



Identity and Desire

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**Special thanks to:** All of the womyn who contributed work in its many forms, our readers, and our supporters in the journey.

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**SINISTER WISDOM**, founded 1976

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*Sinister Wisdom* is a multicultural, multi-class, female-born lesbian space. We seek to open, consider and advance the exploration of community issues. We recognize the power of language to reflect our diverse experiences and to enhance our ability to develop critical judgment, as lesbians evaluating our community and our world. Statements made and opinions expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the publisher, board members, or editor(s) of *Sinister Wisdom*.

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

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Sinister Wisdom is a U.S. non-profit organizations; donations to support the work and distribution of *Sinister Wisdom* are welcome and appreciated.

**Sinister Wisdom, Inc. PO Box 3252, Berkeley, CA 94703, USA**

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## Notes on a Magazine

As this issue of *Sinister Wisdom* took shape, I realized Julie and I had a compilation of work that offered not only a terrific range of voice and perception, but also a representative body of work which evokes desire—in so many different ways—from poems of loss and regret, to powerful longings for, and connection to, culture, family, and imagination; desire that is carnal and raw, compassionate and insightful, thoughtful and probing—manifestations often unarticulated in a world that continues to marginalize us, but yet still reverberate beyond the layered experiences and perceptions so generously shared here by our contributors.

In “Red Prayer for a Nun,” Samn Stockwell asks: “Why trade one embargo of the soul for another,/ as if we were not both a paste of dreams/ over a shard of will?” The array of answers are fascinating, running from painful and peculiar relationships of family to the greater universe of social and cultural markers that claim us as other, or lover, which enfolds us in the endless consequences of racism, classism, sexism, and the ostracism perpetuated by foiled dreams of financial security, of education, of emotional safety. Each of the following poems, stories, narratives, reviews, essays, and herstories claim the necessity of a specific lesbian-centered curiosity and a lesbian desire to bear witness to who we are in our bodies and self-consciousness, our personal physical power, and our defiant desires to thrive in the face of patriarchal privilege and indifference.

We can understand desire in Sally Brunk’s careful understanding of wisdom in “Following in Grandmother’s Footsteps,” or Liz Demi Green’s positioning of the “[T]hirteen strokes of misfortune,” in her “The Queen of Spades,” a desire for reconciliation, held up by the determination and strength to persevere. We watch Ana Schwartz acknowledge her feminine beauty in “The Dress” and her sexual physicality in “Park Slope Hook-Up.”

Stephanie Barnes’s powerful piece, “Audre Lorde and David Ruffian in Heaven” confirms a desire for interconnection “in the interlacing intersections/ of black, female, gay.” Monisha Lakhota’s “It’s Not their Fault”, articulates desire for the innocence of just being who we are, and Lisa L. Moore’s “Cinnamon Rolls,” with its bravado and desire for authenticity.

In her thought-provoking poem, “simple truths,” Elana Dykewomon offers the desire for understanding and accepting how damn hard it really is to be present in our truths. “[in] the cave I have seen the minotaur” she writes “and death of course/in the cavern the others avoid.” Even the book reviews of Ruth Mountaingrove and Robin ní Catáin

convey desire—intellectually—in the sharing of the books they discovered and delighted in.

Julie and I thank every one of the lesbian writers who trust us with their work and continue to believe in the importance of *Sinister Wisdom*. As Elaine Sexton tells us in “Believing” we need never become mere spectators of our lesbian lives, we won’t watch “silent,/ rolling up our windows” so we don’t see what must be seen.

Merry Gangemi  
June 2011

## **Where To Find Sinister Wisdom**

Antigone Books (Tucson, AZ)  
Bloodroot (Bridgeport, CT)  
Giovanni’s Room (Philadelphia, PA)  
Galaxy Books (Hardwick, VT)  
In Other Words (Portland, OR)  
Bear Pond Books (Montpelier, VT)  
Goddard College Library (Plainfield, VT)  
Left Bank Books (Hanover, NH)  
Dartmouth Barnes and Noble (Hanover, NH)  
True Colors Bookstore (Minneapolis, MN)

Our list of places to find *Sinister Wisdom* is growing! Join the *Sinister Wisdom* Community Distribution Network and help spread the work of Sinister Wisdom. More information is available at [www.SinisterWisdom.org](http://www.SinisterWisdom.org) and on our Facebook page, <http://www.facebook.com/SinisterWisdom>.

## Digital Archive of Sinister Wisdom 1976-2000

### Agreement with Reveal Media

As you may know printed materials—books, magazines, journals, et cetera—are quickly being digitized by a variety of institutions including libraries and Google. To date, back issues of *Sinister Wisdom* have not been available electronically to scholars, researchers, and students. While we recognize that there are many issues with digitization, we also don't want *Sinister Wisdom* and its thirty-five years of lesbian imagination to be lost to future readers. As a result, *Sinister Wisdom* has entered into an agreement with Reveal Media to digitize back issues from 1976 through 2001.

