing more they can do for me, after all, it's not their department. This can also go on for months.

On top of all this, workers out and out lie. I've been told certain information by a worker, who'll later tell me she/he didn't say that at all. Or, they'll promise to do a procedure that's vital to your application, or your continuation of a service, then they either forget to do it, or refuse to do it, and deny they promised to do it in the first place. The worker is always right, they're never, never wrong. It's us who eat shit. Confronting a worker on her/his lying and/or incompetence (which is rampant in assistance programs) is very dangerous. They have all the power. You rub your worker the wrong way, and forget the service or program you've applied for or are already on. Workers make up their own rules. It may not be legal, but they do it. If they don't like something about you, or if you haven't properly grovelled or kissed ass enough, watch out!

In 1985, I was on Welfare when my father suddenly keeled over one night and died. My sister bought me a plane ticket, and I left California to be with my family in Denver. I asked my lover to call my worker to cancel an appointment I had with her the following week, and to also tell her I'd left due to a death in the family. The worker informed my lover that unless I was back in three days, she was terminating my Welfare. In the middle of a family crisis, I had to make days worth of long distance calls to straighten this mess out. After realizing my worker wasn't gonna budge on this three day business, I asked her for her supervisor's name and number. She flat out refused. Clearly against the rules, but she was making up her own rules. My lover had to get a Legal Aid Worker to obtain the supervisor's name and number. The supervisor allowed me to stay out of state for three weeks (the legal amount of time) but I had to furnish proof that my father had really died when I returned to California. As well, my worker continuously punished me for the rest of the time I was on Welfare, for daring to question her power and authority.

"The Community's There For You!"

Besides believing the lie that the government takes care of all who need it, some Lesbians also believe that the Lesbian community is taking care of all poor and/or disabled Lesbians. Over the years, both my lover and I've been told (usually, but not always, by middle class, white, able-bodied Lesbians) "the community will

do that for you." Among other illnesses and disabilities, I'm Environmentally Ill (E.I.). Living in the Bay Area is extremely toxic, and we want to move to a less toxic, rural area. Some Lesbians are not only shocked, but angry to discover I'm still in the Bay Area 7 years later. They demand to know why I haven't moved and when my lover or I try to explain the complications, they'll emphatically state, "Well ... the community will help you move!" As if there's offers to help me move pouring in every day, and I'm turning them down! Another example of this was when a Lesbian came to my home to give me health care. She saw my paintings on the wall and asked if I'd been exhibiting and/or selling them. I briefly described some of the difficulties for me as a homebound, mostly bedbound woman (with only a couple of functional hours a day) living off SSI and paying almost half of it for rent. Again, "Well...the community will help you get your paintings out in the world. There's plenty of Lesbians who'd love your art and want to help." So I told her to feel free to give my name and number to all those Lesbians, and now, over 9 months later, I haven't gotten one call.

There's all kinds of attitudes underlying those comments. First is the assumption that just like the government, the Lesbian community is taking care of everyone who needs help. They're just sitting on our doorsteps waiting for us to pen the door and invite them in. The belief that since "the community" is waiting to help us, there's something personally wrong with us, if we're not getting help. Or perhaps we don't really want help, we don't want to help ourselves, so we haven't asked all these willing and waiting lesbians. Or, maybe we don't deserve the help. Maybe we're not really poor and/or disabled, and that's why all those Lesbians aren't there for us. I'm so fed up with this attitude of something's wrong with me if I don't have all those helpful Lesbians on my door step, that I want to scream at the next Lesbian that spouts that shit to me.

"The Community?" Huh, what?

Who is "the community" that these Dykes claim is waiting and willing if only I'd open my door and let them in? I asked my lover, "Who do you think these Dykes are talking about when they tell us 'the community' will do this or that for me?" She said, "These are all middle and upper class Dykes and they're talking about the

community they have around them, other middle and upper class Lesbians." If this is true, if their definition of "the community" refers only to Dykes with physical and financial resources, then I don't know these Lesbians. The community that continues to be generous and supportive of me after all these years of being sick and poor is a small number of Lesbians who're mostly poor and disabled themselves. This means they have fewer physical and financial resources to share. This is my community.

There are small pockets of Dykes who're devoted to disabled and/or poor Lesbians, but the truth is, there isn't much of "the community" available to us. Valuable Lesbian energy has been lost to men with AIDS. Lesbians who might've given free health care, massages, housecleaning, personal and/or political energy to poor disabled Dykes ten years ago, now give it to men with AIDS instead.

Another attitude that keeps some Lesbians from sharing their resources is this prosperity consciousness bullshit. It comes in many forms: "willingness to manifest your life," "just go for it," "you'd be healthy/have money if you really wanted to," "your negative thinking prevents you from having prosperity," "you create your own reality," an on and on ad nauseam. Many years ago, a Lesbian was giving me extremely low fee therapy in my home. That she was willing to do that was great. About a year into it, she told me she couldn't work with me any more because I wasn't "willing to manifest my life." What she based this decision on was the fact that I was often too ill to make the phone calls necessary to get information about the assistance programs I wanted to apply for. My physical inability to make phone calls was chalked up to a lack of "willingness to manifest my life." Of course, she never offered to make some of those phone calls for me. Both my lover and I've had Dykes tell us to "just go for it," after we've explained how no money and my incredibly complicated illnesses and disabilities are the reasons we haven't moved yet. It's easy to "just go for it," when you have health and class privilege. Class privilege not only gives someone the money to "just go for it," but the know how, and perhaps more importantly, valuable personal and business contacts.

Class privilege also determines which Lesbians are more likely to have "the community" (middle and upper class Dykes) available to

them. Middle and upper class Dykes know more middle and upper class Dykes than do us poor/working class Dykes. These Lesbians have beneficial work contacts. Those of us who got shit jobs, or no jobs at all, don't have the same number of class privileged friends in our lives. For Dykes like myself who're mostly homebound by illness/disability, our contacts with "the community" are fewer as the years go by. The number of middle class Lesbians I knew 8 years ago when I was first becoming disabled by my illnesses, and the number of them in my life now, has decreased dramatically. A few years ago, a close friend of mine got cancer. Being a professional, she had tons of professional friends and contacts. The help and support she received on all levels, was very different than what my current group of mostly poor, ill/disabled Dykes are able to give me. Some middle class Lesbians who'd known of me for years, but never offered any support, donated time and energy to her though some of them hadn't known her previously. My friend and I talked about the difference in how "the community" was there for her versus for me, and we acknowledged that cancer is a more recognized illness than the types of immune system illnesses I have. But we never discussed how class played a role as well. That was scarier for me.

"Well...Then, What Do You Do All Day?"

Like mainstream society, many Lesbians believe the lie that people on assistance programs sit around eating bon-bons, watching soap operas, and painting their nails. They think that once we're on assistance, it takes care of all our needs, and we don't have anything to do with all our "leisure" time. I can't begin to count how many times Dykes have asked me what I do all day, since I don't "work." I must admit that all those years I busted my butt to get SSI, I thought that once I got it, I could relax a little, not have to work so hard every day fighting the bureaucracy. The truth is, once on an assistance program, you work as hard to keep it as you did to get it in the first place.

Services and programs that are supposed to be available to you once you're on SSI and Medi-Cal, don't come automatically. Yes, I qualify for Section 8 housing (federal housing subsidy for poor people who are disabled, old or got kids) but six years after

applying and being approved, I still don't got it. Even though I've been approved for it, I do continual work to make sure they don't lose my file again for the umpteenth time, that I'm still on the list (it's amazing how one minute your name's on the list and the next minute it just up and walked off the page) finding out new information and rules, etc., etc. When Lesbians demand to know why I don't have Section 8 after all these years, and I explain it to them, they give me that look that says, "I don't believe you, you must not be doing it right." After all, if I was doing it right, I'd have Section 8 by now.

My various illnesses/disabilities give me an average of two hours of functional time a day. Dealing with my illness itself, as well as trying to obtain medical care I need is something I work at every single day. Some Dykes don't believe me, saying that I have Medi-Cal and it pays for everything. Nothing could be further from the truth. Medi-Cal is funded by the state and each year the state makes cuts in Medi-Cal funding. Very few doctors take Medi-Cal as they pay so low that doctors can't recover the money it takes to pay their office workers to fill out the Medi-Cal forms. Also, Medi-Cal has a bad track record of not paying health providers, even when they do send in the piles of forms. Mostly, Medi-Cal covers western medicine, but there are many types of doctors, tests, drugs, surgeries and other treatments they won't cover.

I struggled with Medi-Cal for several years to get them to pay for my oxygen (which they're supposed to cover). They maintained EI wasn't a valid reason for oxygen. I need oxygen due to my EI, and they maintained EI wasn't a valid reason for oxygen. They wouldn't pay, the oxygen company wanted to cut me off, and I put countless hours and months into dealing with the oxygen company, Medi-Cal and a Legal Aid worker. It was another situation where I'd do weeks of work and think I'd resolved something, only to find out it'd gotten screwed up one way or another. In the end, I was lucky. Medi-Cal approved the oxygen two years into the battle, because they messed up the paper work and didn't want to admit it in court. It took four other womyn with E.I. another two years to win their oxygen case in court. The amount of relief I felt over no longer worrying about having the funding for my oxygen cut off, and no longer fighting the daily battle with Medi-Cal over

oxygen, is hard to put into words. As well, the time I'd spent fighting them was now freed up to fight for some other service I needed.

Medi-Cal will cover a total of two alternative health treatments, such as acupuncture, homeopathy, chiropractic, etc., a month. Again, the fee they pay alternative health care providers is so low, hardly anyone takes Medi-Cal. For those of us with chronic illnesses, two treatments a month often isn't enough. Many of us need treatments weekly, and sometimes 2-3 times a week. Both my lover and I spend a lot of time contacting alternative health providers, asking how low their fees are, if they make home calls, and if they're willing to use safe products (personal care products that won't make me ill) in order to come into my home. Many months of calls go into finding the one or two health providers that are willing to do it.

Once you've done the months or years of work to obtain a Medi-Cal service, you're not home free yet. I've been getting in-home intravenous (IV) gamma globulin for two years now. It took an unbelievable amount of work to set up. After two years of doing it, you'd think things would go smoothly. Guess again. There's always a glitch somewhere. I call in orders for new gamma globulin, IV needles, tubing, etc. The supplies are sent to the company the in-home nurse works for, she picks them up there and brings them here. We're told the supplies are there, and she goes to pick them up on the day of my infusion, and of course, no supplies. I spend the next four hours making desperate phone calls. Better yet, I'm told I never ordered any supplies, despite the fact I've written down the day I ordered them and who I talked to. Of course, as the client, I'm always wrong. Like with case workers, don't challenge them, don't confront them on their incompetency or lying, if you want to keep your service. Another glitch; the nurse doesn't show up, she's sick, her kid's sick, or she forgot she was supposed to come, etc. More hours and days of phone calls to get another nurse. Every time my treatment is late, it takes two months to catch up on the benefits it give sme. Late treatments only happen 3-4 times a year, but times two months each time, that's over half the year.

Recently, my lover and I decided to ask the company to train her to put the IV needle in. We felt this would give us more independence, cut down on late treatments, and remove the risk of reacting to toxic nurses. In their quarterly magazine, the company

bragged about training patients or their family members to self infuse. So we called them up and said we wanted to do it. Suddenly, nobody has heard of training for self infusion. They don't offer it. We must be mixed up, it's the company they subcontract to (for the in-home nurses) that does the training. So we call the company that hires the nurses and they say no, we don't do it. Back and forth and back and forth. Weeks later I think I've finally got it all set up, and again, they don't remember talking to me and promising to set the training up.

What else do we do with all our "leisure time?" Ask just about any chronically ill/disabled Dyke and she'll tell you she learns more about her illness/disability, new doctors, tests, and treatments from her similarly ill friends than she does from her doctor. Instead of eating bon-bons and planning our next cruise, we're constantly searching out new information, asking other womyn if such and such a product helped or not, what they've done for this or that problem, etc. This is a full time job. When my brain works, I read anything I can get, about the various illnesses I have.

As if there wasn't enough to do, there's the ever continual search for attendants. In Home Support (IHSS) is the Alameda County program that supplies money for attendants. If you're lucky enough to get it. It's another one of those programs whose funding is continually cut. Fewer and fewer people receive it, and once you do get it, you fight every year to keep the number of hours they've given you, if you're not outright cut off altogether. Once you're on IHSS, you don't sit back, watch tv, and pick lint from between your toes. Finding an attendant is a perpetual pain in the ass! IHSS pays minimum wage for attendants. It's hard work, low pay and no sick days off or holidays. It's the type of work college students do, people who're in between jobs, and people in the country illegally. In other words, transient work. No one goes into attendant work as a career. A few womyn are lucky enough to keep attendants a year or two at a time, but most of us lose them every month or two. Being as E.I. as I am, I need attendants willing to give up their toxic personal care products and only use safe products. This is extremely difficult. Most people, even Dykes, are attached to their hair permanents, dyes, mousses, gels, etc., or to their make-up, hand lotion, deodorant, fabric softener, incense, and so on. I

keep ads in the local papers for attendants and do phone interviews every week. Sometimes every day. Yet the only person I've been able to keep as an attendant is my lover. Besides constantly interviewing possible attendants, I spend hours making up lists of things for my lover to do when she works for me.

Welfare Bums, Free Loaders, Scammers, and Taking a Free Ride at Tax Payers Expense

None of the assistance programs, whether it's Welfare, SSI, IHSS, AFDC, Food Stamps, etc., provide the bare subsistence needs for poor and/or disabled people. No program begins to bring recipients up to government stated poverty levels. What this means is that folks gotta figure out how to get the rest of their basic needs. Since it's against the law to have more than what the programs give you, you gotta scam. Assistance programs call this Welfare Fraud. People living on programs call it survival. It takes much time and energy scrambling to get survival needs met that aren't covered by assistance programs, and learning how not to get caught. Obstacle courses, catch 22's, and impossible criteria are built into every assistance program as a way of eliminating most people who need the help. As a result, time and energy must be spent learning what these traps are, and how to get around them.

For instance, the Food Stamp Program asks you where you live, if you share a kitchen, and if you share meals with anyone. If you so much as eat one meal with a lover, roommate, or friend, that's considered meal sharing, and disqualifies you for food stamps. The rationale is: if someone shares their food even once with you, then you don't need the stamps because you have someone who feeds you. And if you share your food with someone else, then you must not really need food stamps, and as well, you might share food you've bought with Food Stamps, and that's fraud. Of course, before the worker asks you if you ever eat meals with anyone else, they don't tell you why they're asking the question. Also, if you answer no, you don't share food with anyone, they come back real fast at you with, "Never! You *never* have a meal with a roommate or friend?" So you think about it, and you say something like, "Oh yeah, once a month my best friend and I get together and cook a meal." They gotcha! Instead of then

telling you that meal sharing isn't legal, and asking you to agree not to food share when you get Food Stamps, they just quietly disqualify you and months later when you receive your letter of denial, you wonder what the hell went wrong.

Every interview for assistance, and every application form is chocked full of questions like this, meant to trick you into disqualifying yourself for the program. Before any interview or filling out of forms, it's important to call everyone you know who's gone through it, and find out what traps to avoid. Besides having impossible criteria, and trick questions, there isn't anyone in assistance programs that tells you about other programs and services you're eligible for. I've never had a worker inform me about a service that not only did I need, but that I qualified for. This is the kind of information we must seek out, mostly by calling other friends who've more experience surviving on assistance programs. One more thing to do with all that "leisure" time we're supposed to be wasting on eating Food Stamp bon-bons while we paint our nails cherry red.

This myth that those of us on assistance get free rides off taxpayers' money while we do nothing all day is so infuriating. Nothing is ever free. I once figured out that I get paid less than 2 cents an hour (based on my month's SSI check) for all the work I do every day, just to get or keep services.

Some Lesbians think, at least we can rely on the monthly checks, we don't have to worry about our basic survival. Not so. Quicker than you can say jack shit, you've got a letter in the mail informing you they're cutting you off for one reason or another. Usually, they've made another stupid mistake, which takes you weeks of phone calls to straighten out. (By the way, I talk so much about phone calls because I'm homebound. For those not housebound, they make you come down and sit and wait.) Sometimes they find some minor technicality to bust you on. There's always the fear they'll find out about some scam you're pulling just to have the bucks to pay your light bill. And then there's the jealous or angry former friend, lover, or neighbor, who reports you out of spite. People are quick to say, "Oh, but I just read about a case of *real fraud*." When I ask about this case of "real fraud," "I find out it's some woman who's getting twice the amount she's supposed to

get from AFDC. She also has 12 kids! No one can live offa AFDC with 12 kids. Even the extra amount she was getting wouldn't begin to support that many kids. *Real fraud* is when temporarily broke class-privileged people or able-bodied people easily get on assistance programs while the poor/working-class or disabled are denied. People are willing to believe this shit the media puts out. Every year the assistance programs lose funding, and they start looking around to see how they can cut clients. Every year comes a reevaluation of one or more of your services, and since funding gets cut each year, it gets harder and harder to keep qualifying for the services you already got, let alone get new ones.

Those of us on programs are a small percentage of the people who need services. Compared to people who're unable to get the programs, yes, I'm lucky. It should be a right, not a "privilege." I acknowledge this advantage that others need equally as much and have worked equally as hard to get, but have been denied. But for healthy, able-bodied, class-privileged Lesbians, don't you dare tell me I'm getting a free ride, or you wish you had it so easy, or that it must be nice not to work, or that I'm lucky to get a monthly check. Not only do I work harder in my two hours per day than many of you do in your eight, I also live with the fear of being thrown off programs, with the degradation and humiliation dished out with each service and contact with workers, and lastly, I don't have the privilege you have of choice. I don't have the class or health privilege to keep me off assistance programs.

Thanks to Caryatis for explaining the difference between privilege and advantage, and for all her help with editing.

Thanks to my lover Frieda for the title and some of the subtitles, and for all her input and critique.

ellen teban

(excerpt from novel, transfusions)

one of the main characters, katherine, has leukemia and gets many blood transfusions. each time, she makes up a story about who she thinks was the donor. these stories are scattered throughout the book.