This was not an easy decision. Reveal Media is not a woman-owned or lesbian-owned company and is in fact a for profit entity. Nevertheless, Reveal Media has an exciting project to digitize issues of magazines and journals from the Women's Liberation Movement to make them available to research libraries and scholars. We feel that *Sinister Wisdom* is an important part of the collection and we are pleased to join a number of other feminist and lesbian publications that are a part of the project.

What most excites us about the project is that, as a part of the agreement, *Sinister Wisdom* will receive an electronic file of all issues of *Sinister Wisdom* digitized under the agreement. We plan to put these back issues online at our own website, ([www.SinisterWisdom.org](http://www.SinisterWisdom.org)), to make them widely available to readers. This will probably take a number of years (though secretly we are hoping that it might happen in time for our 40th anniversary in 2016.) In the interim, Reveal Media will sell subscriptions to libraries and other institutions of the full collection. When they reach a particular threshold, they will also make the collection freely available.

An important part of *Sinister Wisdom's* contract with Reveal Media is that **individual authors can opt out of having their work available in the collection.** If you wrote for *Sinister Wisdom* during these years and you do not want your contribution to be available in the archive, please email Julie R. Enszer at [JulieREnszer@gmail.com](mailto:JulieREnszer@gmail.com) or write to her at [Sinister Wisdom, PO Box 3252, Berkeley, CA 94703](mailto:SinisterWisdom, PO Box 3252, Berkeley, CA 94703). In your letter please indicate that you are writing to “opt out” of the digitization project and clearly list the articles you wrote and your name. Your material will be suppressed from the digitization project. Your timely response to this is greatly appreciated.

In the meantime, we will keep you up to date on the project and let you know how it develops.

## **Red Prayer for a Nun**

**Samn Stockwell**

Why trade one embargo of the soul for another,  
as if we were not both a paste of dreams  
over a shard of will?

Remember the full lips and unclothed  
breasts of young women, the sun setting through cigarette smoke,  
wine drunk late, the day ending  
before memory battles hope?

—The only triumph.

## **First Confession**

**Samn Stockwell**

Stephen ground my face in the snow bank  
and ran to his mother's house.  
Martin smelled like cow shit  
and held my hand in third grade.  
My best friend held a velvet postcard  
of the Virgin Mary that glowed in the dark.

I loved her and wanted to marry her,  
though she committed mortal sins.

We wanted God to keep us forever  
riding our bikes over the iron bridge,  
waving to our distant parents.

## **The Balkans**

### **Samn Stockwell**

1.

My mother pounded on the back of my older sister  
pushing her down the front steps - *you just go* -  
and threw her mascara after her,  
my sister waiting until evening  
when my father brought her back in the house.

My mother curled into the couch.  
*The doctor told me to rest.*

Then work, food  
and the brown couch  
we slept on  
in the vastness of the living room  
vanished.

We were divided by my younger sister's birth;  
my brother to the air force.

In the next place we lived  
she tied the baby to a chair  
and threw her,  
once, against the wall.

I can't remember what?  
A medical procedure  
my mother performed  
on my younger sister -  
I remember my sister screaming.  
It makes my shoulders roil even now.

Sometimes at night I think I hear someone crying  
but it's the glue of everyday life -  
the dog snoring, the refrigerator churning.

My younger sister lived at home until she was thirty,  
sidling between adolescence and old age.  
She and my mother watched TV and dozed and

sickened, sharing a vaporizer and diagnoses.  
My mother grew thin, my sister fat, and my father circled outside them,  
raging—  
*I've given them everything.*

2.  
It could be events, like place,  
are a side effect of time—

When he was seventeen and  
I was seven, my brother  
offered me twenty dollars  
to touch my crotch.  
He pleaded,  
hand under his suit pants.  
When I was younger  
he said *mom said to do this*

and time left him forever seventeen.

3.  
Wearing a flannel nightgown,  
my older sister tripped over a cord.

My father ripped the cord out,  
beating channels through her gown.  
My mother said  
*look what you've done*  
but she was smiling  
nervously, rage was not a consolation.

Guilt ate every one of us.

## **January Dreams**

**Samn Stockwell**

I was walking a snowstorm down,  
I could hardly raise my feet  
and when I got home,  
it was still Christmas,  
gifts from my aunt  
under an exhausted tree,  
my family waiting for the ceremony.

Next, I drank a vat of gravylike coffee  
in a coffee bar. The anorexic girl  
drank water, and I kissed her, dripping  
calories on her lips. Where was Beth  
to witness? I wanted Ellen and a parade  
of my showy past to stalk away from.

Was Christmas over?  
Had I gotten a present for my aunt?

I am getting in the car with Beth  
when the handicapped actor's workshop ends.  
They hop past: the walking heads  
with necks glued to black shingles.

Beth drags me to the lesbian sewing circle,  
where her lover is fixing the drape on a gray  
flannel cape. I am fitted with red boxing shorts,  
I will be attacking the cold. Beth is singing opera.