Ellen teban felt her life had been full. second generation american, she'd been lucky not to totally buy into the assimilation scene, but had been able to blend with american culture enough to survive. her parents had enough political awareness to find pride in their culture and their class. for the most part, ellen had always been a proud working class jew.

there were moments of doubt, of course, for her and her family. she remembered when her father was offered the job as foreman of the print shop. the fights seemed endless, and not just with her mother, but with the whole mispacha — aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents, nieces, nephews — as well as friends, neighbors, and political comrades who all seemed to have something to say on this matter.

joseph, her father, thought he should take the job. ellen was ten and natalie, her mother, was pregnant. joseph thought they could use the money and no one could argue with that point. joseph thought maybe if he was foreman he could do some good for the workers by being in a position of power, by getting in closer with the bosses. natalie, who was for sure the more radical of her parents, would shout, "ha!! what kind of rationale is that? you want to get in with the bosses? you think that's good? what will you want next? to be the boss? to oppress the workers?" then the arguing would start and would include anyone who happened to be around. joseph didn't take the job as foreman, though for many years arguments ensued about whether or not that was the right decision. natalie had a bad miscarriage which left her unable to have any more children.

all her mother, or anyone else for that matter, had to say was "ha!!" with the proper intonation, and large debates on any issue would begin. ellen got so used to this that when she would play and have contests, instead of saying "on your mark, get ready, get set, go," she would say "on your mark, get ready, get set, ha!!" it was fine when she was by herself, but most of the kids in school or on the block didn't seem to understand. ellen didn't mind much what they thought. her house was pretty much a community in itself, with adults and kids from their large family or from the "society" floating in and out all the time. most of the time ellen liked the debating. it was the stuff of life, she would tell people who didn't seem to understand why she argued so much when she was an adult.

even as a young child, ellen would notice the glimmer in everyone's eyes when a hot debate was brewing. sometimes people were so excited they would stand on the furniture to try to get their point across. later in life when people would accuse her of standing on her soap box, she'd laugh and think about the people from her past who stood on the furniture. she'd thank them for the compliment and they'd stare at her quizzically. sometimes, if it was someone close to her, she'd try to explain that standing on things to speak was an old finely honed family tradition of many generations. often she'd leave them thinking.

ellen felt like shaking things up for people was another fine family tradition she wanted to hang on to. like her parents, ellen married "late" in life, at 33. she and ira got along rather well, but ira wanted to have children and ellen didn't. as much as ellen would pine over babies, she knew it would interrupt her life. although they argued the point much, it wasn't too difficult for ellen to win these arguments, since ira didn't like having sex with ellen. shortly after their marriage, ellen found out ira preferred sex with men. ellen didn't mind since she was happier pleasing herself than trying to explain to ira what to do. abstinence also was the best birth control method she knew.

five years into their marriage, ira was killed in a freak accident. he was walking home at about 2 a.m. from one of his male lover's homes in greenwich village. he went to cross the street and got hit by a cab. not hurt too badly, he started to get up when a cab from

the other direction hit him again and killed him. both cab companies immediately declared bankruptcy and ellen was left with no money. luckily she had a job and didn't have children to support.

having done her duty as a married womyn, it seemed people didn't care as much how ellen lived. she moved in with two wimmin friends of hers, lucy and millie, in a house lucy owned in the upper 90's. she lived in the attic, which gave her the privacy she needed, but was close enuff to these two wonderful wimmin to have company when she wanted that too. ellen became close with different wimmin in her life, but none of it seemed to last. occasionally, one of these wimmin even came to her bed with her, but ellen was essentially a loner when it came to close personal ties. she didn't want to make those kind of commitments. ellen didn't have any personal relationships with men, only political ones. she didn't make much of this though and neither did anyone else.

ellen and her roommates got along wonderfully, and it was the perfect setup for ellen. she continued working in the shops and organizing the wimmin, and tried to keep the "society" going, though it died out. she had social events at the house, which was plenty huge. even after she retired she continued working for the union, organizing picnics and trips to the united nations. she knew the union was now sometimes run by people "as bad as the bosses," but she felt it was important to keep the people, and the families of the people, organized.

when ellen was 70, millie, one of her roommates, had a stroke. at first, ellen and lucy, millie's "companion" as she was called, tried to take care of millie. but lucy didn't seem to be able to do it, and though the doctors said there was nothing technically wrong with lucy, the worse millie got, the worse lucy got. millie died soon after and lucy lost touch even more, sinking into her own depressed world where she was unable to come out of the past and into the present long enough to do things like take a shower or make herself a cup of coffee. ellen tried to care for lucy, but lucy's son, robert, thought this was a ridiculous setup. robert, with his general rude manner told ellen it was time for lucy to go to a home, even though it "killed him" to send her there. "what can i do," he told millie, "she can't even make herself a cup of coffee. she couldn't move in with me. i can't expose my kids to something like that."

lucy went off to a home. every time ellen visited, lucy would cry and cry and cry some more and hold ellen's hand real tight whenever she tried to leave. the nurse told ellen that robert hardly ever visited and when he did it was only for a few minutes. usually robert would yell at lucy for crying so much. according to the nurse, the only other visitor lucy had was one of her grandchildren, a young teen girl with a purple streak in her hair and a leather jacket she was never seen without. ellen knew that was miranda, who used to come to the house a lot and loved her grandmother. ellen was glad someone aside from her was there for lucy. four months later lucy died. ellen was sad, but glad lucy was out of her misery and out of the home.

while lucy was in the home, robert let ellen live in "lucy's house" and pay her rent to him, though he raised the amount quite a bit. ellen had to scrape her money together to have enough for everything. as robert was lucy's sole survivor and would inherit the house when lucy died, ellen knew the axe would fall soon enough. there was nothing she could do, and she wasn't going to suck up to robert. she couldn't live with herself if she did; besides she didn't think it would make any difference.

two days after lucy's funeral, robert called. the body's not even cold, ellen thought to herself. robert in his always patronizing tone told her he was sorry, but he was going to sell the house, for a price he knew ellen would never be able to afford. "what can i do," he told her, "my hands are tied." of course, robert didn't care that ellen had lived there over 30 years and it was more her home than his. she knew lucy and millie would want her to have it. what could she do? she had no proof, they had no contract, they had no nothing. who thought of such things? robert said he didn't want to force anything, but ellen had thirty days to move and he was going to start showing the house the next day. he hoped that didn't invade her privacy too much. sure, why would it, having strangers troop through the house you lived in for over 30 years, after one of your best friends who lived there had died a few days ago. what was it worth to say to this young fool? at least he produced miranda, ellen would tell herself so she wouldn't feel so bad.

of course, ellen couldn't find any apartment she could afford, what with rents being what they were these days. luckily, she

found a room and a half in a hotel/boarding house with a rent she felt she could pay regular. if she was careful with her money, and got those free lunches at the union hall, she could make it through the month. the room wasn't much, but it had a bed and a chair and a kitchenette with a stove and a small refrigerator. she missed her attic, but at least it was something. and there was a library around the corner, so she could always get new books to read. she was still a passionate reader and it was a very fine library. she knew it could be worse. she walked by as many homeless people as the next person.

ellen continued to do some union work, but it was getting harder for her to get around, and the streets were getting more dangerous. still and all, when one of the big wig union people called and asked if she would help organize a union blood drive to help people with AIDS, she couldn't refuse. she needed a project, and whenever she heard about AIDS, she couldn't help but think about ira and what he and his friends would've gone through if they were alive. yes, she would do it.

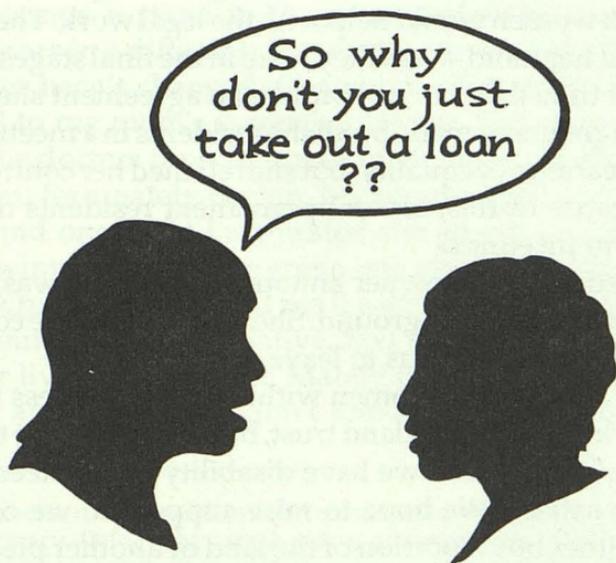
she worked hard and became the liaison between the blood bank and the union organizers. she liked all these people and they seemed to like her. she even gave blood, which she had never done before, just so she could see what it was like. even though ellen was working harder than she had in a long time, she thought she was more tired and had more pains in her stomach than was right. she went to the clinic and the doctor told her she had stomach cancer. he told her about all the options, about chemotherapy, radiation treatments, extending her life, medicines, side effects, chances, statistics, and her strong will. she told him she'd think about it all.

the pains and the tiredness got worse, but ellen was driven by her union project, so she tried not to think about it too much. the weekend of the blood drive came and it was a huge success. not only did tons of people come to give blood, but there was lots of media attention too. they even interviewed ellen at the blood bank. one of the journalists seemed enchanted with her and thought she'd do a series on her. ellen laughed, but still the journalist gave her her card and asked her to call.

at the end of this long and exciting day, ellen slowly walked home. she stopped at the library and took out a book. the librarian

excitedly told ellen she saw her on t.v. and she was great. ellen shook her head and thanked her. the librarian wondered why ellen was only taking one book out, instead of her usual six. ellen didn't have much to say, except it was all she needed right now. ellen went home, stuffed sheets and towels around the door frame, window frames and all the other cracks she could find in her room. she turned the gas oven on, lay down on the bed, and began to read. a neighbor smelled the gas eventually and by the time they broke in, ellen was dead and only half way through her book.

the union people took care of the funeral. she had a plot in the society section of the cemetery with the rest of her family. ira was buried elsewhere. some friends from the union, a couple of union big wigs, some people she'd met at the blood bank, miranda, and the journalist came to the funeral. the journalist still wanted to do a series on ellen. her editor thought it was sentimental crap, but finally agreed to let her do an extended obituary on ellen teban. it appeared in the paper the next day with an old photo of ellen at a union rally.



Max Hammond Dashú

Landowner-Tenant Problems on Lesbian Land

We are 7 residents/evictees of a woman's land owned by one woman. We have either already been evicted or have been asked to leave by the owner. The landowner received an inheritance when her parents died. She bought the land 11 years ago. The women's land started when she allowed 2 women to camp. They had an idea of a women's village and she liked it. The land grew.

The owner collected money from the women living on the land to pay the taxes and to support herself. Women also contributed money and much work energy to put in utilities, a bathhouse, common house, and several living structures. Women held meetings to make decisions on the land.

Some residents had learned about land trusts. This would give more security to permanent residents and would eliminate the expensive taxes once the land trust became a nonprofit tax-exempt organization. The owner liked it and agreed to put the land into trust if other women would help with the legal work. They did, but she changed her mind when they were in the final stages. This was not the first time that she had broken an agreement she made, or broken an agreement made by all the residents in a meeting. There was an appearance of equality, but she retained her control as landowner. Because of this, several permanent residents decided to stop going to meetings.

At a mediation the owner announced that she was changing the land to a private campground. She would be in sole control. She might ask many or all of us to leave.

We are low-income women without a lot of access to money. We are working to create a land trust, but we don't have the money to move right now. And we have disability access needs that are not easy to satisfy. We hope to raise support so we could raise money to either buy a portion of the land or another piece of land.

Fried Pies on the Fourth of July

I'm writing this on the Fourth of July. Fireworks going off in the background, facing an eviction notice when I get home. I've been gonna write something about "class" for a while but somehow in the flurry of my life it always gets pushed aside. That's a lie ... my life isn't that hectic. I'm on "vacation," sitting in an apartment visiting my oldest nephew, typing on his computer that he bought with blood money (Air Force pay), trying to figure out where to begin. My beginnings were 31 years ago, the fifth unwanted child of a sharecropper & his wife in rural Missouri. Daddy always called himself a farmer. But everybody knew he was just a sharecropper cause he didn't own any land. My mom never described herself as a farmer or a sharecropper, but always as his wife. We lived out in the country in an old run down house that belonged to someone else. It was the kind of house that always had broken down cars sitting up on cement blocks in the front yard, and tall weeds growing up around them. It was the kind of house that gives meaning to the words "white trash."*

Thirty one years later things haven't changed much. I still live in a run down house on land that someone else owns. I still live on food stamps & stand in the same welfare lines each month. Yeah, they are in a different state, but the look on the faces behind the counter hasn't changed. Contempt, USA style. Still, my life compared to my mom's is much different. She came out to visit me after the doctors found a tumor in my throat. It was the size of a lemon but fortunately benign. My mom stayed out on the land with me and one night I suggested she go out to dinner with a bunch of wimmin who were going into town. Later that night she came back full of herself, told me it was the first time she has ever been to dinner without a relative, first time in sixty-five years.

So our lives are different. Mainly cause I'm a radical lesbian separatist and she's not. I don't know how to explain why I'm

*The white racist rural semi-Southern community that I grew up in assumed white supremacy. Being white trash put us at the bottom of the pile of whites, but cause we were white it meant we were superior to all other racial and cultural groups regardless of their economic status.

sitting in my nephew's apartment other than to say that he's family. He's in recovery & that makes it easier. I must say it feels weird, his hetero life and all, but he's still family. Something about sitting in his vinyl recliner with the splits in the seat eating fried pies — the kind ya get 4 for \$1 on special at Fagans makes it feel less weird to be in his hetero world. At this point in my life there's not many members of my family that I can still hang out with. But I'm a lucky dyke, my family hasn't disowned me the way a lot of other wimmin's families have. My family knows what a lesbian is, and they've always known I was radical, so my not liking men just seemed logical to them. But I'm still family. This means a lot to me. Even though I have a very fucked up "dysfunctional" family, I know it's a place I can belong. This is another lie I tell myself ... that I can still belong to my family. I can't, I don't and I never will again. Not because I'm a radical lesbian separatist, but because I went to college. So far I'm the only one in my family that has went to college. Going to college was a way to escape. Escape poverty, abuse, shame and my family. But it didn't work. I became a dyke instead. I don't think I would have come out if I hadn't gone to college simply because I didn't even know of lesbians until then. That's the best thing that I got out of my college experience. Lesbianism 101.

My BA didn't get rid of the shame & guilt of poverty. In my head I know being poor is a type of political oppression. That it is not a reason to feel ashamed & guilty, but I can't quite get my heart to understand that. I can't seem to shake that feeling of being an outsider, never fitting in, like a square peg. You know the rest

In my head there's a constant voice pointing out to me all the ways I don't fit in. For years in college I tried to silence her by buying the right clothes, joining the right women's groups, volunteering at the right dyke events. At first glance, I fit right in with all the white middle class lesbians who surrounded me. I felt trapped, caught in something I couldn't taste, smell, touch, hear or see. That's another lie. I could taste my exclusion each day I sat alone eating my bologna on white bread instead of joining my friends at the local restaurants for lunch. I could smell the difference between leather coats & designer perfumes and my blue jeans and clearance Avon. I could touch difference when I laid on my army cot and them their water beds. I could hear the difference in my am/fm radio and their wimmin's music playing on stereos.

I could see the difference all around me. I thought about dying alot during those years.

I thought I'd found something different when I "discovered" wimmin's communities & lesbians' land. With a bad taste still in my mouth, I started reading about lands, talking to wimmin, and eventually visiting. The idea that there was a movement of wimmin who were trying to deal with the oppressions of patriarchy in their real every day lives thrilled the shit outta me. I spent years arranging my life so I could go visit these places of wonder.

Four and a half years ago I arrived at Adobeland in the sonoran desert outside Tucson. I had survived watching WhipperWillow, a wimmin's land in Arkansas, destroy herself and eventually get repossessed. Repossession was not a new idea to me. I'd seen that number many times before. I knew that wimmin living together in these ways, AND trying to buy land was too much. My own family had taught me how hard it was to try to live outside of mainstream white middle class america & survive, let alone buy land. Ha.

So when I arrived at Adobeland I knew it wasn't gonna be paradise or anything like a fairytale, but I had hope. The land was paid for, some of the wimmin had lived there for years, and it seemed like the community was working out ok. It took me two years to realize that things weren't as I had first thought. This is where my family shit, my class shit, and my lesbian shits hits the fan. I had scrimped and saved, and worked crappy jobs to get enough money to build a one room house and it had just burnt down. Of course I didn't have insurance.

I knew things weren't great at Adobeland but where was I supposed to go? Where was another wimmin's land that was in a climate my body could tolerate, where my daughter would be welcome, and close enough to a job source? I couldn't find one or I wouldn't have rebuilt after the fire. Needless to say I didn't have the money, or access to money to buy land of my own. Some of my friends have asked me why I didn't move into town and get an apartment. My only answer is I don't think I can survive the isolation that I feel living like that. The next time someone asks, I think I'm gonna give them a copy of this to read. If they still don't understand then I don't know how I'll explain it better or any different. Besides, living in town would mean eating beans four times a week.

Anyway I did rebuild. Many great things all came together at once and I was able to build a three room house for my daughter & I. My family helped me out as much as they could. A couple of weeks after the fire I got a check from my Mom for \$1200 from my hometown savings and loan where I knew she had her savings account and I sat down and cried. Then I called her and asked if she was sure she could give me that much. She answered, "I'm 63 years old. That's my life savings. If something happens to me how far is \$1200 going to go? Take and build your house. I'll sleep better knowing you all gotta place to live." So I took her \$ and it helped re-build my house.

Compared to the lean-to's and tents that other wimmin live in at Adobeland, my house is a condo. But when I applied for a county housing re-hab program I was denied because my house would take too much work to bring it up to code (things like plumbing, electricity, & running water). I was busy trying to put our lives back together, working a 40-hour job, raising my daughter & trying to work out community politics.

It had become obvious that things needed to change at Adobeland. Conflicts between Adobe, who owned the land & other residents were numerous. Taxes were unbelievably high. We decided to form a land trust. Adobe refused to give up control of her land. The land trust was dropped. Things got worse. And worse. After two years of fighting, mediation, and now lawyers, I'm facing another eviction. So much for change and class oppression.