## **simple truths**

**Elana Dykewomon**

1.

the world gets cleaner  
because women clean it  
always been that way  
simple  
but we were no match  
for internal combustion  
strip mines  
our rags and bleach  
couldn't reach those corners  
hell, we said  
we're tired of this mess  
you do it  
but no one did

2.

guns must be delicious  
little boys lick them  
old men rub their barrels and sigh  
meat potatoes gravy  
thanksgiving  
property borders everything tasty  
don't be a spoil sport  
it's a party  
pin the tail on the target  
smack your lips

3.

some women like a tickle

4.

what makes it change  
not kindness  
what lesson is that  
we thought kindness was  
true spiritual practice

shows how much we know

5.

that reminds me  
of being 16, 17 aching  
to gentle  
a woman  
any woman must get it  
if another one asks  
    can I be gentle with you

this was before I ever heard  
of sm of give it to me hard

o for a chance  
to run my hand  
slow

now  
I take it for granted

any day any night  
I can touch women  
with love

I don't forget to, exactly  
but

I could be gentle  
more

would that change anything  
besides me

6.

the power went off  
I lit the menorah for the last night  
even though Susan and Michal had gone to bed  
because let there be light  
and here was light

and I lay on the couch next to the menorah  
and played solitaire on my cell phone

7.

could I tell you a story  
not tonight

9.

let's skip 8  
evenhanded, practical – let us  
you and me float  
suspended in the salted tank  
looking inward for a chance  
that dreams  
don't come true

in the cave I have seen the minotaur  
and death of course  
in the cavern the others avoid

in the morning I dreamed I heard my brother's voice  
on the answering machine

they were nice to her in the hospital this one guy  
brought her potato chips but  
mom is no more

he rambled and I choked on the dream scream  
no no not loud enough for Susan  
exercising in the living room  
twenty steps away to hear no

grief will come  
but not today  
the second of january

10.

I am fragile as old celluloid  
full of important images but too  
flammable to take out of the vault

## **Believing**

**Elaine Sexton**

We all watched, silent,  
rolling up our windows.

From the back seat  
Lucy said: *Just because*

*you've made your bed,  
doesn't mean you have to*

*lie in it.* We all turned to look  
because *seeing is believing.*

Just then, the cliff you hoped for  
appeared – a winter sea

crashing and bashing  
its stone face, now your own.

## **Glass House**

**Elaine Sexton**

The night reflected her own interior  
design: glossy, modern. This time  
she made sure to use tempered glass,  
inside and out, so the trees entered  
everywhere, the couch she napped on  
nestled in open branches as did  
the lampshade, a lit robin's nest.

The goblet she held suspended in air.  
The sun rose and set drenching pine  
floors that glowed noon to night,  
never a dark moment until it turned  
truly dark. Lucy busied herself in a book,  
trying not to look out to see her legs  
stretching, her elbow propped, then dropped.

If she did look, she could see her name  
in reverse type, her hair needed brushing.  
She would see you staring back, amazed  
that she could ever feel safe so  
completely transparent, the anomaly  
of "safety glass," how it promises  
to be harmless when it breaks.

**Rectrix (*REK-triks*)**

**Elaine Sexton**

Picturing language without gender  
over supper, someone said *imagine*

*a day without pronouns, his/hers.* What to do  
with *rectrix* / from the Latin / feminine

of *rector* / *one that directs* /  
*(she) who directs* / as well as:

the *quill feathers of a bird's tail*  
*controlling the direction of flight.*

Imagine text without *italics*. No map  
to the emphatic. Here's the smallest

lens on earth / to consider control /  
all that can not be said / in print.

**\*drive\***

**Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz**

But the scary, the strange part is, I'm driving my new girlfriend's truck 65 miles an hour in fairly dense traffic and I begin. First knuckle against crotch through my green army cutoffs. Then my whole palm pressing up and down, heat rising, blood rising, rubbing in hot broad circles, flame, blood, sun so high, body roars ready to come when it hits me. What I'm doing. Masturbating on the freeway.

I panic. Lose it. It. The erection, I want to say, juggling male imagery against my meager knowledge of physiology, clitoral pride, tall and swollen. Lose it to fear, is this dangerous? Am I crazy? Who do I ask? Three lovers back was the one who taught me to make her come while she drove, and she drove just fine, but there were two of us--one to come and one to pay attention?

Meanwhile it's gone. Lost. It. And I want It.

So. Eyes on the road, the cars. With supreme caution I begin again. Lightly. Inside the shorts this time. Fingers on skin. Slick clit. Pounding broadening circle pounding flame blood flame blood pounding if this is dangerous if I die for it I have to finish and do. Come wet. Keep driving. Flash on that famous male drive. Gotta have it. Animals. Just yesterday I read how male dolphins bond to gang rape females, corner them with a frontal assault and a back-up team like vast slow football. Imagine telling my new girlfriend whose truck I'm driving,

my new girlfriend with whom I made such wild liquid love in a huge borrowed bed in the mountains of northern New Mexico that (gotta have it) I followed her across the continent to a city where I know only three women, none of them well. Where I sit every day trying to revise essays I can barely remember reading much less writing. Where she works a job she hates, comes home burned and defeated, empty. Vacuums the stairs, bleaches the sheets.

Flash on the seat of her truck, vinyl with a stretchy seat cover, clean and tidy, like everything my girlfriend owns and is. Tonight when I get home I'll mention something about how she is sometimes rigid and she'll freeze with rage. For days. Then I'll try to pretend I didn't mean it. But I do.

Flash on the seat of her truck where I just came wet. Wonder if the smell will drift out the window, or vanish beneath sweet amber diffusing in afternoon sun from the tiny wooden box she keeps in the ashtray.

Or if maybe a whiff will remain. If she'll recognize it and find it sexy. The sun hits right above my eyes, I drive steady in the line of traffic, cross the bridge into my new, alien city, and I know this last, that she'll find it sexy, is what I want.

**Photograph 1**

**Azaan Kamau**



**Photograph 2**

**Azaan Kamau**



## **The Night I Met Bill Casey**

### **Merry Gangemi**

The drive to Locust Valley was interminable; eighty-percent humidity, a yellow-green haze over the Long Island Expressway, and my almost-father-in-law, Edmund, behind the wheel, bleating his horn like the rest of the stalled herd. Edmund was a diminutive man, but he was nobody's fool. After the war and his stint as an OSS interrogator, Edmund taught high school French. He was a Goldwater conservative who eventually assumed and held onto control of the Hudson County GOP for more than twenty years.

Edmund was a widower and a teetotaler, the latter a crusade. He only drove Chevrolets, and never exceeded the speed limit. When I began to date his son, Nathaniel, he was delighted, but soon his displeasure was evident. After all, I was a registered Democrat, a nascent feminist, and definitely not WASP. Anyway, there we were, creeping towards Locust Valley while WNEW fm purred through the radio and planes from JFK screamed overhead.

I was invited by Edmund's friend Sofia to spend a month at her summer home in Locust Valley, a tony enclave not far from Teddy Roosevelt's Oyster Bay home. I was twenty-years-old, engaged, and already treading water in a role that was devolving into something inexplicably disturbing. Regardless of the affection I felt towards Nathaniel, who was eight years my senior, I carried uneasiness in my chest, a sense that something wasn't quite right. No matter how wonderful Nathaniel was, he was also ambitious and privileged. When there was tension between us, I attributed it to his occasional bouts of impatience with circumstances rather than temperament. Nathaniel had swept me off my feet into a circle that I found both exciting and intimidating. Needless to say, I was thrilled by the invitation: four weeks at Rock Hollow Farm.

Sofia Ocampo was an elegant Argentine Parisian, married some thirty years to one Frederick Rodier, whose family fortune was built on the backs of South Africa's diamond miners. Rodier had known Edmund since World War II and the Office of Strategic Services (OSS). Fred, as Edmund referred to him, had cast Sofia aside and taken up with one Olga Barańczak, an expatriate Polish lawyer who was the same age as Nathaniel. Sofia refused to give Frederick a divorce, carrying on as if Fred's affair was mere annoyance, which, according to Edmund, it was. Sofia could care less about pretense. Everyone knew what Olga and Fred were up to, and, quite frankly, Olga and Fred did not faze me; I was intrigued by what Sofia and Edmund meant to each other. I did not

understand why I had been invited but the chance to get out of the city and write, felt like an adventure I didn't want to miss.

"So why do you think she invited me?" I asked Nathaniel the night before I left.

"Because she likes you," he answered.

"She hardly knows me," I said. Through the phone, I could feel Nathaniel's pause. Then he sighed. "Don't read anything into it," he finally said. "She likes you. She's bored. Leave it at that."

Five hours after leaving New Jersey, we drove through the gates of Sofia's farm. At the end of a long gravel driveway, we pulled up to the house. This so-called summer cottage was next door to the Doubledays (who were not in residence, I learned). It was a large, rambling, cedar-shaked house with a four-car garage, groundskeeper's cottage, greenhouse, guesthouse, and a large, secluded, in-ground swimming pool—but more on that later. Sofia was conferring with her groundskeeper, Jake Bird. Edmund beeped the horn and Sofia and Jake turned around.

At this point in my story, I suppose I should write: A beautiful smile bloomed across Sofia's face, but that would sound ridiculous and betray my naiveté and awkwardness. As it was, I had a very hard time meeting people I did not know, let alone understand how her smile really did bloom across her face.

"I wonder if calling the police is necessary!" she exclaimed, moving around the car to greet us.

I scrambled out of the car. "Hello," I said.

Sofia bestowed two light kisses, one on either cheek. "So our budding poet has arrived!" she exclaimed. "Welcome to the farm, Helen." She turned to Edmund. "You are late as usual," she said.

Edmund grinned. "Police? For what?" he asked.

"Some punks tore up one of the flower beds along the east end of the property," Jake Bird said.

"Completely destroyed the angelica," Sofia added.

"What is angelica?" I asked.

"The guardian of the garden," Sofia proclaimed. "But for now let's get you both settled."

As if on cue, the housekeeper appeared.

"Bring Helen's bags to the Green Room," Sofia told the housekeeper. "Edmund, you are in the Carriage House."

Sofia Ocampo had the voice of Capucine and the physiognomy of Lauren Bacall. I looked and sounded more like Annie Hall with short hair, and tended towards baggy chinos and over-sized oxford shirts—a fashion failing for a young woman that was hardly appreciated by Republicans circa 1974—but I was interested in everything, which gave me certain latitude I took full advantage of.