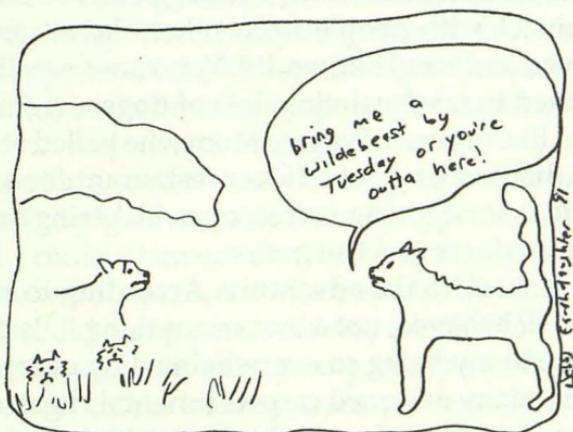
I might lose my house and definitely my home ... because Adobe owns the land and she doesn't like me any more. In the eyes of the law and the words of the lesbian community, it's her right to evict me and the six other wimmin that she's trying to evict. I never expected the law to be on my side, it never has been. But it hurts that a lot of wimmin who've heard about the situation apparently feel like it's OK that we're getting evicted. I've been told things like "after all it is *her* land" and "you should be grateful she let you live there as long as she did." Ad nauseum. I think the wimmin who are saying that are reacting out of fear of losing their own status quo. They also must be forgetting that we were living in a lesbian land community that was supposed to be dealing with oppressions. Obviously I wouldn't expect my slumlord to change his shitty attitude but I *do* expect wimmin who put out that they are willing to change to put their money where their

mouth is & Adobe simply hasn't done this. (And she's got plenty of company on that score.)

That voice inside my head is at it again. She's screaming, "I told you so. I told you so." Over & over. She's right, she did tell me not to trust. She told me not to hope. She told me not to believe that I could ever belong.

But you know what? In spite of it all I still have my hopes & dreams. In spite of that eviction notice in my face, I still believe that living in community on land with other lesbians will work. I ain't sure why I still got my hopes & dreams. Maybe since I don't have an inheritance to look forward to, I gotta hang onto my dreams to get me through the rough spots. I admit, I'm a little shaky as far as belonging is concerned, and my trust is cracked, but I know patriarchy. And when patriarchy struggles this hard to destroy something, it's because it's a threat to the big P.

I don't know where my daughter and I are gonna live. I don't know where the other wimmin who are getting evicted are gonna live. I look at homeless people & try to swallow the lump of fear in my throat. I remind myself to breathe. I listen to the fireworks outside the window & wonder if I'll ever belong.



Big kitties encounter the
concept of "rent."

Andover Inn Land

So, my Mother and I were having our weekly Saturday morning conversation when the topic of budget cuts in Massachusetts came up. We were especially appalled at the cuts in elder and child care. Each in her different words we expressed concern over what working Moms would do with their kids. Which led to what my Mom did with her kid — me!

My Mother was a waitress at the Andover Inn in Andover Massachusetts. An Inn connected to Phillips Academy, you know, the snoot school where wealthy kids from all over the world go. No, not Phillips *Exeter*, Phillips *Andover*. Anyways, mostly her and my Dad would work different shifts in order to ensure someone would always be home with their often sick, asthmatic kid: me. But a few times a week my Mom would work the breakfast or lunch shift and I would get to go to work with her. That's right, *get* to. It was a real adventure for me. My first exploration into the world of the wealthy.

Even though I grew up in Andover, my parents managed to protect me from the ravages of the elite by ensuring that we always lived on the wrong side of the tracks ("the Vale," a part of the town where a lot of the working class families lived), or in *West Andover*, where all the farmers were. Before the age of five I didn't have to come in contact with people from other classes and assumed everyone lived and acted like we did. You know, small houses that always seemed to need painting, lots of dogs, neighbors' homes that I treated like my own, Peggy's Mom who yelled at me as much as my own did, lots of great leftover restaurant food, one parent home at a time, loud loving voices, open bickering and disagreement, overt tiredness and frustration.

Anyways, back to the adventure. According to my Mother I was "very well behaved, not a brat or anything." Part of that was probably due to my being so overwhelmed by everything I saw. Deep, bright, many designed carpets (oriental rugs), ceilings that were at least a hundred of me high; plates with lots of tiny flowers (imported china), and flashing, dripping, beautiful lights (crystal

chandeliers). I often felt like I was in an enchanted land; and princesses in enchanted lands *did not* act like brats. They floated through the halls of the castle in long flowing dresses with all the servants admiring them and letting them do whatever they wanted to do. Which is exactly the way it was in Andover Inn Land. I pretended to float through the halls and all the staff kept a watchful kindly eye on me to make sure I was o.k. I became everyone's kid, the childcare responsibility of all the working class folks there. Johnny the chef let me lick spoons from huge pots that had bigger bellies than my Grandmas'. The desk clerk always had a piece of forbidden chocolate for me. The bell boy, George, sat with me and colored and told stories. The maids were always dusting off my head or my bum with huge feathered dusters. Waitresses scurried around and crooned at me or pinched my apple cheeks. What wonderful attention I got! And it all seemed quite normal to everyone there to have this four year old roaming the halls while her Mom worked. Now remember, this was 1957, and white women weren't supposed to be working, never mind bringing a kid along. But then again my Mom was always doing things she "shouldn't" be doing — just like all the other working class Moms I knew.

Upstairs where all the patrons were served was amazingly beautiful. Velvet walls that I stroked for hours. Woodwork so well shined I could make faces in it. And the grandfather clock. This clock was its own being. It clicked, and chimed, and buzzed, and had moons on its face that all looked different. Even though it was called a *grandfather* clock, I knew it was a *Grandmother*. Sometimes, when I gazed admiringly up at her I could even hear her speak to me in wisdom and love.

And if you happened to be there on a party buffet day you'd get to see the stuffed pig on the table with the apple in its' mouth. And all that food. I couldn't imagine anyone ever eating it all. First of all because there was so much of it. Rooms full! Secondly it was all so pretty, who would want to ruin the way it looked by eating it? But it did get eaten, and at a very young age the princess from the wrong side of the tracks learned about and tasted such delicacies as filet mignon and lobster thermador, cherried cheese cake and mint julep, baked alaska and glazed duck. But it wasn't till I moved

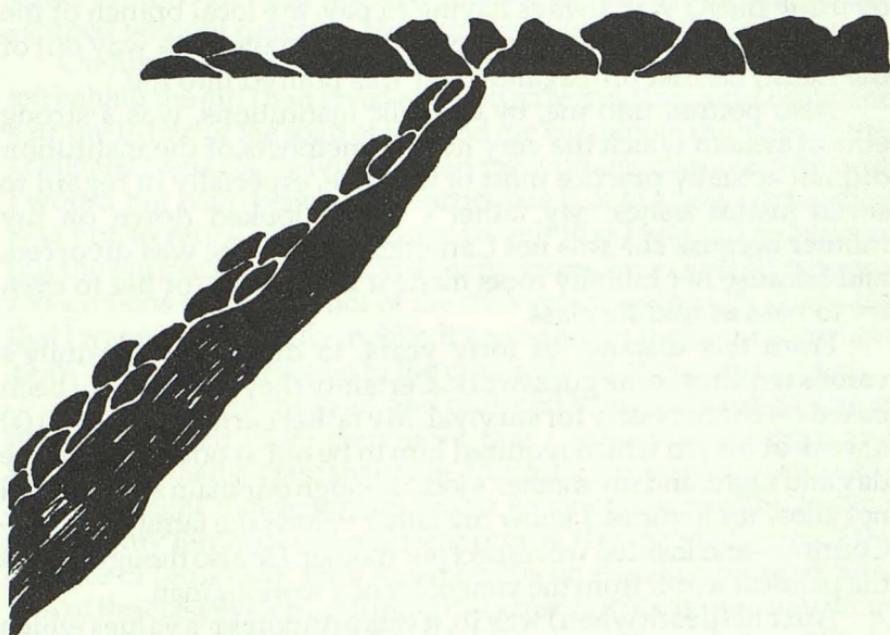
to Boston and started hanging out with middle class feminists that I learned that there were other kinds of cheese besides Velveeta, Crackerbarrel, and Land O' Lakes American.

Another place the princess liked to visit was the ladies lounge. Not bathroom, lounge. I was obsessed with bathrooms in general and everywhere I went my first tour stop would be the toilet. Now, you have to imagine what a ladies lounge in a place populated by rich people would look like to a four year old. Mirrors for days. I could see every side and part of me, and sometimes got dizzy from all the contorted positions I would find myself in. There were also ornately designed toilet paper holders that you could run your fingers over to feel the designs. At home we had the splintery wooden kind that always made such crass noises when you unrolled the paper. And there was a special smell too, not like the one that came out of the bottle with the green wick in our bathroom, but something sweet and subtle.

Eventually I would find my way to the gift shop. This is where all the people in the kingdom would bring their presents for me, the princess. I would judge which ones I liked and which ones I didn't. Which were pretty and which were insulting to royalty. I know now that every item there was handcrafted art and very expensive. When the shop closed the staff got to buy stuff that had been reduced greatly. My Mom bought a driftwood lamp that now sheds light on my bedtime reading. The only gift the princess "chose" to keep.

There was a scary place in Andover Inn Land too. When I was tired and had to take my nap I had to go down to the "dungeon" — the staff quarters in the basement where there were unlit, smelly, winding halls and tiny ugly rooms with no windows and jabby, metal beds. I hated this part. It totally destroyed my fantasy and made me face the fact that when it came down to it upstairs was for rich people and downstairs was my real world. Usually after I woke up from my nap it was the end of the shift and my Mother would come and get me and we would quietly leave through the basement employee entrance, which was advantageous because I was already back in my own reality and could transition much better for my next destination — home. Home was never as wonderful as upstairs in Andover Inn Land but it certainly

was tons better than the dungeon. I knew people would never choose to live in a place like the dungeon and wondered who had made it be a place for people like us, and why they had created something so horrible and ugly downstairs when there was so much beauty upstairs.



Benicia
Suz Fields

Confessions of a Working-Class Intellectual

I am the daughter of a taxi-driver and a beautician. Two of my three siblings did not finish high school. I grew up in a lower working-class neighborhood in industrial Cincinnati where economic survival was more important than education. We lived in a small gray shingled house next to the railroad tracks. Trains shook the house several times a day. Because my father was Catholic, I went to a Catholic grade-school and later a Catholic high school. For some reason I was an intellectual from an early age. I wrote letters to the editor of the local paper when I was 12. I objected to the racism against Black people that permeated every level of cultural life in Cincinnati in the 1950s. Although my mother often threatened to take my library card away from me because of the overdue fines I was always having to pay, the local branch of the Public Library probably saved my life, as it gave me a way out of the racist/classist propaganda that was poured into me.

Also poured into me, by Catholic institutions, was a strong ethical system which the very human members of the institution did not actually practice most of the time, especially in regard to social justice issues. My father's family looked down on my mother because she was not Catholic, because she was divorced, and because her hillbilly roots made it impossible for her to even try to pass as middle-class.

From this distance of forty years, to describe my family's values requires some guesswork. Certainly they would have been based on the necessity for survival. My father earned about \$30.00 a week at his job which required him to be out at odd hours of the day and night, and my mother's job, although our main support, did not allow for luxuries. I know my father valued the family name — Courtot — and insisted we respect our mother. He also thought about the political world from the viewpoint of a workingman.

After his death when I was 10, it was my mother's values which predominated. She valued her hillbilly pride, hard work for its own sake, self-reliance to the point of destructive pride, silence and stoicism. She did not value acquisitiveness, things in themselves, order, cleanliness, or submission in women. From a matriarchal family herself, she exhibited to her children her own matriarchal strength, and in an era which had terrorized millions of white

women into staying in their homes, she worked six days a week in the beauty salon. If she was bothered by neighbor women's judgments she did not let us know about it.

When I slammed shut the door of my house as a child to go out into the world, I had to leave behind my parents' values to enter the middle-class institutions of school and church, which had been designed in all their parts, sometimes intentionally and sometimes not, to foster in me a hatred of those values, a hatred for my self. In order to succeed in the world I would have to deny my deep root system and to become something different, a social construct of an upwardly-mobile working person who would succeed or fail depending on how much of myself I could remove, forget, leave behind.

Perhaps because of my turning to books to save me, and perhaps because of my lesbian self which I knew from an early age, and which would not permit me to accept all the lies that were poured into me, I never succeeded in leaving behind me my parents' values, or the working-class person I am. I have brought her into everything I have done, even when I did not have a name for her. This is not to say I escaped without damage. The damage is deep and life long.

On July 4, 1960 I left Cincinnati for a new life in New York City. I left behind the girl I had loved all through high school, my family, and a future in one of the soap or tool and die factories of the gloomy city. I believed I was also leaving behind my working-class self, although I would not have been able to articulate it at the time. Actually, it was not so much my working-class self that I wanted to jettison, but the entire class system. For many years, I was able to bury my recognitions of the injustice of the class system in the U.S. It was not that I was ever upwardly mobile, it was only that I believed somehow as an artist, I was immune to the ramifications of the class system.

After I had my children, and returned to my lesbian self, I must have been even more convinced that I was escaping once and forever the deadly class structure. My lesbian self arose again in the same moment that feminism found its voice: for me, my lesbian self and my feminist self married forever. It seemed to me that the essence of feminism, with its emphasis on equality, was a refutation of the class system. All that I did arose out of my own working-class understanding of the world. Into every room that I walked I brought the shame that is given to working-class people early on. My pain and my triumphs were tinged with my woundedness as a working-class woman.

I struggled with other lesbian/feminists, we had land wars and we had sex wars: we had triumphant beginnings and strife-

filled endings, and in all of this my class and the class of the women I worked with dominated everything. Yet it was unacknowledged. Slowly my damaged self began to speak. It accused, it cajoled, it pleaded with women, mostly middle-class women, to see it, to respect it, to make space for it. When I realized that this would not happen, something changed in me forever. No longer can I remain innocent to the place that class has in our system. No longer can I pretend a solidarity with middle-class women, when their privilege and my powerlessness prevent true communication, true equality. Perhaps one of the dirtiest secrets I have kept from the world is this: that I cannot trust middle-class women. Although I have loved them, worked with them, hurt with them, intimacy is impossible.

Unless you have been covered in shame for what you are at the deepest core of your being, you cannot imagine what it is like for me as a working-class woman. I recognize other working-class women in this way; by the shame they carry with them into each room, each situation of their lives. There is so much confusion about class in this country; so many women in the Seventies wanted to proclaim themselves working-class, mistakenly believing this would make them morally superior to middle-class women. Women searched in their childhood histories for any evidence to prove their right to call themselves working-class — and for some women, it is true that their working-class history has been obfuscated by their families' upward mobility.

Contemporary lesbian culture seems to be based on the idea that lesbians share a solidarity which crosses all lines of race, ethnicity, class and economic station. This illusion has created confusion and pain for many lesbians.

One incident in my class struggle with lesbians is prominent in my mind, because it was so well-meaning, and so foolish and hurtful. In 1980, a class war erupted in Santa Rosa, California at the women-owned Moonrise Cafe. It was generated by the racism and classism experienced by the women who were part of the collective of the cafe. In order to try to connect with each other, and to heal the separations, we began a series of community discussions of racism and classism. Women of color, justifiably, refused to participate in the racism discussions, and white women in the community never confronted ourselves on our racism. An ongoing meeting of many women in the community to "deal" with class issues did happen. Ultimately, I think we only managed to injure each other further.

I understand better now some of the factors which were involved, not the least of which was working-class self-hatred.

One of the things we did was try to define stereotypes about middle-class women and working-class women by sitting together in the room and shouting out stereotypes. The general idea was that once we had flushed the stereotypes out of our systems, perhaps we could meet each other on common ground. The working-class women were stunned and hurt to discover the stereotypes that not only middle-class women harbored about us, but that working-class women ourselves believed. The stereotypes about working-class women were centered on shame, failure, and a general sense of uncleanness, while the middle-class stereotypes centered on the opportunities they had and the things they owned. There was no discussion then about the paucity of values in the middle class, or how damaging the stereotypes about working-class people were compared to the ones about middle-class people. Rather, we sat stunned. We could not go on. Here is the result of the exercise.

WORKING-CLASS STEREOTYPES

working class women steal
can't handle their money
don't know how to drive properly
have rundown looking cars
are often guilty of bad judgment
are very wasteful
die in debt
work for wages
marry into trouble
have quick sex
often experience incest
are noisy
have sex all the time
are ignorant about contraception
like to hang out at bars
are better lovers
are earthy and in touch
don't work
are lazy, unskilled, stupid
once a con always a con
can't get jobs because they didn't
study hard enough in school
do not have stress in their jobs
are unreliable
accident prone

MIDDLE-CLASS STEREOTYPES

are more sensitive lovers
can get abortions
must drink before sex
go to encounter groups
live on women's land
afraid of commitment
have credit cards
are able to get vacations
have allowances
buy "things" with their money
can buy new cars
buy houses
have salaries
have careers
go to college
get their way paid through
college
marry money
run factories
have secretaries
have stress on their jobs
job security
work not for money
can be volunteers
eat balanced diets

will do anything for work
work for lower wages
they do not know which fork to use
eat lots of sugar and starch
do not know good nutrition
eat out of cooking pots
eat out of cans
talk with their mouths full
have their elbows on the table
are welfare mothers

dress for dinner
have dining rooms in their
houses
eat dinner at 6
the family eats together
they eat breakfast
have extra food
have fresh orange juice
drink wine with dinner
have enough to eat

Working-class lesbians internalize the shame that is used to damage our spirits. When we get a good job, or make it to college, or are able to pass in middle-class society due to a special gift or interest, somewhere deep in us we believe we are impostors. This belief limits our ability to make strong choices in our lives, choices for ourselves that come from the very root of our being.