I dutifully followed the housekeeper. “What is your name?” I asked her.

“Perla,” she said. “Perla Müller.”

“I like that,” I told her as she led me upstairs to my room.

“Spanish and German?”

“No,” she said, “Brazilian and German.” She put my suitcase on a stand at the foot of the bed. “Let me know if you need anything,” she said, and left, quietly closing the door behind her.

I stood there for a moment, looking at the closed door, a nebulous sense of discomfort hanging in the air. What ruins are in me that can be found, I thought, remembering my Shakespeare. I was still standing there when Sofia knocked.

“Come in,” I called, and she opened the door.

“So,” she said. “I hope you like this room. This was my room until I was married.” She walked over to the windows and began adjusting the curtains

“Is that how long you’ve been here?” I asked.

“Much longer,” she said, and opened one of the dormer windows. “My grandfather built this house over eighty years ago. It has always been my favorite place to be.”

“Mine is the ocean,” I said.

Sofia opened another window, tied back the curtain, and turned to me. Her marvelous smile bloomed again.

“Then,” she said. “We have many things in common.”

Sofia looked around the room again and then turned to me. “You must be exhausted,” she said. “Dinner is at eight, nothing formal.”

I looked at my watch. It was 3:30. “Thank you,” I said. “I’m tired enough to take a nap.”

“Good,” Sofia replied. “Sleep well.” Like Perla, she closed the door very quietly.

Later that evening, we sat down to a casual supper in the screened-in rear porch. Edmund, awash with references to Solzhenitsyn, dominated the conversation for most of the meal, dragging his reductive-government ideology along with him to the veranda, where we had coffee and lemon poppy-seed cake. Eventually, Edmund finished his analysis of post-Nixon America and turned his attention to Ronald Reagan, who he believed would be the most impressive president the country had ever seen.

“More impressive than FDR?” I asked.

Edmund stirred his coffee. “Roosevelt was a Democrat,” he said.

“Well, I know that,” I replied, “but he did lead us out of the Great Depression.”

“He was a socialist,” Edmund said, “a traitor to his class.”

I pulled a face, which made Sofia laugh.

“The renegade of the Roosevelts,” she quipped “Speaking of which, Edmund, why don’t we go to Oyster Bay tomorrow? Teddy’s summer cottage is an interesting day trip.”

“Well,” Edmund said irritably. “You know I’ll be leaving after lunch.”

Sofia turned towards me. “Yes,” she said. “Helen is an idealist, Edmund.”

“Right,” he said, “my only daughter-in-law—a bright-eyed idealist.”

I was surprised at how his words stung. My eyes filled.

“Tell us about Nixon,” Sofia said, changing the subject and giving me a sympathetic wink.

“He’s coming back strong,” Edmund said.

They should have impeached the bastard, I thought.

“Everybody wants to see him,” Edmund droned. “He’ll be back sooner than we thought.”

Sofia listened and engaged Edmund in what he thought would help ascend Reagan from governor to president. I struggled to stifle my yawns and to revive my dwindling attention span.

“Go to bed,” Sofia said soon after midnight.

I excused myself and went upstairs.

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The next morning, I woke to the sound of Jake Bird raking the gravel. He was rhythmic as he worked, his measured strokes punctuated by the achingly lonely call of a morning dove. I closed my eyes and stretched, arms up over my head, back arching like a cat. I imagined Jake as methodical and cautious, unlike the reticent, solitary gardener at my grandfather’s summerhouse, who insisted on planting geraniums when my grandmother wanted roses, and grew cabbages and carrots instead of tomatoes and green beans. I once heard my grandfather tell his canasta partner that Mr. Plutterman had been gardener to the ex-king of Romania—which annoyed my grandmother no end and only fueled her contempt for him. The last straw for her was when he caught two rabbits and hung their gutted corpses, heads down, on the clothesline.

I lay there remembering and thinking about all these things, and then wondered why I agreed to marry Nathaniel. His father was conservative and I was a socialist. How was I to deal with a father-in-law like Edmund? He fancied himself an intellectual. He disparaged anyone who did not agree with him about the evils of communism and the necessity of controlling bleeding-heart liberals and dangerous student

radicals, who, he would complain, had no idea what they were protesting against or demonstrating for. They were cowards, he would say. They'd hand us over to the Reds. Nathaniel would roll his eyes and say nothing and I would be relieved that I was an earnest, if idealistic, lefty-commie-pinko.

I looked over at the alarm clock. It was 7:15 and already humid. I couldn't bear to sit through breakfast with Edmund, so I decided a cup of coffee and a good run was a better option. Sofia was in the breakfast room with Edmund, who was reading the Wall Street Journal. I picked up the New York Times and scanned the headlines. Edmund grunted good morning.

"How did you sleep?" Sofia asked me.

I smiled. "Like a rock."

She laughed. "I always thought that was a funny phrase," she said, and I agreed.

"I'm going for a run," I told her.

"There's a lovely path," she said. "Go right at the end of the driveway. It's not far past the box hedge."