Although lesbians have tried to develop a solidarity with each other, a community of loving women, the truth is that class difference, damages, and middle-class privilege and working-class shame are among the things that have prevented this from happening. My own task these days is to continue to work on my shame and my self-hatred. I was a little girl "too smart for her own good" who had a great yearning for a wider world, but who refused to leave her parents and her own class values at the door. By middle-class standards I have had no great jobs, and I have not accomplished what was in me to accomplish with my writing. The injuries of the class system have damaged and informed my life. I am grateful for a lesbian identity, but I do not delude myself that I share a universal solidarity with lesbians because I have been actively oppressed by middle-class lesbians.

The road I have taken away from my root system has never been able to take me away from both the love and the shame of my childhood. It saddens me that my granddaughter, and all the granddaughters of the working class, will continue to experience this assault on their loving selves, and will be forced, by an acquisitive society and by middle-class institutions, to carry a shame with them because they do not measure up to standards which have created so much havoc in the world.

In The Clouds

I work on the fourteenth floor of the Medical Research building in Minneapolis. I have my own office with a big window so I can watch the birds. Once a day at two-thirty p.m. I drop to the second floor to pick up the Doctor's mail. Twice a week I pick up lymphocyte culture. In between I xerox photographs of lymph cells, type articles on the discoveries the Doctor makes about bone marrow, and organize our patient files. I've been part of the BMT team for the last ten years.

"Bone Marrow Transplant program, this is Angela."

Before I became a secretary I was a paleontology major, MESOZOIC era. I studied bones. Mostly dinosaur bones. In my senior year I realized there was not much of a future in dinosaurs. I signed up for one excavation. We went looking for the Apatosaurus in Utah. We didn't find any. For two months I graded the earth with a small steel spade from six in the morning until six at night. When I came back I quit school and became a secretary. How could I know then that in ten years the MESOZOIC would be in fashion — the year of the dino, the dino-fest. I flew to San Francisco for that, came back with dino-magnets, balloons, buttons, and dino-pins for everyone. The Doctor was surprised to find out I knew anything about dinosaurs.

"Bone Marrow Transplant program, this is Angela."

I believe dinosaurs carry the sacred code to life. They are ancient gods; we could learn a lot from them. For one thing, patience. Dinosaurs are like secretaries that way. Most humans don't understand patience anymore, we want everything now. We don't understand evolution, time. Look how long it took the dinosaurs to get any recognition. I happen to know that in a billion years anthropologists are going to dig up all these file cabinets and discover that secretaries were the bones of this civilization.

"Bone Marrow Transplant program, this is Angela."

Not that I mind. It seems sort of cosmic that I ended up in BMT, really, considering my previous interest in bones and then my childhood. I used to suck the marrow out of pork chops. Once a

week my mother fried pork chops. The whole family (I have eleven brothers and sisters) passed their hip and shoulder bones to me. I'd stick my tongue in the hole and suck the marrow clean; it tasted like sweet baby food. (I don't eat meat now; it's bad for your heart and complexion. Six years ago I went on a high-protein diet and my nose broke out. Before that I'd had a beautiful complexion, smooth as a vinyl couch.) Then, when I was in sixth grade, my parents thought I had leukemia. It turned out to be constipation but in my own small way I'd faced death all the same and I know how it feels. The people in my files face their own individual extinction every day for years. Now that's patience. Not that I've ever met any of them—not in person. This floor is strictly research. I've thought of it, though, of looking them up. Maybe some day. They'd probably think it was strange.

"Bone Marrow Transplant program, this is Angela."

Each patient moves from a referral file to a candidate file to a patient pending file while the doctors prepare for a donor. When they've got one and the patient has been admitted to the hospital they go into an active file. I draw a little happy face on those, little happy marrow faces. I memorize all their names and keep track of their transplants and progress. Some bodies may try to defend themselves against the foreign marrow, and vice versa. In each of my cabinets I put herb-filled sachets for good luck. A-F gets fennel. G-L gets lemon mist. L-P gets potpourri, and so on. Every three months I replace the sachets.

"Bone Marrow Transplant, this is Angela."

Some patients never find a compatible donor. Marta Gataran. She was a patient five years back. Blood type O, Rh negative. Date of birth 8-21-29. She had no relatives here, only cousins in East Berlin and the government wouldn't let them over. Our government. Marta didn't want her cousins' marrow anyway; she said she'd rather eat snake skin. That statement wasn't on the chart. I overheard the Doctor repeat it to another doctor. I couldn't tell whether he thought Marta was being silly or patriotic. The Doctor doesn't have time to put inflection in his voice. Some days when I pick up the mail I'll see him in the hall thinking or discussing new transplant techniques with the other doctors. I walk right by and he doesn't blink or say hello. The first times this happened I

thought he didn't like me; then one day I realized he didn't know it was me. He doesn't recognize me when I'm not behind my desk or associated with the file cabinets. Associative memory. The Doctor has never had to make room for people and things he doesn't think are important. Every brain is different. His has evolved that way. He doesn't have extra room for new combinations that don't help him save lives. What can you say to someone with all that responsibility?

"Bone Marrow Transplant, this is Angela."

The Doctor has one twelve-year-old daughter who's a genius. Elizabeth. Elizabeth goes to a special school where they teach her mathematics and science. She calls every day after lunch and since the Doctor is never able to come to the phone she talks to me. We discuss dinosaurs, birds, cold fusion and military strategies to protect the planet from aliens. Elizabeth says we have no reason to believe aliens are going to like us. No reason to believe they won't, I tell her. Can't always count on the worst. I try to help Elizabeth make room to see things in new ways, but she's already being trained in preparations. What's it going to look like, I say, when the aliens come and here we are all ready to extinguish them. What kind of way is that to start a new relationship? And if they're so advanced as to fly all the way over from another galaxy, we're going to need them more than they need us. Elizabeth doesn't answer that; she doesn't think she needs anyone. She only sighs her heavy twelve-year-old sigh.

Elizabeth also worries that I'm not getting all my amino acids. She likes to name them. Proline, Histidine, Isoleucine, she says. If I have time I tell her about the Apatosaurus. The Apatosaurus was a vegetarian and one of the largest of all the dinosaurs, seventy-five feet long and sixty thousand pounds. The Apato was so large it had to evolve two brains. One in its small head that connected up all the messages from its spine and neck and then another one in its large posterior to control its bony tail, which was thirty feet and twenty-four thousand pounds in itself. The Apato's amazing size kept the saw-toothed carnivorous dinosaurs like the Allosaurus and Tyrannosaurus at bay. (Smaller dinos like the Ankylosaurus were armed with steel-like skin and clubbed tails. Others matched the terrain completely. Every dinosaur had its defense mechanisms but I don't tell this to Elizabeth.)

"BMT, this is Angela."

I start work every morning at eight. On Mondays and Wednesdays I come at six in my old jeans and sweatshirt when no one is here. No waiting for the elevator. I sit in my office chair and I lean back, watch the sky open and the birds awaken. Up here they fly level, float around and around. Sometimes two birds fly so close together their wings touch. Just the tips. They glide past my big window and peer inside at me. Scientists used to think dinosaurs were wiped out by asteroids, radiation, or glaciers. Now the theory is they evolved into birds. Only the dino had that special hinged bird-ankle and bird-hip bone that points down and backwards. The Archaeopteryx, which was half dino half bird, had a long bony tail but from its shoulder bone sprouted feathered wings.

"BMT, this is Angela."

I can still see the grace of the dino in them. They shed all their heavy defenses for flight. I saw one bird that must have evolved from an Ankylosaurus. Her eyes flitted and she wagged her tail as though she still thought she had a club on it. I called that bird Annie. Once I invited the Doctor's daughter to come watch with me. We pulled a chair in from another office and we sat here looking up at the sky while the birds floated around and around in the clouds. The dawn cracked open with pinks, yellows and salmon oranges. Wow, is all Elizabeth could say; we didn't talk about aliens that morning. Later Elizabeth left for school. I changed into work clothes for another day at the office.

"BMT, this is Angela."

Hard to believe that without that little bit of sweet meat in our bones we can't survive.

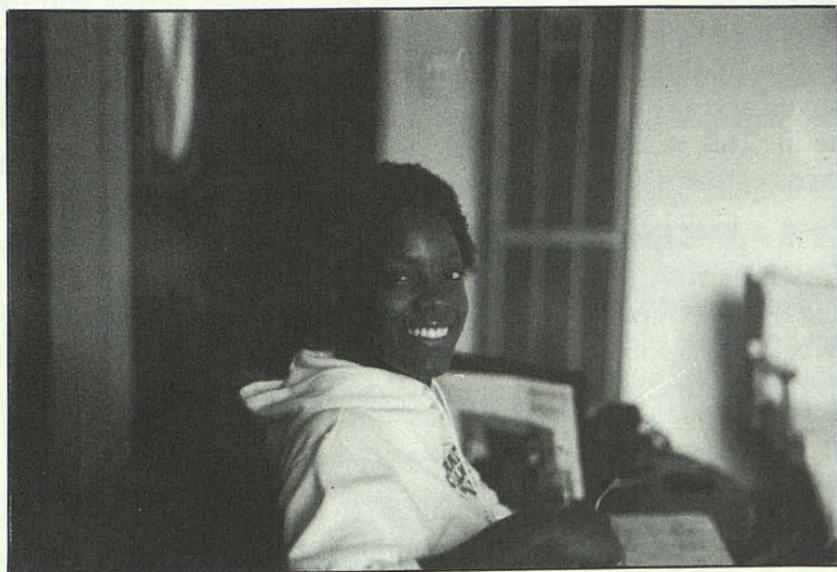
"BMT, this is Angela."

It all starts with that referral file. That's when their trouble begins. Jackie Richards, Norman Meyer, Michelle Barrone. The youngest one was Clara Hutton, six months old. Leukemia. The transplants went all right but three weeks later an infection leaked into her system. Clara died. October 2, 1987. Weight 11.7 pounds. I came in early that day. The sun was a creamy white dipped in the color of ancient red clay. It pushed up inch by inch, raising its big head slowly and gracefully until we faced each other through the window. For 4.6 billion years the sun has been doing that. Now that's patience.

"BMT, this is Angela."

Patients always die. Ian Bolevecheck, Marta Gataran, Clara Hutton. I'm supposed to move them straight from the active file to the closed file but I do a little something special for them. While the Doctor sits in on status meeting, I close the door. Then I roll my chair back from my desk and take off my shoes. I climb on the desk on my knees. I remove the top yellow paper from their file, with their name on it, and I press the paper flat against the window pane. Sometimes the birds come. Sometimes they don't. But it makes me feel better. I imagine that the patients' souls are with the dinos.

During times like this, I just let the phones ring.



Alex Alexander (color photo)
Corie Lamere

Full Time Debt, Part Time Money

I grew up in a white, rural and working class home. At seventeen I left my blood family and the Iowa countryside for a nearby town. I moved in with a stranger and got a job waitressing at a truck stop. With some help from friends and no help from blood family, I have supported myself since then. I've earned money doing farm work, legal work, secretarial work, child care, waitressing, teaching, and facilitating workshops about internalized oppression. Due to a chronic illness and my beliefs I work part time, no matter what the job.

"Personal Income"

Like rainfall figures, my annual gross income varies from year to year. Sometimes there's plenty of rain, sometimes it's dry. Like most creatures, when there's plenty, I recover from the drought and prepare for the next one. In 1986 my gross income was \$16,900, my lifetime high. In 1987 I was ill and moved across country; income sank to \$5,000. For part of 1988 I made \$20 per hour, another lifetime high. That year I earned \$16,400. In 1989 I got fired, moved across town, and couldn't find work that would not make me ill. This resulted in \$8,600 income. Last year I moved back across country and still earned \$15,000.

I'm a paralegal with a law degree and a decade of experience. I work for a straight feminist attorney in private practice. She pays me \$17 an hour plus parking costs. I work about twenty-five hours a week on a flexible schedule. Four wimmin work in the office and nearly all our clients are wimmin. These are my fringe benefits.

"Family Money"

Annual income figures explain only part of how money flows through my life. Lesbian family members have always been part of my money scene. Consider how I get around. My then partner, Marilyn, loaned me \$1500 to buy a van. It took me a year and a half to pay her back. She did not charge me interest and never made me feel guilty about the loan. When I bought my current car a dear

friend named Emma co-signed on the loan. She had a credit history, I didn't. I make the car payments and both of our names are on the title. If anything happened to me, I'd be happy for her to have the car.

Emma values clothes and how she feels in them; that fits her fancy job in city government that requires them. When she changes wardrobes, she gives me many of her cast offs. I appreciate this. It significantly increases the money I can spend on books for the lesbian archives I maintain. I seldom buy clothes even though I sometimes feel strange in Emma's. Her clothes don't quite fit either my style or my body. But clothes simply aren't that important to me and I hate shopping for them. Going through closets at her house is fun.

Over the years my lesbian family and I have often loaned or given each other money. The amount loaned or given was determined by how much the one had to give and how much the other needed. We have negotiated terms. By sharing our money we create bonds with each other. I'm proud of how we have sustained each other in times of need.

I remember one such sharing a couple years ago. I had lost my job and my partner. Heat and humidity were choking my body and I was depressed and suicidal. I applied for job after job and even got a few interviews, but unemployment, savings, and the will to confront further public assistance forms dwindled away. Sheila, a friend and ex-lover, gave me \$1500. I lived on that for three months until I finally got a job.

Despite all this give and take I have never pooled money with anyone. One lover and I bought a picnic cooler and a record together, just so I could say I have jointly owned something with someone. I'd like to pool money with someone I trusted just to see how it felt. I suppose I haven't ever pooled money because I have only once lived with a lover, Marilyn. She and I were from different class backgrounds, she had a child, and we weren't together long. I have never had a friend who seriously considered pooling money with me although I have suggested it.

Like everyone, I suppose, I have struggled about money stuff with loved ones. This was true for Marilyn and me. I traded grocery shopping for her cleaning the house. This was a class and disability based decision. I have numerous allergies to nearly all cleaning products. She doesn't. She sometimes wanted to pay her

friends to clean the house for \$35. I didn't. I also didn't like the way she spent money at the grocery store. In theory, the trade seemed to settle our differences. In practice, it didn't.

First we bumped into differences over what produce and other grocery items to have in the house at any one time. I was used to going to the grocery once every two weeks and buying what I could afford. If I came home one night and didn't have the thing I really wanted to eat, I ate something else. I ate whatever was there until everything was gone. Like most working class people, I learned to make do with what I had and didn't make special trips for specific things. I waited until the next grocery trip.

Marilyn was raised solidly middle class. She was used to eating pretty much exactly what she wanted each night so she didn't like running out of anything. If we didn't have what she wanted in the house, she would often jump into her car and go to the store for one or two items. She grew up in suburbia with grocery stores down the street. I grew up on the farm with the nearest store miles away. While living with her, I struggled not to pick up her habit of going to the grocery store every few days.

She wanted her refrigerator and cupboards full, all the time. As a general rule of thumb, she wanted three cans of each item we stored in the cupboard. When she said this I remember being stunned. I noticed she kept rolls and rolls of toilet paper on hand. That made me smile from all the times I had cursed myself for running out. She wanted that familiar feeling of abundance around her.

Having that much food around was overwhelming to me. I did nearly all the cooking and felt responsible for the food not going to waste. For many months I had to remind myself to buy more food than I thought we needed. Initially I shopped at a discount supermarket that had limited brand selection and low prices. I soon learned that the brand of an item was also important to her. I again changed my habits to fit her needs, I regularly shopped at stores which carried her preferred brands. As you can probably tell from the tone of this writing, I never quite got over my resentment that I had traded her whipping out \$35 once a month for someone else to clean the house in exchange for my spending hours and money to satisfy her food needs. I never valued her ways as deeply as mine.

“Government Spending”

My friends and I do not charge interest on our loans to each other. Interest is yet another way the wealthier make money off the poorer. I hate paying interest and avoid it when possible. For instance, I've avoided credit cards. The notion of paying 18% interest makes me livid.

My disgust hasn't kept me from paying interest. I pay 10% interest on a \$5,000 car loan and 9% interest on the \$10,000 remaining on my school loans. I once sat down and figured out what interest would mean in my life. On paper it says I borrowed about \$23,000 for college and law school. After bank fees and government charges, I actually received only \$19,000. I will pay back nearly \$45,000. This boils my blood, especially when I hear stories from more affluent friends who defaulted on their school loans and later cut deals with lenders to make one much lower, large payment. In other words, they didn't have to pay interest. I'm glad they didn't have to pay interest, I wish we all didn't.

Attending law school and working in law gives me certain privileges. At the same time, those experiences oppress me and others. I discovered too late that law is about power not justice. Law work drains my heart. It also pays the debt and allows me to maintain a way of life which supports my well-being. I have a hard time perceiving which way the balance tips.

In 1995 I will be debt free if I make all my payments at current rates. My history makes that seem unlikely. I've deferred payments while in the Peace Corps, while ill for months on end, and during a period of unemployment. Still, four years feels so tangible. Having the debt shapes my sense of freedom. I wonder what not having it will feel like. Will its end somehow finish what law school meant to me? Will I choose a different lifestyle which requires less income? Will I leave legal work?

“Personal Spending”

So what do I do with my money. In part it depends on whether its a wet year or a dry year. Its rainy this year and I have the highest standard of living I've ever experienced. This means my rent, phone bill, and travel adventures are up.

As usual I purchase new and used stuff for the lesbian archives that I started years ago. The archives is mostly a lending library of lesbian non-fiction and a collection of lesbian newsletters. I value it above many things. The percentage of my resources that have gone into it reflects that valuing. As usual I also spend money on music making stuff. I play various instruments which I own and maintain. To listen to other wimmin's music, I have a record player, a tape deck, a tuner, and speakers.

In writing this article I thought back over the years about some of my bigger purchases. I've owned three record players in my life. The first I bought from a high school music teacher for \$50. I used it for nine years and then gave it away. I bought another which I used for the next nine years. It broke and was unfixable. It's sitting in the closet until I discover a place to recycle it. The third record player, I just bought last month for \$130. I sure hope it lasts nine years.