The path was well maintained, clear of rocks and branches, and carpeted with pine needles and mottled leaves. I ran easily, in spite of the heat, for a good half-hour, and then turned back. I saw Sofia when I approached the box hedge.

I slowed down and then stopped. "Hello," I said.

"Did you enjoy your run?" She asked me.

"Very much," I answered. "It was perfect!"

"I thought you would," she said. "Edmund is getting ready to leave. He wants to avoid any midday traffic."

My relief was palpable. "That's too bad." I said.

Sofia laughed. "You are a terrible liar."

I blushed, even though my face was already hot and red from running.

"Ah!" she exclaimed, "You know when you're impolite."

"Am I that transparent?" I asked her.

She laughed again. "Completely!"

"Damn!" I exclaimed, and then said, "I'm going to be a terrible daughter-in-law, Sofia."

"Nonsense," she said. "You will figure it all out."

I stood there, not sure of myself and suddenly startled by a feeling I could not name.

Sofia took my arm, and we walked back to the house without another word between us.

Nathaniel called late that morning. Sofia was out running errands and I was reading in the hammock on the far side of the back lawn. His voice on the answering machine sounded tired and strained. He was sorry we weren't at home and he missed me. I deleted the message and frowned.

"Does he miss you?" Sofia asked, later.

"I don't know," I said. "Nathaniel always tells me he misses me, but actually, I never miss him."

"Interesting," Sofia said. "I must admit to the same. My husband was always traveling and I was too busy with the boys to even think about missing him."

I picked a sliced cucumber out of the salad she was making. She gently smacked my hand. We both laughed. After lunch we went for a walk and then we went down the pool. Sofia went directly to the deep end.

"Do you miss Paris?" I asked her.

She looked at me. "At times," she said. "But I miss Barcelona far more than Paris."

"Gertrude Stein loved everything Spanish," I said. "But she also liked Franco."

I don't know if she heard me. She dove in, releasing a spray of whiteness and rainbows into the humid air. I watched her from the chaise. She is so beautiful, I thought. I closed my book and watched her swim from one end of the pool to the other. A stream of words began to run through me: aqueous, aquiline, alchemy, amazement. She is, I thought, amazing. I put down my book and dove in. We swam laps, sometimes side by side, sometimes fast and sometimes slow; I stopped counting at twenty-five, and let another stream of words move through my mind: cantilate, curious, copious, conjure, comforting; but then I lost my timing, miscalculated my turn, and hit my forehead on the pool wall. I shot up out of the water. Sofia was gone.

Late that night, a parade of ferocious thunderstorms moved through, clearing out all the humidity. The rest of my stay there was all gorgeous weather and hour upon hour of reading and writing. Only a few rainy days kept me inside. I ran every morning and I spent long sweet hours reading in the hammock. When Nathaniel called, I felt disengaged from him, distracted, and evasive. I found out later that he was furious about those phone calls. But I didn't care at the time and I didn't care later. The physical space I was in, the distance from home, and the immediacy of Sofia and the days there, were all that mattered. Only those few rainy days and the newspapers reminded me that the world was still not perfect.

The Saturday before I was to go home, Sofia hosted Bill Casey and his wife for dinner. Bill Casey was a legend to Edmund and his circle. Sofia and Frederick had known him since before the war. Casey would

soon be Reagan's choice to head the CIA, but at the time I didn't fully understand his significance or his power. I was excited at the thought of meeting him. Sofia was very clear that casual was not on the menu. She lent me a string of pearls and matching earrings to emphasize that fact. I was in my room when I heard the flurry of their arrival. And not long afterwards, Sofia knocked on my door.

"It's too bad Edmund isn't here," she said. "He adores Bill."

"Were they both in France?"

"No," Sofia said. "Bill and Edmund were OSS, Edmund in Washington and Bill in London." She fastened the pearls around my neck. Her fingers lingered and then her hands dropped gently to my shoulders. The sensation was electric. I had to force myself to step away. Then the moment passed, and we went downstairs together.

Bill Casey was very tall, and pale. He had a long unpleasant face. His cheeks were flaccid and poxy, his handshake was limp and cool. His wife was unassuming and very nice. After an hour or so, we went into the dining room. Sofia sat me on her right, across from Mrs. Casey. Bill Casey took the seat at the opposite end of the table.

The dining room was cool and dark. Candles illuminated the table. Several bottles of wine stood on the sideboard. From the kitchen, I could hear Perla moving about. I began to feel small, and hyper-vigilant, as if I was moving down a dimly lit hallway and could not find any doors.

Bill Casey argued or droned throughout the entire meal. He seemed annoyed, a state of mind I was certain he was very familiar with. In turn, Sofia was aggressive or vexed; she challenged Casey several times, particularly about money and Reagan's candidacy. Mrs. Casey said very little but smiled at me a lot. Then, I thought of a question.

"Don't you think Nixon was guilty?" I asked Mrs. Casey.

She looked at me. For a moment or two, no one said anything. Then Bill Casey said, "What the Left has done to Nixon is despicable. There has to be respect for what Richard Nixon has done for this country. You'll do well to think of that."

Then what? I thought. But I said: "Don't you think he went too far?"

Casey looked sharply at Sofia and then at me. "No," he said. "He didn't go far enough."

Then Mrs. Casey said, "Tell us, Helen, are you enjoying yourself?"

"Yes," I answered. "Very much."

She asked me about running and what I had studied in college. Sofia was quiet. Bill Casey sniffed and then speared some green beans. The tension hovering over the table was intense and frightening. I started to

think of strings of words. Conflagration, I thought, chastisement, scintillating, scorn. Sofia touched my arm, asking if I cared for anything more, and the word, “sensuous” ran through me. Sensuous, sensational, secretive, serious, shame, shattered, shimmering. I felt myself redden and took a drink of wine from the glass in front of me. That last word had made me blush: shimmering; not sensuous or shame, but shimmering. I took another drink of wine.

What happened next, while we were waiting for coffee, was extraordinary. Mrs. Casey stood up and excused herself, “to freshen up,” would I care to join her? I was immovable. I would not leave the table no matter how intense Bill Casey’s anger hung in the air. Every nerve in me began to vibrate. Sofia put her hand on my arm.

“Feeling all right?” she asked.

“Yes,” I said.

She nodded, and then directed herself to Casey, who was still muttering on like a priest at High Mass mumbling incomprehensibly in Latin. Then they really began to argue. Casey was louder and gesticulating. Sofia was angry. I looked from one to the other, wondering why Mrs. Casey was taking so long. I saw how beautiful Sofia was, how fine the lines that coursed her forehead, her simple, elegant hairstyle, her hands still smooth and unmarked, the way she meeting Bill Casey head-on, her beautiful dress. She had forgotten me. She was someone else, someone beyond the woman Bill Casey could not talk down. Then I felt fear; I realized that I didn’t understand what they were saying even though at times they were speaking English. They switched to French, to Spanish and back to English, which was more incomprehensible than the French. It felt as if their sentences had no structure; words had devolved into scatterings and slivers of sounds: sharp, stinging; empty, specious; elusive, vacuous. I looked from one to the other in bewilderment: I could not understand what they were saying.

Then Sofia broke into a stream of fiery French. Casey stopped talking. He was clearly enraged. Then he jerked his napkin from his lap and threw it on the table, excused himself, and left the room. Sofia and I sat there. We heard him call to his wife; Perla rushing to get his umbrella; a rustling of hurried movement; the front door open, and the front door close. Shortly afterwards, Perla came in with the coffee and quietly poured us each a cup. She asked if I wanted dessert.

“No,” I said, “nothing for me.” When Perla disappeared back into the kitchen, I turned to Sofia.

“Don’t concern yourself with Bill, darling,” she said. “He and I go way back.” She sipped her coffee and then smiled that gorgeous, gracious smile. “I think we should have a cordial,” she said. “Better yet, a brandy.”

She got up and went through to the kitchen, returning a few minutes later with sniffers and a bottle of brandy. Perla came in to clear the table.

“Perla,” Sofia said, “Everything was lovely and delicious. Thank you. Don’t fuss too much about the kitchen and we won’t need anything else. Will you be here Tuesday?”

“Yes,” Perla said. “I will see you Tuesday.” We could hear her moving about the kitchen and then we heard her car pull down the gravel drive.

Sofia and I sipped our brandy. We did not talk about dinner, or Bill Casey, or republicans. We talked about the intangibles of character and integrity, the innovation of the Phoenician alphabet, the genius of Hannah Arendt, and the perfidy of colonialism. But while the brandy dulled my anxiety, my mind raced and my body struggled to keep up with it all. Eventually, I stopped trembling. The clock chimed midnight. We said goodnight to each other and went upstairs.

I could not sleep. I lay there for hours, watching shadows thrown so randomly on the ceiling by the moonlight. I recited poems and the lyrics of songs. I remembered the opening lines of *Oedipus Rex*, the words Antigone hurled at Creon, Lorca’s luscious poem, *Dos lunas de tarde*. I thought of Juliet’s passionate recognition of Romeo’s voice: *My ears have not yet drunk a hundred words of thy tongue’s uttering, yet I know the sound*. And then of Dickinson, and Bishop: *Dream dream confronting, / now the cupboard’s bare. / The cat’s gone a-hunting. / The brook feels for the stair*. At 3 am, I gave up. I took a towel, quietly let myself out, and went down to the pool.

The air was much cooler that night, the surface of the pool smothered by a mist that rose from the warmer water. I remembered Faulkner and the first time I read the word “effluvium.” I slipped out of my pajamas and into the pool, careful not to make noise. I was careful not to splash. I floated on my back and then swam breaststroke, languidly and quietly, back and forth. I tried to think of nothing but I thought of Nathaniel and Edmund. I heard what my name would sound like if I married him: Helen Pflicht. It was flat; it had no life to it. It was a name I could never get use to. I could not marry Nathaniel. Caught between Nathaniel and his father, I would suffocate. I would never write another poem. I would never see Sofia again. I felt that last thought like a sin, knowingly horribly honest. *Standing by my bed / In gold sandals / Dawn that very / moment awoke me*. I knew of Sappho, and I knew of Rich, Pratt, and Broumas. I knew what it meant. I stopped at the shallow end of the pool, and I cried. It was grief and loneliness that fell into the water, because I understood what had happened. I understood who I was. I couldn’t marry

Nathaniel or any other man. If I did, I would never write anything that was true again. I would become broken.