About once every season I check to see what my current income is and what I am buying with my resources. I jot down a budget and consider what things I need to save for in the next six months. My current monthly net income of \$1400 goes out something like this on a monthly basis:

| | |
|--|-------|
| Debt payments for school and car | \$380 |
| Rent, heat, electricity, and clothes washing costs | 375 |
| Food | 125 |
| Automobile gas, oil changes, maintenance, insurance | 100 |
| Telephone services | 90 |
| Archives materials | 70 |
| Furniture, Musical instruments & Electronic equipment | 50 |
| Travel and Moving Expenses | 50 |
| Savings | 30 |
| Donations to Lesbian Groups | 25 |
| Health Care (e.g., massage, vitamins, meditation tapes, state park tag) | 25 |
| Gifts to individual lesbians | 25 |
| Home and garden maintenance | 20 |
| Spiritual aids (e.g., candles, tarot decks, spiritual books) | 10 |
| Lesbian cultural supplies (paper, postage, art supplies, blank tapes) | 10 |
| Quilting/sewing stuff | 10 |
| Clothes | 5 |

Each month's expenditures don't look like this because one must save and save before making big purchases or paying big bills. I save for everything from my car insurance payments to dental exams.

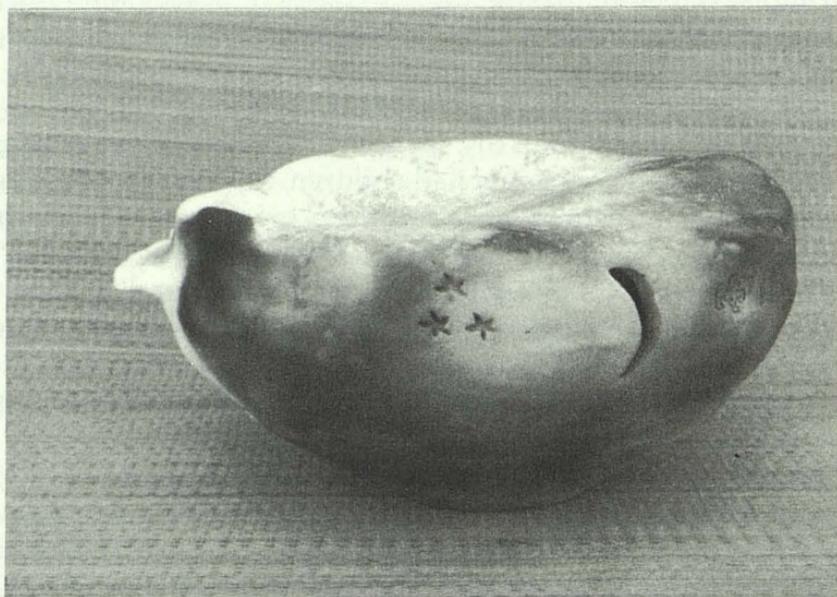
"The Bottom Line"

Writing this, I wonder if my spending habits are as unusual as they feel to me. Never having had children, domestic animals, or house payments distinguishes me from many other dykes. In addition, I don't entertain myself the way most dykes do. I don't own a TV or a VCR. I rarely go to movies or "cultural" events. I don't give money to religious or AIDS organizations. I seldom eat in restaurants. These habits make me feel "other." Perhaps it's the warp between my working class background and my middle class education.

Throughout my adult life I've spent most of my resources on education, travel, books and music. I look at this list and feel how upper-middle class it is. That label makes me feel ashamed even though I value my choices in the context of my life. For instance, the formal education may not have been that valuable in and of itself, but it was valuable as a means for me to increase my self-esteem.

When I've asked dykes about their incomes, debts, and money sharing activities the conversations usually end rather quickly with uncomfortable silences. Perhaps a dozen lesbians have shared their complete money situations with me. Is that common? I have no idea. I hope all this detail about my money will inspire other lesbians to talk specifically about their money. Too often we don't share enough detail with each other about what resources we have or how we really spend what we have. My real hope is the more we know, the easier it will be for us to experience sharing.

At this time I have a comfortable standard of living and am thankful for it. I share resources of some sort or other with everyone I meet and many I do not meet. That sharing allows me to give to myself, too. I'm glad for what I have been able to give myself, I need it and I still feel guilty for saying that. I hope to shed the guilt, keep the peace, and increase the sharing.



Ceramic drums
12" high, 15" diameter
Suz Fields

All the Pieces I Never Wrote About Class

These are all the pieces I've never written about class. Because they are too hard to think about. Because no one wants to hear it anyway. Because it is overwhelming in its complexity and I can't hang with it long enough to get the depth we need for real understanding. Because it is overwhelming in its simplicity, and I can't understand how it can go on year after year. I may never finish any of these pieces, but I can tell you what they're about.



There's the one about language, and the terms we use to discuss class. Classism and poverty are not the same thing. Working-class is not poor. And broke is not poor. Doctors are not working-class, just because they work. Plumbers are not middle-class just because they make money. Preachers and teachers are not working-class just because they don't.

Working-class is not a working-class term.

Class is not money. And class is not the same thing for white lesbians as for lesbians of color or Jewish lesbians.



Poverty is not-having-money, not-by-choice. Not-having-money has an impact on one's growth, health, education; not-having-money limits access to food, clothes, beds and bedding, health care, transportation. By this last, I do not mean having a Chevy instead of a Lincoln. I mean, having no means of escaping the ravages of weather for which you already lack protective clothing.

Poverty, that is, not-having-money, can limit or eliminate the ability to grasp that choices exist. They don't exist, or are very circumscribed, in the deeper realms of poverty in the U.S. Not-having-money erases the future before it can be imagined. You can see how things could be different if you had the money to make them different, because you can see that people with money have

things different, and they're not smarter or better than you, they just have this money, see, and if you had it too, you'd make things better, but you don't have money, and you already work as many hours as there are in the week, and so does everybody else in the household, and things still aren't any better, so what possible reason could there be for even thinking about it?

Poverty erases the future before it can even be imagined.



There's the one about how we always write about our fathers. The indignities they faced, the jobs they died from, the freedoms they never knew. It's all true, but where are the womyn? It never seems the same when we talk about our mothers. The indignities they faced, the jobs they died from, the freedoms they never knew. Women being denied pride just isn't as photogenic. Only men are expected to have dignity anyway.



And then there's the one about casually-thought-out barter systems. Lesbians are fond of this idea. Only certain artisans and professionals have skills which can easily be exchanged. You can't swap what you do in a factory for what someone else does in a restaurant. So the dykes likely to be making the most money, i.e., those with artisan skills and professions, trade with each other. They were the only ones who could afford their services to begin with, but never mind, I'm being picky. They would get to keep their cars and property in good repair at no loss of cash. This would increase their disposable income for the purchase of more consumer items which they can maintain for free through the lesbian network of repair-dykes. So they can buy even more things. Electronics. Cars. (Cruises?) The folks who wait tables, stock shelves, cap bottles on an assembly line, answer phones at businesses or crisis centers have nothing negotiable in most community barter systems. And if you're already on GA, has your lesbian community ever made you feel so welcome you'd sign up for this? Or would they make you feel that, for you, it's just another form of welfare?

Of course, many people who are unemployed, on government assistance, or in low-income jobs have valuable talents, but that involves time spent working in the community for barter, plus

their 40 (or more) hours for survival. Some lower-class services are in demand by others. I guess a toilet cleaner can trade with a therapist, but I don't imagine they'll ever feel like equals. Most lower class dykes are considered just as "unskilled" by the barter system as we are by the monetary system. Different classes exist, and an ill-considered barter system would contribute to the gaps among them.



And another one about language. The language lower-class dykes use about ourselves. Working-class is not a working-class term. We think of ourselves as regular folks who would go right on being regular if we somehow acquired the money to keep body and soul together. (I often think we are mistaken in this.) Sometimes we know that we are The Working People, as opposed to those whose careers consist of managing our working, or those who haven't even the advantage of employment. But, labeling us by the jobs we hold is something imposed from the outside. It is not a badge of distinction, only a mark of inferiority. Those who no longer labored, but held professions or management positions, gave us a name that really only meant them-not-us. Do we cling to it to distance us from the really poor?

Which brings me to the really poor. Being poor is not the same thing as being working-class. The latter term refers to those who have an income, however insufficient it may be, and whose income is the result of labor. Those whose lives are spent in chronic unemployment, for instance, or on welfare, in subsistence farming, or in the cycle of capture-and-release from the systems of incarceration are poor and face an entirely different set of circumstances. The determination of who will be working-class and who will be poor in the U.S. is in many respects a racial determination. All people of color are not poor and all white people are not middle-class. Large groups of each live in what I refer to as the lower classes.

Lower-class is my current preferred term for working-class, working-poor and poor. I use it to combat the sole use of the term working-class, which renders everyone else below middle-class invisible. I recommend use of the term lower-class with considerable caution, though, because, like all supposedly generic terms, it could be abused to create yet another we-are-all-alike myth.



And one about middle-class language used to discuss class. Too often, middle-class discussions of class and classism quickly devolve into efforts to establish that they don't have as much privilege as others (that would be us) seem to think they have.

But being broke is not not-having-money. It is only being unable to locate the amount of spending money one wants for a specified time. Low-on-cash is a temporary state within a life of being in possession of sufficient, if not abundant, cash. This is not poverty.

And, as briefly as is lesbianly possible, I would like to discuss — no, let's be honest, I would like to *dispose* of the term "chosen poverty." I grant no quarter to lesbians who think they've joined the lower classes in America by selectively saying no to their privilege. Sometimes they do this because they believe it to be the conscientious means of achieving class equality; but sometimes it's because they don't want to work with men, or because they feel better about themselves by withdrawing from the imperialist economy, or because Mercury is retrograde. (No slur intended against astrology, only against the use of knowledge we acquire in our leisure to claim that we have no leisure.) Poverty is not-having-money due to conditions beyond one's control. To choose to be relatively moneyless within an essentially self-controlled life is simply not poverty. You'll just have to come up with another term (or, preferably, knock it off!) and disabuse yourselves of the notion that your lives in any way resemble the lives of poor people.

And gray areas. The dreaded gray areas. You know. The people who had servants and went to private schools, but whose third-cousins-twice-removed lived in tenements in another part of the country a generation or so back? They're very uncertain about what this confusion of values brings to their class identities.

OK. OK. I got that out of my system. I know there are people living on the borders of the class worlds. And they need to find each other and work out the contradictions in their lives. And to be acknowledged by the rest of us. As border-dwellers. But they aren't lower-class any more than bisexuals are lesbians. Some class privilege is some class privilege and we had none. The gray areas I'm really referring to are the ones created by the smoke screens the middle-and upper-class lesbians in our communities throw up to

conceal their privilege and their eagerness to retain it. Having one parent who was raised with class privilege and one who was not is not a mixed class childhood, if you were raised by two teachers, or a lawyer and a housewife. My grandfather was a coal-miner, but I was raised in Buffalo, New York. I'm not Appalachian. Your sense of yourself in the world comes only partly from money. The rest comes from saying, My mother is a teacher, as opposed to, My mother cleans the toilets after school closes. This is true regardless of how many children the teacher may have been raising on her one salary.

Then there are those charming terms like disaffected. As in the disaffected middle-class dykes. Or the ones who call themselves traitors, turncoats to their class. Fugitives, runaways, escapees. Those who divorced it, absconded, left it behind, recovered from it. The only problem is it's all done with mirrors. They no longer look at their privilege and believe it, therefore, to have vanished. We clearly perceive it propped up right behind them, lending its support to everything they do, whether it is what their parents intended them to do or not. It is in our faces all the time.

You not only can't go home again, you can never completely leave in the first place.



And this one. I was sure I'd never risk talking about this in public. The one about the middle-class socialist-feminists with their manifest privilege and their secretarial jobs. Have you ever noticed how they never will tell you their childhood class identity? They just say they're working-class secretaries. (Practically all of them are secretaries. Can this be a coincidence?)

Now, I myself am a secretary, and I consider it a working-class job. Relatively clean, yes, but not the free-of-physical-labor position many believe it to be. It can be very humiliating, when you know you can't escape it, and high-stress, and it doesn't pay all that great for most of us. The difference between me and the middle- and upper-class socialist-feminist secretaries is that for me, secretarial work was as high as I had ever dreamed I could go; while for them, it is as low as they would dare descend. We're not equal here.

I feel the same about middle-class dykes holding blue-collar jobs. Designed to feed a wife and kids, trades pay what unions used to call a "family wage." It would always have been nice for

womyn to get those jobs, but middle-class womyn are not the ones the unions kept out all those decades. This is not working-class. This is middle-class lesbians with blue-collar jobs.



I might as well mention the one I was going to write about computers about 6 or 7 years ago. Computers are making offices as deadly as many factories. But their popularity is unstoppable. (I'm writing this on one right now.) Bosses like them. They even like using them. In fact, it is absolutely astonishing how many middle- and upper-class people, including dykes, now own computers. Not just because of the money involved, but because it used to be that almost the only folks who could type were lower-class womyn. Therefore, all the shit paperwork involved in lesbian/feminist organizing fell to us for the last two decades. Then, when typing machinery became high-tech and chic — dare I say yuppie? — the arcane mysteries of the keyboard were suddenly unveiled.



Oh, yes. The one about the difference between poverty and classism. They are not the same thing, you know. Poverty is only not-having-money. Classism is how we are treated for not-having-money by those who do have money. Under poverty, pride can exist; under classism, poverty becomes a matter of shame.*



The one about how different our basic self-concepts are, even within the umbra of poverty, when we are of different racial-ethnicities. This is because poverty is not classism. Not-having-money is not-having-money, no matter who you are. How you are treated for it is classism, and that intertwines with many other oppressions, notably racism and anti-Semitism.

In the U.S., if you are white and poor, these are two separate factors in your life. Everything around you in the culture is a

*I arrived at this particular distinction between the essence of poverty and the essence of classism in discussions with the editorial group of this journal, whose names are on the inside front cover.

constant display of white affluence. To have enough money is portrayed as being a natural consequence of being white. If you don't have it yet, it can only be a matter of time. Maybe you just aren't trying hard enough. In other words, while it always feels personal, it is not racial, not connected with your whiteness, with that particular part of your core identity.

If you are of color and poor, society works very hard to keep you aware that these two things are inextricably intertwined with each other. Not-having-money is made to seem a natural consequence of being a person of color. Everything in the media says that each attribute, racial-ethnic identity and poverty, is due to the other. You are poor because you are of color, and because you are of color, you will be kept poor, all the while being made to believe that it isn't anything being done to you, it's just who you are.

If you are Jewish and poor, society works equally hard to tell you you just don't exist. Jews have money, and if you don't, maybe you're not Jewish. If you insist that you are, then you must be lying about your resources.

All of these attitudes and beliefs are alive and well in the lesbian community. What are you doing about it?



This is a hard one: the one about boycotts.

I am uncomfortable with our intense eagerness to boycott all that we dislike. If we can't stop it from happening, we can withdraw our stamp of approval: our cash. Only how did cash come to be our stamp of approval? If a dyke opened a restaurant in my neighborhood tomorrow which was not accessible to dykes with wheelchairs, I would boycott the business. This makes sense to me: the way she runs her business is the thing I hate and won't support. If she is also a singer, what is accomplished by boycotting her records and performances, if they are accessible? I understand applied pressure. But we boycott people and events we can't possibly stop without organizing. And we don't organize, we just express our disapproval.

Is it just that if we can't stop her, we can at least refuse to contribute to her sustenance? If so, then I guess having a livelihood is only for the righteous. It is in keeping with the tenets of white Protestantism that only the undeserving are deprived. Is this where U.S. lesbians get the idea that money sanctifies? Of course,

it would follow logically from this that poverty is somehow deserved; or that poverty is a fitting punishment for political transgressions. But that doesn't seem to worry us much. I'm a secretary. If I fuck up tomorrow, are you going to picket my office to make sure I starve until I comply with your wishes?



And the related one about how it is believed that having-money should give greater emphasis to one's opinions. Earlier this year, for example, there were some letters in a feminist newspaper about music festival controversies. Two dykes wrote companion pieces enumerating all the income that would be lost to the festival owners, the craftswomyn, the artists, etc., should these letter-writers opt to boycott the festival, which they were threatening to do if their political agenda was not administered. If the festival owners chose to favor the other side of this dispute, they would suffer economically. It was the very strong suggestion of these dykes that the festival owners look at the numbers, and decide their politics accordingly.

This was bad enough for my taste, but they got worse. They emphasized that they pay top of the sliding scale because they can afford to, but that by doing so, they "subsidize" lower-income womyn. Funny, I thought you were supposed to pay top of the scale because you could afford to, period. The inference here seems to be that the center of the scale is the "real" price but some can't afford it and we let them pay less. Then there are others, who can afford the middle of the scale and then some, which they offer out of the generosity of their spirits. They could have paid less, you see, but they were class-conscious lesbians and they elected to donate some of their money for the charity dykes. Gee. Thanks. But, it didn't say on my ticket that your money paid for me. It said my money, however much of it I could afford, paid for me. It also didn't say that paying the low end of the scale (which I, like many lower-class dykes, seldom have the courage to do) entailed the forfeit of my right to be considered equal in political disputes. How have we let things come to such a state?



The one about working-class dykes and pride. How proud we are of what our parents earned, of what depths of poverty they

avoided, and how nobly. For some of our folks, this was because they had quite recently emerged from real poverty, and wanted desperately to keep themselves and their kids out of it. I understand the clinging, but *I* know that *they* often knew their escape was not solely a result of hard work. It was chance.

The one about how we maintain our pride now. How it's OK if we own things as long as we can show how hard we worked to earn them. As if we had suddenly come to believe that hard work is a thing that gets rewarded in this culture. We do need to recognize that a stereo or a tent or a camera or a dinner out means something different to people who always have had and always will have some money than it does to those who haven't and won't. It takes something different for us to feel OK about buying it, owning it, enjoying it. And the money — or whatever else — it takes to get it is something different, too. We generally get less per hour, and/or work less steadily. But what are we trying to do here except fend off whatever it is we fear from above and below? We don't want our existence negated by the upper classes just because of a few possessions. And we want a distance between us and the people below us, who work just as hard as we do and get nothing. Only if we have to admit they work as hard and get nothing, then work isn't rewarded and what we have is a fluke and we could lose it. By the first act, we sell our souls to the middle class. By the second, we sell our poorer sisters'.



And this one. The really hard one. Not the one about money itself. That's still too hard. This is the one about abuse. Not the violent and sexual abuse we suffer in childhood, though. The lesbian battery that no one wants to hear about.

This is the one about how I have observed that more abused lesbians are from lower classes. About the way our current poverty and our fear of it being worse makes us more easily manipulated into abusive relationships. Poverty makes us easier to trap.

How we misunderstand middle- and upper-class expectations in relationships. Where I come from, if you provide financial assistance to someone, you make it seem like it's something that would be better for you, too. It isn't considered a lie because everyone knows what you're doing, you're refusing to encroach on

someone's dignity. You take the sting out of it. Some years ago, a lesbian with whom I had been involved for a very short time told me she'd lost her house and could she stay with me. I said yes. She continued to ask, over and over, if I was sure it was all right. I did what I had been taught to do. I said it was perfectly all right, I was new in town, and could use the company. She moved in, outed me to my family, stole my money, read my journal, destroyed my possessions, sabotaged my schoolwork, eavesdropped on my phone calls, hid my prescriptions, threatened my friends, and kept me exposed to the constant threat of violence to me or to herself if I tried to get away, which I couldn't do anyway being newly disabled and extremely poor. She hadn't, she later confessed, lost her house; the day of the move, her mother had sent her money for the rent. But she didn't pay it because she thought I needed her with me. When I said she'd come in under false pretenses and ought to leave, she said I'd led her to believe I needed not to be alone and she'd moved in as a favor to me. It took 9 months to extricate my life from hers. I lacked the resources to leave. I was easier to trap.

How no one makes any attempt to help because we're tough, working-class dykes and we're used to violence. In fact, she didn't scare me at first, and I said so, because I was, indeed, more than a little accustomed to violence. When it really began with her, though, lesbian friends came right into the apartment and left again with her screaming and threatening me. Everyone figured I could handle myself. And, anyway, most of the dykes I knew were middle-class and she did scare them. They weren't used to it, you know. My class background made me easier to trap.

And afterwards, for the four years she haunted my life, the middle-class dykes ostracized me and embraced her in the community. She emphasized she had no hard feelings and would gladly be friends with me. Of course. There was no risk involved for her. But our community's middle-class make-nice attitude places tremendous pressure on abused lesbians to forgive and forget. So my former friends became hers, while I, insistent about avoiding her, was closed out. Classism made me easy to abuse.



And the distance again. That distance we try to place between the working-classes and the poor. I have never yet been in a

discussion of class among lesbians from the lower classes where the subject of the "value of education" did not arise. I question this assertion of the value our parents placed on education, even within different racial-ethnic groups. Many immigrants to the U.S. did come from cultures which esteemed education for its own sake. In this country, however, education is presumed to lead to work. The value we seek when we send our children to school is employment.

This business of our parents' belief in education has a defensive ring to it. I believe that we are, once again, appeasing the middle and upper classes and distancing ourselves from the lower classes. I know lots of dykes who acquired considerable education which they did not use to further careers, and their parents consider the education essentially wasted. So of what value is education? Rich people, who don't need a degree to get ahead, have stated that education is a thing to be sought for its own worth. Why are we buying into that?

We probably also say it because it means our parents were good parents who wanted good things for us. Looked at more closely, though, good parents comes to mean parents who sought middle-class benefits for their children, and who were not like poor parents, who let their kids drop out of high school.

None of my aunts or uncles finished high school. None of my cousins, either. Neither of my parents did. My father never started. My two half-brothers graduated, but my sister left to get married. I hung in to the bitter end, only to learn that I would have to surrender my scholarship to college. I was needed among the working adults if we were to eat that year.



Unemployment. Joblessness. These are matters of very different import to lower-class than to upper-class lesbians. But nothing is universal to the lower class. Some of us have spent much time unemployed because we are subjected to more sexual harassment than womyn in middle-class jobs. Middle-class men assume lower-class womyn will be available to them. On the other hand, some lower-class womyn will keep a tenacious grip on the most hideous job to try to keep their heads above water. Whether we have worked or not worked, we have done so for reasons other than those which determine middle-class womyn's work records.



I identify as coming from working poor people. In my childhood, I sometimes thought of us as poor, because we had no money. Then, with age, I came to understand the difference between getting a paycheck that didn't stretch far enough, and getting no paycheck at all. My father's monthly salary wouldn't have fed us for a week, but as a disabled veteran, he received a check which stood between us and abject poverty.

My mother worked, and scammed, and worked some more. She taught me to kite checks from one bank to another, she begged old food from local stores, cruised the better-off neighborhoods for furniture left by the curb, and raised hell. I still remember the time she encountered a grand piano sitting on a front lawn with a large plant in it. She was so incensed at the extravagant waste that she knocked on the door and screamed at the man for his arrogance. The dishes we ate off had been lifted from the bar and grill establishments where she waited tables at night. When my cousin married a sailor, my mother began shopping with her at the PX and we discovered the joys of powdered eggs.

The old rug in the dining room gave out, and she knew the noise of all of us running around on bare wood would wear her out, so she begged the samples from the nearest carpet store. While we were at school, she pulled out the grommets, turned over the old rug for a pad, and glued the damn things down in a patchwork pattern which so delighted her she went back for more and ran it all the way up the stairs. My sister and I, teenagers, immediately vowed we'd die if any of our friends ever saw it. She didn't care; she had good, strong carpet — or, at least, good, strong carpet samples — which would last longer than any cheap rug we could afford.

I have said, on many occasions, we were working-class, we were never on welfare. True enough, but not because we didn't try. Most times, there were just too many adults of employable age in the house for us to qualify. That we couldn't live on what they brought in didn't matter.

When they were first married, my mother pressed my father to use the GI bill to buy a house. When there were four children, we moved into the 3-bedroom house they found, and they proceeded to have five more children. Then there were the boarders, the

cousins and uncles down on their luck, the runaway friends of my older brothers and sister, the baby my mother brought home from the bar where she worked because the mother and grandmother left it in a carriage on the sidewalk all day while they drank. (After 18 months, they decided they'd like her back, please.) And the boy my sister was going out with, whose parents threw him out for dating trash. They followed my sister around, spitting on her, drove past our house at all hours screaming obscenities, all to make the point that their son was from a better family and much too good for the likes of any of us. He and my sister eventually broke up, she left the state, and he remained in the house as another brother.

And the owner of the candy store from my mother's old neighborhood. He'd retired and was living alone. So what if we had nowhere to put him, that wasn't the point anyway, she was only going to visit him, she protested. My father knew better. While she was over "visiting," assuring the man it was because he was so good with kids (to take the sting out), my father brought the cot out of the basement and the candy-store owner — who was, indeed, good with kids and a terrific addition to the household — slept there until his death a few years later.

The point of all this is that I knew we had no money and that was called poor. But we were related to people who were poorer and we'd heard of people who were rich. (When I encountered feminism, I thought this meant we were middle-class. Get it? Not rich, not poor. Somewhere in the middle. Made sense to me.) Anyway, we knew the difference. Then, too, my mother never wavered from what has been called the First Rule of Irish Families: there's always room for one more. The idea is that if you have anything, you have more than those with nothing, and that's enough to share. Lesbians have enough resources to alleviate much of the poverty in our communities; and the information to stop the classism. Are you listening?

Betty Dudley

Heart Beats

Burning blood flows angrily,
Like a precursor
Through the heart it may one day attack.
Downed by my own anger,
My own power.

Why don't I just let it go?
Chill out, California cool,
Live in the here and now
Where my income puts me
On par with you.

Or why don't I just kill you?
You act as if I'd tried.
Be myself you say.
But to show a self you can handle,
I have to lie.

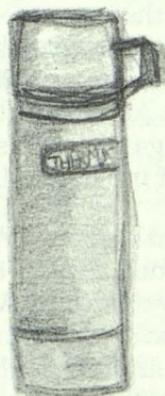
You work at reclaiming your anger,
While I am to erase mine.
As if we're playing with the joystick
To a video game, arranging the players at will
With a button to start over anytime.
The kills aren't real.

Well, fuck that shit.
Anger is a power line.
One that life has handed me.
The kills are real.

I have a heart,
Warmed by anger,
Dragged through places
Love could not pull me through.

And if I am afraid of anything,
It is of women who will not own their power,
Afraid of their own heart beat,
Who believe that blood should be pumped by a mere Valentine;
Women who would kill a heart like mine without even knowing
what they've hit.

Yes, I love you.
I don't wish to dump this all on you.
You wanted to come close enough to hear my heart beat.
Well, that's what I've let you do.



Thermos
Suz Fields

RESPONSE

Just received SW43/44 *WOW* SW43/44 succeeds in celebrating the breadth, depth & diversity of the lesbian identity. Skimming & sampling — I only got home a few hours ago — I find the issue fresh, even the contributor notes are funny, fascinating and revealing. *Nothing* is stale.

Thanks for the emotional and spiritual recharge. I spent 3 hours last night moaning to a friend that lesbian-feminist culture was, must be a mirage — that the definition of “lesbian” was too loose to build a consensus or nurture expression. Thank you for reminding me that even flowers can survive & bloom in the desert. The energy spent was worth it.

— Valerie Beasley

Dear *Sinister Wisdom Women*, ... I am glad to support your magazine and look forward to future issues, however I want to register my displeasure about issue #43/44. When I subscribed last I was signing up for a series of separate issues... I assumed new material each time. I do not like retrospectives, and resent my subscription having to pay for one. I've already read the material when it was originally published. And why cut trees for paper for what has already been printed before? If you must do a retrospective, I think you should ask your subscribers if they want one and then sell it separate from the quarterlies. So that's my disgruntlement. The rest is my love.

— Madrone (of Fly Away Home)

Dear Elana and everyone, Just a note to let you know I received my 2 copies of the Retrospective and was absolutely thrilled. My god, you did a magnificent job. I loved the selections you made, couldn't believe the amount & carefulness of labor — the whole thing is beautiful. And I think the timing is perfect somehow. Loved the Notes for a Magazine & also Notes on Language. Thank you from the bottom of my heart. Love,

— Harriet Ellenberger

Dear Elana and all SW Dykes: Thank you for issue 43/44 — it was the answer (hell, I didn't even know what the question was). I was especially moved by Audre Lorde's writing on silence—exactly what I needed to hear. It all inspires me to write and perhaps to renew some of my diminishing faith in the good sense of the Lesbian “community.”

I know that putting out SW is a difficult job — I hope a day doesn't go by that you don't get to hear that we readers out here love SW — our lives would be diminished without it. Thank you.

— Shoney Sien

Dear Editors: I am writing to protest the editorial politics involved in selecting articles to be reprinted in your fifteenth anniversary issue ...

Specifically, I protest the systematic erasure of Mary Daly and her co-thinkers from the retrospective. The deletion of Mary Daly's piece from the reprint of Julia Penelope's 1977 MLA panel on Lesbians and Literature was glaring, as was the inclusion of Elly Bulkin's attack on Mary Daly's *Gyn/Ecology* without any of the original letters which protested Bulkin's smear tactics.

Mary Daly's thinking was a guiding force in the launching of *SW*. Indeed... the original editor's notes for the fledgling magazine, state explicitly: "We want to print what Mary Daly calls 'ludic cerebration, the free play of intuition in our own space, giving rise to thinking that is vigorous, informed, multidimensional, independent, creative, tough.'" ... It is an outrage that the radical feminist contributions of Jane Caputi and Andree Collard, both early and out-of-print material, were also not deemed worthy of reprint.

The omission of these materials is not simply a loss, it is a falsification of Lesbian herstory. The erasure of an influence as profound as Mary Daly's reminds me of a Stalinist photograph, retouched to delete the faces of those purged ...

Tragically, such erasure of Mary Daly's thinking comes at a time when her worldview needs most to be heard. We are witnessing a growing movement of lesbians away from feminism and towards gay male values. Sexist behaviors such as S/M, pornography, butch-femme, and sexual fetishism are increasingly tolerated in a Lesbian community that used to be the vanguard of feminism. Mary Daly has been a brave voice against the patriarchal tide, practicing the "ludic cerebration" with which *SW* used to identify.

I urge *SW* to reclaim its original values and re-chart a truly radical feminist course. You can start by reprinting Mary Daly.

— Crystal Chemris

Editor's note (Elana): Aside from her section of the 1977 MLA panel (material included in the recently reprinted, widely available Gyn/Ecology), Mary Daly has not published in SW. We consider thoughtful criticism, such as Elly Bulkin's in her essay "Racism and Writing" (of which only 1/4 addresses Mary Daly), an indication of the importance of a work, not a smear. Jane Caputi published an essay "Jaws: Fish Stories and Patriarchal Myth" in #7 and Andrée Collard a speech "Random Thoughts on Victimization" in #11. We have no intention of erasing these lesbians' contributions — but we did have to choose from thousands of pages. And the 90+ radical lesbians and lesbian/feminists we did reprint — what are they, chopped liver?

Dear Elana and every Lesbian who worked on SW43/44: I began this 9th day of my 51st year by opening my contributor's copy of SW 43/44 only casually, intending to flip through its pages to find out what was included, what omitted (I already knew, from several Lesbians, that Mary Daly had been left out). I would leaf through, delay really reading it for a later time. But this double issue thwarted my casual intent. I couldn't *not* read it, cover to cover, exactly as I read every issue from 1976-1980.

Now, I sit at my keyboard dazed, touched, moved beyond words, but committed to writing this letter to all of you. I've learned many things from my 50th year: one of them — if I delay an impulse too long, I rarely act on it. And so, I want to act on my impulse to write this letter, I want to convey, somehow, my feelings as I read the contributors' notes and knew that with them the retrospective issue had come to an end, for now. Fifteen years of *Sinister Wisdom*, 15 years of Lesbian/feminist visioning, Harriet and Catherine's rash love of that visioning, making of it something we lovingly held in our hands ... pondering, searching, exploring, making connections, arguing, disputing, challenging, asserting, rebutting, healing, wounding, healing, going on ...

In my hands the tangible, concrete realizations of our dreams and doubts. I couldn't put it down. It was so thick and heavy; it smelled so good. I read every word, article, poem, searched every graphic ... knowing I'd read them all at least once, some many times, with full recognition, savoring, remembering.

SW 45 is a great gift, a wonderful gift, holding 15 years of my/our life/lives in my hands.... When I say I couldn't put it down, I mean that literally. When I finished reading it, I sat thankfully and let the full weight of those years envelope me and let myself cry for joy, for gratitude, for who we've been and who we are, for what we have managed to give ourselves, each other — for our continuity, for our breadth, for our stubbornness, for our keeping on. For our sheer tough determination, for so much. And I have lived to hold this gift in my hands. Too many Lesbians, some whose words were reprinted there, not so lucky as I.

To all of you, all of us, thank you. Thank you very much.

— Julia Penelope

Dear Elana, The 15th Anniversary Retrospective is an issue I'll pick up again and again, not only for its herstorical value, but also because of its coverage of the multiplicity of issues affecting us then and now. Congratulations!

— Terri de la Peña

To the Collective: I received your guidelines for submissions in the mail today and while I have nothing to offer you in the way of material at this time, per se, I did want to respond to the way in which the information on the Lesbians and Class issue is worded.

While I think it is important to empower all women, the language in which you address these issues seems only to further division. For example, "We urge middle-class and wealthy lesbians to remember that an embarrassment of riches is not the same as the shame of poverty." There's a world of difference between the lifestyle of the middle-class and working class or raised poor families, and the inherent feelings and meanings of the words "embarrassed" and "shame." To use words such as "embarrassment" versus "shame" (and it is set up in a kind of us versus them mentality), women of middle-class backgrounds in particular are always being called to account for their class backgrounds by working class and raised poor women. Consciousness raising, as sometimes happens when white women are confronted about their inherent racism by black women, is often thrust back into the faces of middle-class women with statements such as, "Do it yourself." This closing of the doors of communication helps no one and certainly doesn't foster an atmosphere in which people can come together and explore their differences.

To say this letter made me angry would be an understatement. I'm tired of people pointing to my class background, over which I had no control, and blaming me for inherent attitudes that I wish to explore and change. Rarely is my desire to change these attitudes, to become more sensitive to working-class issues even acknowledged. How are we going to find common ground if a reasonable dialogue cannot even be established?

Most of my friends are working class, certainly the class in which I find myself currently living is working class (as well as the neighborhood), but I accept that I bring with me assumptions about the world that are grounded in my class background. But the assumption on your part that middle-class women (and wealthy women) only feel "embarrassment" about their places in the world is, I feel, a leap into the unknown. This statement makes it almost impossible for a woman of middle- or upper-class background to even feel comfortable submitting work to this issue. Of course we remember these things, of course we're aware of them. Do you think we don't also feel shame when our working class friends point up our shortcomings? Do you think we don't feel shamed by the inequality of the class system? Of our own backgrounds? Many middle-class women try to hide their class backgrounds, especially in situations like attending a State University or College where to be middle-class is to be an outsider.

While this experience is valuable, it doesn't negate the feelings this "outsideness" brings with it. This feeling of "outsideness" is essential to the true transformation of our belief systems — just as I was an outsider as a white woman in a literature class on black women's writings, just as I am an outsider being a lesbian in a straight society. Lesbians already know this feeling of being outside the mainstream. If we could draw on that to create a dialogue about class it would be so much richer, so much more valuable than simply creating another us versus them value system and dialogue.

... If any kind of a meaningful dialogue is going to emerge about these issues, it has to be one in which inclusiveness is the primary focus. I understand that working class and raised poor voices have been left out of this dialogue for too long, just as women's voices and the voices of people of color have been eliminated from literature, history and art. The list is endless. I urge you to be more careful with your word choices. It is only through these painful kinds of dialogues that real learning, real understanding can occur. We cannot be afraid of our shame, our anger. But don't assume that middle-class and wealthy women are simply "embarrassed." This is not the case. For while I agree with the premise of this issue and applaud it, it is essential that we take care with our language and open doors instead of closing them. This kind of division is what keeps us splintered and un-unified. It needs to stop. You have the opportunity to let this happen. Don't let it go to waste. Thank you for your consideration of this and letting me speak my mind.

— Cris Newport

Dear Janet Capone and Denise Leto: I recently bought a copy of *Sinister Wisdom* #41, "*Il Viaggio Delle Donne*." I thought it was fabulous! "*Il Viaggio*" is the first publication I have ever seen that deals exclusively with the experience of Italian American lesbians. I grew up in the North End of Boston (Boston's Italian neighborhood), and I currently live only a few miles from there. I never knew any other Italian American lesbians when I was a child, and I have yet to meet any. When I read "*Il Viaggio*," for the first time, I heard voices that echoed my own experiences....

— Lucille L. Petringa

CONTRIBUTOR'S NOTES

Adrienne Lauby is a 42-year old disabled mix-class (upper-working, lower-middle) feminist raised in rural Nebraska. Currently I am writing a novel about young lesbians to complete my master's degree in English from a California State College.

Alien: I'm a poor white disabled Gemini with pink hair. I eat Cheetos that I buy with food stamps and watch tv with my daughter. I spend my time rescuing myself from patriarchy by acting out my fantasies, going to therapy and support groups, and by telling the secrets of my soul to anyone who will listen.

Betty Rose Dudley: I'm 39 (really) and a white working-class bitch from Missouri who grew up to be a state worker in California.

Calary Blue is a working-class woman who lives in Oakland, hangs out in San Francisco and has a heart in Alaska.

Carie Winslow lives in Gainesville, Florida.

Caroljean Coventree: I live in an old, old house where two wide rivers join. My blessings here are many, from lesbian neighbors who nurture profusions of wildflowers to the cedar waxwings and mule deer who live down the county road out front. Lesbian friends and wildness are often at my door. I am thankful.

Caryatis Cardea: I am a lesbian separatist. I was born in 1950 in Buffalo, New York to a French-Canadian, Irish-Catholic working-poor family. I have 5 brothers and 3 sisters, only one of whom speaks to me since I challenged my parents on incest. These are all the things I never tell in my bio: I am an accident-disabled, vegetarian, card-playing, Scorpio, aging-hippie, rock 'n' roll dyke who plays classical piano. I laugh more than anyone I know.

Celia Rodriguez is a working-class Chicana lesbian and artist living, teaching, and painting in Chicago.

Corie Lamere: Born 5/21/57 and raised on farms in Minnesota. Father worked as a pipefitter/welder, farmed in his spare time & raised seven children with my mother who was always at home. Left home and lived on my own at 16. Graduated H.S. 1975 and joined the Navy. Discharged at Treasure Island and stayed in California. Worked as a psych. tech. 17 years. Recently disabled from working as an electrician apprentice.

Debby Earthdaughter: I'm 30, U.S. citizen from a German/unknown heritage, from mixed working/middle class, living with environmental illness disability and the low-income that goes with not being able to work. I currently live as a renter at a private women's campground near Tucson and am working with SHE Land Trust to establish land for dykes with disabilities and our allies.

Elliott: I'm a mainly white, more able some days than others, Mid-western Dyke Separatist who's been temporarily transplanted to Philadelphia. In times of need, comfort food overrides my analysis of privilege and health in food choices. My writing has also appeared in *Common Lives/Lesbian Lives*, *Lesbian Ethics*, *Hag Rag*, and *Wanting Women: An Anthology of Erotic Lesbian Poetry*. My poetry chapbook, *Songs from the Separatist Revolution*, is available through MHL Press at 5902 McCallum St., Philadelphia, PA 19144 for \$5-10 sliding scale and \$1.50 postage. These days, talking and surviving are pretty much the same thing for me, so let me know if you live in my area or if you know a way for me to make free phone calls to my families in Madison and Minneapolis.

Felicitas: I'm a 29-year-old working-class lesbian German citizen who lived in West Berlin for the last 10 years and who has been living in the U.S. for the last 9 months.

Janet Capone is a working class Italian-American poet and fiction writer. Both sets of her grandparents came from villages near Naples around 1905. "East 50th Street Scream" is part of her first novel, which is soon to be completed. She also co-edited with Denise Leto the *Sinister Wisdom* issue on Italian-American women: *Il Viaggio Delle Donne*. Her work has appeared in various journals such as *Lesbian Ethics*, *Common Lives/Lesbian Lives*, and *la bella figura*, and will be in a forthcoming anthology on Catholic girlhoods to be published by Penguin.

Jasmine Marah: (working poor) enigmatic, eclectic, elastic, eccentric, enthusiastic, fat, forty-four, furious fotomaker.

Martha Courtot: I am an exile in many worlds. I write and love out of my deep woundedness and my belief in the holiness of connection. I celebrated my fiftieth birthday in August, and am amazed at the interior changes this new age brings. Class for me is perhaps the deepest wound. I have been published in many lesbian and

feminist journals, struggled in class wars in the lesbian community for ten years before wearing out, and am enjoying being a lesbian grandmother. My worst struggle is against the voice that tells me to keep silent.

Mary Frances Platt: I am a fat lesbian with disabilities who was raised mixed class (poor & working) with the dominant values being working class. Currently I am a master's educated financially poor woman living on SSI with a strong working class perception of the world. I "do" anti-oppression education & am still looking for the butch of my dreams.

Max Dashú: I am a railroad-tracks-child and tract-housing-in-the-shadow-of-nuclear-factory-girl. I have been checkout clerk fired for epilepsy, agricultural laborer, scholarship student, homeless drop-out, waitress fired for epilepsy, housepainter, public schools clerk, eldercare worker, chardyke and janitor. I am a working-class historian supporting myself mainly as a laborer, and teach international women's studies, freelance and "uncredentialed," at every opportunity.

Naja Sorella: I was born in 1952, and grew up working class with a mother from an inner city working class background, and a father from rural poor. If I'd had the medical care class privilege buys, I wouldn't be as ill and disabled as I am now. If I wasn't so ill and disabled, I'd have a better chance of not being as poor as I am now. The loves of my life are my 7 year lover/best friend/life companion Frieda, painting, writing, reading, collecting stones/crystals, and talking with other separatists.

Nanette Herbert lives in London, England.

Nona Caspers was raised in a working class neighborhood in rural Minnesota and now works as a secretary and attends the creative writing program at San Francisco State. Her first novel, *The Blessed*, came out in the spring of '91 by Silverleaf Press. In it a young lesbian is abducted by a motherly older woman who wears a gun on one hip, and a Bible on the other.

Sabena Stark: Raised by two survivors who arrived in this country broke and died broke 30 and 40 years later. I spent two of my teenage years in a Jewish home for girls. I am a bird that flew out of the ashes of the Holocaust to have a child, write music, love women, and pay for a therapist.

Suz lives in California, with Kodiak. She's working-class. Still.

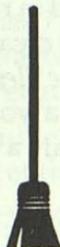
Terri Fredlund: I am a 33-year-old dyke with strong nomadic tendencies, and of Italian/Northern European descent. My sister and I were raised in the San Francisco Bay Area by our mother, who worked for years in the same electrical plant. I am a wimmin's self defense journeywoman, though I do a variety of work to survive.

tova is a working-class jewish lesbian. she is on the core editorial group of *bridges, a journal for jewish feminists and our friends*. this story is an excerpt from her yet-unpublished novel, *transfusions*. she's glad tonight starts the ten days of awe, so she can remember to be awe-full.

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A Few Words in the Mother Tongue — Poems Selected and New (1971-1990) is a superlative, long-awaited collection by Irena Klepfisz whose poetry infiltrates the slick surface of the modern world with ancient meaning, depth and resonance; with an Introduction by Adrienne Rich. 1990, \$11.95, Eighth Mountain Press, 624 SE 29th Ave., Portland, OR 97214-3026.

Dreams of an Insomniac — Jewish Feminist Essays, Speeches and Diatribes is the companion to *A Few Words in the Mother Tongue* by Irena Klepfisz, dedicated "tsu der bavegung — to the movement and the lesbian/feminists who made this work possible"; with an Introduction by Evelyn Torton Beck. 1990, \$11.95, Eighth Mountain Press.

Incidents Involving Mirth, Anna Livia's most recent short story collection, is the first to be published in the U.S., and is a wonderful introduction to a great lesbian imagination. 1990, \$9.95, Eighth Mountain Press.

Her, an exciting new novel exploring relationships between Black women set in '50s Detroit, by Cherry Muhanji. 1990, \$8.95, Aunt Lute Books, POB 410687, SF, CA 94141.

Daughter of the Mountain: Un Cuento — a mestiza in a southwestern border town faces the 20th century with her grandmother's wisdom from the 19th — a profound and beautiful first novel by Edna Escamill. 1991, \$8.95, Spinsters Book Company, POB 410687, SF, CA 94141.

The Lesbian Erotic Dance: Butch, Femme, Androgyny and Other Rhythms is about reclaiming the diversity and depth of lesbian sexualities, by JoAnn Loulan. 1990, \$12.95, Spinsters.

Modern Daughters and the Outlaw West — rural lesbians battle fundamentalists and other intruding male forces — a gripping first novel by Melissa Kwasny. 1991, \$9.95, Spinsters.

Lesbians at Midlife: The Creative Transition — lesbians in their 40s and 50s have a lot of things to say and this is a wonderful, multi-cultural collection of them, edited by Barbara Sang, Joyce Warshow and Adrienne J. Smith. 1991, \$12.95, Spinsters.

Final Session — this engaging mystery of the murdered psychotherapist won Spinsters' 1990 fiction contest, by Mary Morell. 1991, \$9.95, Spinsters.

The Montreal Massacre — feminist essays, poems, letters to the editor on the 1989 mass murder of 14 women at the Univ. of Montreal, edited by Louise Malette and Marie Chalouh, trans. by Marlene Wildeman. 1991, \$12.95, gynergy books, POB 2023, Charlottetown, P.E.I., Canada C1A 7N7.

Telling It: Women & Language Across Cultures — a Canadian compilation on racism, cultural appropriation and homophobia, edited by Sky Lee, Lee Maracle, Daphne Marlatt and Betsy Warland. 1990, \$14.95, Press Gang Publishers, 603 Powell St., Vancouver, B.C., Canada, V6A 1H2.

Sojourner's Truth & other stories "transform Native oratory into written word," by Lee Maracle. 1990, \$10.95, Press Gang.

Dream On — a wonderful, accessible, inspiring collection of Chrystos' poems — don't miss it! 1991, Press Gang.

Drawing the Line — *lesbian sexual politics on the wall* — 40 postcards from the traveling photo show, by Kiss & Tell: Susan Stewart, photographer, with Persimmon Blackbridge and Lizard Jones. 1991, Press Gang.

Need: A Chorale for Black Woman Voices — Audre Lorde's poem with a new introduction, published as pamphlet #6 in the Freedom Organizing Series. 1990, \$3.50, Kitchen Table Women of Color Press, POB 908, Latham, NY 12110.

Beneath My Heart — "I was a live seed planted by a woman / in another woman's womb. / All things insatiable belong to me" — poetry rooted in a Native American and lesbian landscape by Janice Gould. 1990, \$8.95, Firebrand Books, 141 The Commons, Ithaca, NY 14850.

Making It: A Woman's Guide to Sex in the Age of AIDS, in English and Spanish, by Cindy Patton and Janis Kelly, trans. by Papusa Molina, illus. by Alison Bechdel. 1990, \$4.95, Firebrand.

Sacred Space: A Feminist Vision of Astrology, by Geraldine Hatch Hanon. 1990, \$9.95, Firebrand.

Just Say Yes, a lesbian romance with an edge, set in Provincetown, by Judith McDaniel. 1991, \$8.95, Firebrand.

The Women Who Hate Me — *Poetry 1980-1990* is an expanded and revised edition of Dorothy Allison's first book. 1991, \$8.95, Firebrand.

Food & Spirits, eight substantial stories by Beth Brant (*Mohawk Trail* and editor of *A Gathering of Spirit*). 1991, \$8.95, Firebrand.

The Gilda Stories — Jewelle Gomez's long-awaited, sensual and political Black vampire novel. 1991, \$9.95, Firebrand.

Artemis in Echo Park — clear, strong lesbian poetry by Eloise Klein Healy. 1991, \$8.95, Firebrand.

Cats (and their Dykes) — over fifty lesbians contribute to this examination of the cat in lesbian culture in stories, poems, essays, photographs, drawings and cartoons, edited by Irene Reti and Shoney Sien. 1991, \$10, HerBooks, POB 7467, Santa Cruz, CA 95061.

Take Back the Night — a beautiful 1992 13-month multi-cultural woman's lunar wall calendar, created by Terese Armstrong and Mary Blaettler. 1991, \$10, Full Womoon Productions, POB 1205, Santa Cruz, CA 95061.

The Chant of the Women of Magdalena & the Magdalena Poems — a multi-cultural lyric adventure, with biographic poems of the participants and a preface on "Tradition and Poetic Memory" by SDiane Bogus. 1990, \$9.00, Women in the Moon Pub., 2215-R Market Street, Box 137-CWM, SF, CA 94114.

Gaudí Afternoon is Barbara Wilson's inviting mystery, set in Barcelona. 1990, \$8.95, Seal Press, 3131 Western Ave., Suite 410, Seattle, WA 98121.

Ceremonies of the Heart — *Celebrating Lesbian Unions* is an anthology of different pairs' ceremonies with a short "History of Lesbian Partnerships," edited by Becky Butler. 1990, \$14.95, Seal Press.

The Children's Crusade — a novel journeying through the hazardous landscape of family relations by Rebecca Brown. 1991, \$8.95, Seal Press.

Lesbian Bedtime Stories 2 — for those of us who like to read something short, sweet & lesbic to ourselves or our bed-mates before dropping off, these 30 stories are a sequel to the first volume, thanks to "gatherer" Terry Woodrow. 1990, \$9.95, Tough Dove Books, POB 184, Willits, CA 95490.

The Ship That Sailed Into the Living Room: Sex and Intimacy Reconsidered — Sonia Johnson muses on the various things lesbians do in "relation Ships." 1991, \$12.95, Wildfire Books, Star Route 1, Box 55, Estancia, NM 87016.

Death by the Riverside — a lesbian mystery-thriller set in New Orleans, with a subtext about grief, repression and healing, by J. M. Redmann. 1990, \$8.95, New Victoria Press, POB 27, Norwich, VT 05055.

In Unlikely Places — historical romance: "This is a story about Africa, because at my root depth, it is Africa I love — yet I do not assume to write it as anything but a European. And always in search of wholeness" — by ReBecca Béguin. 1990, \$8.95, New Victoria.

Woman with Red Hair — Magalie searches France for her birth mother, and finds mystery; by Sigrid Brunel. 1991, \$8.95, New Victoria.

Cody Angel is the story of a Wyoming lesbian's early love and later initiation into San Francisco life, a story of struggle for self-esteem, independence and love, by Joanne Whitfield. 1991, \$8.95, New Victoria.

Woman Sitting at the Machine, Thinking — the fourth and last of "working class Lesbian poet" Karen Brodine's books of poetry, published after her death from cancer in 1987, a deep and important volume. 1990, \$8.95, Red Letter Press, 409 Maynard Ave. South, #201, Seattle, WA 98104.

Voices of Women in Dialogue: On Politics, Religion and Culture in Israel — feminist interviews in Israel, by Batya Weinbaum, in spiralbound format. 1991, \$16.50, YPS, 151 Main St., Northampton, MA 01060.

Sasha's Harlem — The Making and Breaking of Israeli Americans — magical realism and lesbian politics, set in Jerusalem, by Batya Weinbaum, in spiralbound format. 1991, \$16.50, YPS.

Tea for Thirteen — Candice J. Graham's first collection of lesbian short stories, and Impertinent Press's first title. 1991, \$9.95 (U.S.), Impertinent Press, Box 23097, 2121 Carling Ave., Ottawa, Ont., Canada K2A 4E2.

The Blessed — an intriguing lesbian suspense-love-spiritual quest novel by Nona Caspers. 1991, \$9.95, Silverleaf, POB 70189, Seattle, WA 98107.

Getting Away With Murder — a Cynthia Chenery Scott mystery by Pele Plante. 1991, \$9.95, Clothespin Fever, 5529 N. Figueroa, L.A., CA 90042.

Are You Girls Traveling Alone? Adventures in Lesbianic Logic is a wonderful collection of columns that appeared in L.A.'s *Lesbian News* in the '80s, entertaining, affirming, illuminating; by Marilyn Murphy with an intro by Marilyn Frye. 1991, \$10.95, Clothespin Fever.

Ninth Life — a Caitlin Reece Mystery set among the enemies of the animal rights movement by Lauren Wright Douglas. 1990, \$8.95, The Naiad Press, POB 10543, Tallahassee, FL 32302.

Players — an erotic field of gamesdykeship by Robbi Sommers, the author of *Pleasures*. 1990, \$8.95, Naiad.

Staying Power: Long Term Lesbian Couples gives us survey results, interviews, advice, social history and analysis in a well-conceived and interesting format, by Susan E. Johnson. 1990, \$12.95, Naiad.

Slick, a lesbian mystery centering on the theft a precious, symbolic South American statue, is Camarin Grae's fifth novel. 1990, \$9.95, Naiad.

Side by Side — lesbian romance in NYC at the time of the Stonewall Uprising, by the author of *Patience and Sarah*, Isabel Miller. 1990, \$9.95, Naiad.

Southbound — the sequel to *Faultline* promises to be one of the funnier lesbian novels of the year, by Sheila Ortiz Taylor. 1990, \$8.95, Naiad.

The Providence File — an internationally set espionage thriller by Amanda Kyle Williams. 1991, \$8.95, Naiad.

I Left My Heart — lesbian mystery by Jaye Maiman. 1991, \$9.95, Naiad.

Touchwood — a cross-generational lesbian romance by Karin Kallmaker. 1991, \$8.95, Naiad.

Bayou City Secrets — a hard-boiled, comedic lesbian mystery set in 1936 by Deborah Powell. 1991, \$8.95, Naiad.

Cop Out — #4 in the Detective Inspector Carol Ashton mystery series by Claire McNab. 1991, \$8.95, Naiad.

Zeta Base — love triangles under a dying sun in the distant future by Judith Alguire. 1991, \$9.95, Naiad.

Benediction — love and adolescent angst in a Catholic girls' school by Diane Salvatore. 1991, \$9.95, Naiad.

Black Iris — a story of lesbian relationships and suspense when Denver's lesbians band together to find a brutal rapist. 1991, \$9.95, Naiad.

Lodestar — suspense and romance with a lesbian therapist, judge, FBI agent and an evil commune, by Phyllis Horn. 1991, \$8.95, Naiad.

Second Chance — regular, white middle-age lesbians confront the trials of life and family, by Jackie Calhoun. 1991, \$9.95, Naiad.

Passion's Legacy — a lesbian gothic romance set in pre-Victorian England, by Lori A. Paige. 1991, \$8.95, Naiad.

Calling Rain — legendary lesbian primatologist finds Big Foot and love, and has to guard both against the patriarchy, by Karen Marie Christa Minns. 1991, \$9.95, Naiad.

No Language is Neutral — a new book of poems from Black, lesbian, Canadian poet Dionne Brand. 1990, \$12.95, Coach House Press, 401 Huron St., Toronto, Ontario M5S 2G5 Canada.

Language in Her Eye — Views on Writing and Gender by Canadian Women Writing in English, essays by 44 lesbian and straight women, including Anne Cameron, Jane Rule, Betsy Warland, Lee Maracle, Dionne Brand, Himani Bannerji and Margaret Atwood; edited by Libby Scheier, Sarah Sheard and Eleanor Wachtel. 1990, \$18.95, Coach House Press.

Hanging Fire is Phyllis Webb's 11th book of well-wrought, thoughtful, political and imaginative poetry. 1990, \$12.95, Coach House Press.

Invitation to a New Yarn — compelling poetry by Yoko Shima, in Japanese with English trans. by Barbara Summerhawk. 1989, \$4.95, pub. in Japan.

Ginseng and Other Tales from Manila is a collection of beautifully crafted, illuminating straight stories by Filipina writer Marianne Villanueva. 1991, \$8.95, Calyx Books, POB B, Corvallis, OR 97339.

Idleness Is the Root of All Love — fascinating poetry/journal/novel of two old lesbians, written in short stanzas, by Christa Reinig, translated from German by Ilze Mueller. 1991, \$10, Calyx Books.

A Queer Question: Selected Poems — a chapbook by Charon. 1991, \$7.50.

Changing Your Story — well-made multi-cultural but very male-centered poetry by Patricia Clark Smith. 1991, \$8.95, West End Press, POB 27334, Albuquerque, NM 87125.

Southern Women Writers — The New Generation — essays on women from Margaret Walker to Anne Tyler, edited by Tonette Bond Inge. 1990, \$28.95, Univ. of Alabama Press, Box 870380, Tuscaloosa, AL 35487.

Ancient Mirrors of Womanhood — A Treasury of Goddess and Heroine Lore from Around the World, updated with new preface, a reprint of Merlin Stone's classic. 1990, \$12.95, Beacon, 25 Beacon St., Boston, MA 02108.

Vagabonding: Feminist Thinking Cut Loose — radical, exciting essays, naming the perpetrators of global disaster, critiquing "new age" ideology, pushing us to rethink; by Cristina Thürmer-Rohr, trans. from German by *Trivia* ed. Lise Weil, highly recommended. 1991, \$22.95 (cloth), Beacon.

The Safe Sea of Women: Lesbian Fiction 1969-1989 by Bonnie Zimmerman won the Lambda Lesbian Nonfiction Award in 1990 and is out in paper. 1991, \$14.95, Beacon.

Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism, the 1978 classic, has been reissued "With a New Intergalactic Introduction" by Mary Daly. 1990, \$14.95, Beacon.

Cries of the Spirit: A Celebration of Women's Spirituality is a large-format collection spanning centuries, social classes, ethnic groups and sexualities, edited by Marilyn Sewell. 1991, \$16.95, Beacon.

Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women's Rights in 19th Century America — how séances and trance speaking empowered a generation of American women to claim their own voices, by Ann Braude. 1991, \$12.95, Beacon.

All of the Above — accomplished prize-winning poetry, occasionally lesbian, by Dorothy Barresi. 1991, Beacon.

Territories of the Voice: Contemporary Stories by Irish Women Writers, most, if not all, straight, edited by Louise DeSalvo, Kathleen Walsh D'Arcy & Katherine Hogan. 1991, \$12.95, Beacon.

The Past is Before Us: Feminism in Action since the 1960s — British socialist-feminist Sheila Rowbotham takes a look at the international women's liberation movement, looking towards renewal in the '90s. 1991, \$14.95, Beacon.

Gays in Uniform: The Pentagon's Secret Reports wherein the military reveals that queers can act effectively as agents of the state. We may not be as surprised as they were, but we can share their horror. Edited (and uncovered) by Kate Dyer. 1990, \$6.95, Alyson, 40 Plympton St., Boston, MA 02118.

Gloria Goes to Gay Pride is Lesléa Newman's second children's book, for very young children. 1991, \$7.95, Alyson.

How Would You Feel If Your Dad Was Gay? — regular kids cope in this children's book by Ann Heron & Meredith Maran. 1991, \$9.95, Alyson.

Lavender Lists — *New Lists about Lesbian and Gay Culture, History and Personalities*, by Lynne Yamaguchi Fletcher and Adrien Saks. 1990, \$8.95, Alyson.

The Alyson Almanac — *A Treasury of Information for the Gay and Lesbian Community*, from slang words to congressional voting records, by the Alyson staff. 1990, \$8.95, Alyson.

Happy Endings Are All Alike — high school seniors (girls) fall in love in this reprint of Sanra Scoppettone's 1978 classic. 1991, \$6.95, Alyson.

Bushfire: Stories of Lesbian Desire — 16 stories by diverse lesbians, edited by Karen Barber. 1991, \$8.95, Lace Publications, an imprint of Alyson.

Order in the Universe and Other Stories, about (apparently straight) people who have lost and triumphed by Veronica Ross. 1990, \$12.95, The Mercury Press, Box 446, Stratford, Ontario N5A 6T3 Canada.

SKY — *A Poem in Four Pieces* in which the drama is child-rape, by Libby Scheier. 1990, \$8.95, The Mercury Press.

Wanting Women: An Anthology of Erotic Lesbian Poetry from 43 poets, edited by Jan Hardy. 1990, \$9.95, Sidewalk Revolution Press, POB 9062, Pittsburgh, PA 15224.

Different Mothers — *Sons and Daughters of Lesbians Talk about their Lives* includes 38 "children" from five to forty, edited by Louise Rafkin. 1990, \$9.95, Cleis Press, POB 8933, Pittsburgh, PA 15221.

1 IN 3: Women with Cancer Confront an Epidemic — more than 40 lesbian and straight womyn confront the political and survival issues of cancer in this important anthology, edited by Judy Brady. 1991, \$10.95, Cleis.

Truth Tales: Contemporary Stories by Women Writers of India, 7 stories edited by Kali for Women. 1990, \$12.95, The Feminist Press at CUNY, 311 East 94 Street, NY, NY 10128.

Bamboo Shoots After the Rain — *Contemporary Stories by Women Writers of Taiwan* — 14 stories from three generations of women, edited by Ann C. Carver and Sung-sheng Yvonne Chang. 1991, \$14.95, The Feminist Press.

Women Writing in India: 600 B.C. to the Present — *Volume I: 600 B.C. to the Early 20th Century* — an impressive volume offers over 140 texts from 13 languages, many never available in English, certainly not in this context, edited by Susie Tharu and K. Lalita. 1991, \$29.95, The Feminist Press.

Women in Film — *an International Guide*, comprehensive and cross-referenced, edited by Annette Kuhn with Susannah Radstone. 1991, \$12.95, Ballantine Books.

Caribbean Women Writers: Essays from the First International Conference, edited by Selwyn R. Cudjoe. 1990, \$14.95, Univ. of Mass. Press, Amherst, MA 01004.

Women, AIDS & Activism, incl. data, essays on lesbians, drugs, prisons, teenagers, racism, more, by The ACT UP/NY Women & AIDS Book Group. 1990, \$7.00, South End Press, 116 Botolph St., Boston, MA 02115.

Misogynies: Reflections on Myths and Malice, essays exploring woman-hating in politics, religion, literature, history and popular culture, by Joan Smith. 1991, \$16.95 (cloth), Ballantine Books.

All Contraries Confounded — The Lyrical Fiction of Virginia Woolf, Djuna Barnes, & Marguerite Duras is a critical approach to ambivalence and contradiction in "difficult" women's writing, by Karen Kaivola. 1991, \$9.95, University of Iowa Press, Iowa City, IA 52242.

Emily Dickinson: Woman Poet, the "first full-length study integrating Dickinson's homoeroticism with a comprehensive interpretation of her poetry," by Paula Bennet. 1991, \$9.95, Univ. of Iowa Press.

The Homeplace, poetry chronicling the history of an Afro-American family through slavery to WWII, by Marilyn Nelson Waniek. 1990, \$7.95, Louisiana State Univ. Press, Baton Rouge, LA 70893.

Sermons Seldom Heard — Women Proclaim Their Lives is a collection of contemporary liberal women's sermons, edited by Annie Lally Milhaven. 1991, \$15.95, Crossroad, 370 Lexington Ave., NY, NY 10017.

More Lesbian Etiquette — humorous essays by Gail Sausser, with cartoons by Alice Muhlback. 1990, \$7.95, Crossing Press, Freedom, CA 95019.

Tales of Magic Realism by Women: Dreams in a Minor Key is a collection of stories that explores the fragile borders between the expected and the exceptional event, edited by Susanna J. Sturgis. 1991, \$10.95, Crossing.

Women of the 14th Moon — Writings on Menopause — a landmark collection of 90 lesbian and straight womyn's writings, edited by Dena Taylor and Amber Coverdale Sumrall. 1991, \$12.95, Crossing.

Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America, from romantic friendships to lesbian nation, a controversial study by Lillian Faderman. 1991, Columbia University Press.

Silence and Power: A Reevaluation of Djuna Barnes — essays, reminiscences & illustrations examining Barnes' career as a ground-breaking lesbian writer from 1913 on, edited by Mary Lynn Broe. 1991, \$13.95, Southern Illinois University Press, POB 3697, Carbondale, IL 62902.

Tapes Received:

True Life Adventure, songs of risk and reality by Sue Fink. Frostfire Records, 2658 Tilden Ave., L.A., CA 90064.

Voices of Battered Lesbians — a political tape of testimony, put together by the Lesbian Caucus of the Mass. Coalition of Battered Women Service Groups, 107 South Street (5th floor), Boston, MA 02111.

Announcements and Classified Ads _____

PUBLICATIONS

MAIZE, A Lesbian Country Magazine. \$10 for 4 issues from Word Weavers, Box 8724, Mpls. MN 55408.

WORD WEAVERS, a Lesbian publisher, offers these classics: *Ripening; Dreaming; Awakening; Lesbian Land; Spirited Lesbians*. Write for brochure: Box 8742, Mpls. MN 55408

PALLAS ATHENA provides a network for women veterans, regardless of race, creed, religion or sexual orientation, and resource information as well as letters, fiction and creative works by women veterans. Contact: Pallas Athena Network, PO Box 1171-T, New Market, VA 22844.

TRIVIA: Erin Rice and Kay Parkhurst have stepped forward to take on *Trivia*. Issue #18, due out in early fall, will carry more information about their plans. We need your tangible support to help us through this period of change. Also, if you are a writer, whether previously published or not, or know other women who are writing, please send us material. "*Trivia* is a place where women's ideas can assume their original power and significance." —Lise Weil, Linda Nelson, Editors.

THE CUTTING EDGE is a lesbian produced newsletter for women living with self-inflicted violence. New mailing address: PO Box 20819, Cleveland, OH 44120.

LESBIAN INTERNATIONAL from the Lesbian Information Service in Lancashire, England, has ceased publication.

CALLS FOR SUBMISSION

Poetry, fiction, essays wanted for *SISTER/STRANGER*, an anthology on lesbians loving across differences of age, race, class, size, dis/ability, ethnic & religious backgrounds. Lesbians who are of color, old, disabled, Jewish, poor or working class encouraged to respond. Send SASE with mss. or query to Sidewalk Revolution Press, POB 9062, Pittsburgh, PA 15224. Deadline: 1/30/92.

LESBIAN MSS SOUGHT. Novel-length fiction, cartoons, comics. Prefer upbeat romance, adventure, sci fi, erotica. Will respond to queries w/in 8 wks. For ms. guidelines send SASE to Madwoman Press, POB 690, Northboro, MA 01532.

CALL FOR WRITINGS OF EX-MENTAL PATIENTS. Poetry, personal journal, stories — any form of writing sought concerning women's experiences with mental illness: abuse as inpatients, success with alternative therapies, experience of mental illness, what it was like for you. Send submissions or queries to Jinie Lind, Box 6337, Fall River, MA 02724. Include SASE for return.

SHORT FICTION FOR WOMEN now accepting short stories, novellas and novel excerpts from published and unpublished women writers. Payment will be based on length and funds available. Rachel Warden, Editor, Short Fiction by Women, Box 1276, Stuyvesant Station, NY, NY 10009.

SEXUALITY IN MIDLIFE AND BEYOND ANTHOLOGY seeks stories, personal accounts and poems by women. Previously published work considered. Send w/SASE to: Dena Taylor/Amber Coverdale Sumrall, POB 334, Capitola, CA 95010. Deadline Dec.15, 1991.

COLORADO LESBIANS, DYKES, QUEERS, BUTCHES, FEMMES, SPINSTERS, AND WOMEN-IDENTIFIED-WOMEN! I'm interested in finding out about the history of Lesbians in Colorado (and perhaps neighboring states as well) during the 1940s, 50s and early 60s. If you wish, your confidentiality will be strictly preserved. For more info, write to Katie Gilmartin, POB 1246, Nederland, CO 80466, or call (303) 258-7060.

AT THE CROSSROADS seeks submissions of written and visual art for new arts journal for women artists of African descent. Especially interested in submissions from women in the Maritimes region and writers who have not yet been published. Send to: c/o Karen Augustine, *At the Crossroads: A Journal for Women Artists of African Descent*, POB 317, Station P, Toronto, Ontario, M5S 2S8, Canada.

BOSTON MARRIAGE RELATIONSHIPS AMONG LESBIANS. Clinical psychologists Esther Rothblum and Kathleen Brehony are researching this romantic but nonsexual relationship. If interested in discussing your experiences and feelings on this, please contact Kathleen Brehony at (804) 671-2273, or Greenwich Psychological Associates, 5555 Greenwich Rd., Suite 506, Virginia Beach, VA 23462.

SURVIVORS OF TRAUMA SHARE THEIR SUCCESS STORIES. Recovery stories and ways to deal with after effects of trauma; emphasis on thriving. For info, guidelines: SASE to Leslie Aileen Ross, Box 51, 2 S. 727 Rt. 59, Warrenville, IL 60555.

QUICKIES: LESBIAN SHORT-SHORTS sought for new pamphlet/periodical series. App. 500 words, queries with SASE to Irene Zahava, 307 W. State St., Ithaca, NY 14850.

C.O.W.A.S. (Communities of Women Art Shows) PART III: Woman As Survivor. All art on survival issues welcome for show in Chicago. Deadline: Jan. 4, 1992. Query or submit with SASE to: Dianna C. Long, Urban Art Retreat, 1833 NE 2nd, Portland, OR 97212.

CONFERENCES & COLLEGES

9th BERKSHIRE CONFERENCE ON THE HISTORY OF WOMEN seeks proposals for "Transformations: Women, Gender, Power," June 11-13, 1993. Submit in triplicate by February 1, 1992. Send proposals on U.S. topics to Elaine Abelson, New School for Social Research, Eugene Lang College, 65 W. 11th St., NY, NY 10011; on non-U.S. topics, to Margaret Hunt, Amherst College, 2254, POB 5000, Amherst, MA 01002-5000. Comparative U.S./non-U.S. proposals to either co-chair.

YORK UNIVERSITY has a newly-established graduate program in women's studies. First students admitted 1992. Contact: Karen Shopsowitz, Dept. of Communications, 4700 Keele St., No. York, Ontario, Canada M3J 1P3, or call 736-5010 or 736-2100 X22084.

CONTESTS

PAT PARKER MEMORIAL AWARD of \$250 is given annually to an African-American feminist poet. Submissions season for 1992 award is between March 1 and 31. For rules of submissions, write: Woman in the Moon Publication (WIM) Box 137, 2215-R Market St., San Francisco, CA 94114.

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SUPPORT

My name is Brenda Aris. I am currently incarcerated at the California Institution for Women, serving a sentence of 15 years to life for killing my husband of 10 years. I am a battered woman who killed her abuser. The governors of Maryland and Ohio have granted clemency to a number of women who were in prison for killing or assaulting their abusers. I have written to Governor Wilson, asking that he consider reviewing my case. If you feel that you might be able to lend your support to my request to the Governor, I would be most grateful.

The Berlin Archive for the Discovery & Preservation of the Love of Women — SPINNBODEN — depends solely on private donations and contributions. We appeal to women to donate money, books or other documents of lesbian and woman-related life. Contact: SPINNBODEN e.V., Burgsdorfstraße 1, W-1000 Berlin 65, Germany or call (Germany)/30/465 20 21.

WAGES DUE LESBIANS is fundraising for a lesbian teacher in London, England, who has been harassed under Section 28, a bill which outlaws any positive discussion of homosexuality in schools, among other things. Requests for more info and donations to: Women in Dialogue, attn: Teachers Fund, POB 14512, SF, CA 94114.



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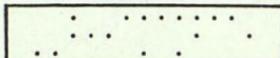
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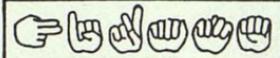
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We publish only lesbians' work. We are particularly interested in work that reflects the diversity of our experiences: as lesbians of color, ethnic lesbians, Third World, Jewish, old, young, working class, poor, disabled, fat. We welcome experimental work. We will not print anything that is oppressive or demeaning to lesbians or women, or which perpetuates negative stereotypes. We do intend to keep an open and critical dialogue on all the issues that affect our work, joy and survival. See p. 8 for details on upcoming issues. We are open to suggestions for new themes.

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Whenever a dyke asks me why I think there hasn't been a really good anthology about class and classism (the kind of dyke I'm thinking about would probably use the word "definitive"), I want to turn to her and not say a thing and see if she gets it.

—Elliott