After a while, I rinsed my face in the water and turned to begin another lap. Sofia was sitting there at the other end of the pool, watching me. I didn't breathe as she slipped into the pool and swam towards me, her strokes strong.

I waited.

## **After Almost Breaking Up**

**Erin Pamela Stewart**

We stay together, take turns with apologies  
and form our bodies back into spoons  
I'm not ready to wake up without this warmth

It's what you said, any love is a gift  
whether we take a long walk through forever  
or find ourselves sick of the other in six months

Once, across a sticky table at a local bar  
I saw you take a silent breath and bare the truth  
of what your current girlfriend could not give you

I wanted then to take your hand  
and tell you this sadness is what sometimes leads  
our souls to salvation

We stay together. There is no other way  
What's ahead of us is too dark;  
what's behind, too far  
There is only here: a warmth to heat  
the moment, a spoon to hold it for a spell

## **A Woman Known Here**

**Cheryl Moore**

How did she keep writing,  
And where are her poems?  
Edna's comfort was in poetry.  
She spoke her philosophy  
In streams of varying lines—  
How I loved  
Her being so deep and humane.  
We shared poetry in common  
and discussed the acute necessity  
of survival.

I was so humbled  
To meet a poet on E-4—  
Edna wrote the gravity of her truth  
In one of my journals.  
I've now lost Edna and the journal,  
But she inspired courage and compassion.  
She restored me to companionship  
In the great few days  
We were wounded friends  
At Muhlenberg Hospital.

## **The Queen of Spades**

**Liz Demi Green**

The easiest way to play the game of Hearts  
is to lose every heart you gain.  
But if you're feeling reckless and a little bit shrewd  
you turn the game on its head,  
hold every heart instead  
this is called shooting the moon.  
But you will never reach these 26 points of grace  
unless you also draw the Queen of Spades.

This is a game my Grandma taught me to play,  
her tiny frame bearing down on the competition  
like a bent safety pin, ready to burst.  
You see, both Grandma and the Queen of Spades  
blessed and cursed you in the same breath.  
Kissed with contradiction:  
The queen's presence means 13 points  
in a game where less is more.

Grandma's wit, wisdom, and power  
held inside the Mormon Church like a frozen flower  
I told her I was abused.  
She believed my story but not my truth.  
It was my father.  
Her heart melted halfway through.

So Dorothy died with silence between us.  
Yet she still visits me in that space  
between dreams and awake—

Sometimes I can see her laugh.  
She looks at her hand,  
Does the math  
Her eyes cackle and she tells me:  
*Elizabeth, I'm winning!*  
*And you can do better than that.*

Because you can't win  
with the Queen of Spades alone.  
To shoot the moon, you have to go for broke:

Collect thirteen hearts stroke for stroke  
or else you're a half-hearted sucker  
swinging on ambition's rope.

So I'm stuck here, with an even dozen  
plus the 13 curses of one fateful woman.  
I am trying to capture her chaos,  
make her magic mine and win  
my father's conscience and apology.  
But with each passing turn  
I realize that's a card I'll never earn.

I'm stuck at 25 waiting for the King of Hearts  
to pull the knife out of his head  
waiting for the mercy of the living  
to match the hands of the dead.  
But I'm not going to wait much longer,  
with each passing year I grow stronger.

If I let anyone fill that space,  
their neck would surely break  
from the weight.  
Who could take such a task but a god?  
I cannot wait any longer for a savior.  
My Dad will never be that man  
I cannot hold stiff and lonely  
Hoping lovers or Christ could make this fair.  
These words are my magic  
So I say:

*...kin.g...me.*

There can be no substitutions but this.  
Everyone has their role to play:  
A Jack is a Jack  
A Queen does her own thing  
I was dealt a heartless King.  
There is nothing else to achieve  
then to become what I need.

I cannot ask for a cleaner hand.  
Thirteen strokes of misfortune are the same  
as one kiss from a medicined spoon.

The Queen of Spades tattoos me a kiss  
a twisted whisper behind my ear.

She shakes my ribcage

She says:

*You can't do this alone.*

*Move gently towards*

*other people's hearts.*

*This is how you will learn*

*to shoot the moon.*

## **Whistling, Waiting**

**Jessica Mason McFadden**

Painful reminders across  
the second line of her wrist  
tell us she is human, too.  
We are alike: my sway,  
her broad shoulders,  
the way you're dancing today,  
our desire for an easier life.

Yet I judge us. Some flustered coldness  
between us makes me hope  
the wrinkled whiter lines  
that bubble up over  
your pale skin make you mine,  
and that perfection will be  
the scar that we all wear  
beneath curling knits.

Others are wrong  
to say that soon you or your nontraditional student  
will wreak of age or something else, unlike  
my youth, my fuel:  
its call to be pumped into a relaxed lover  
who lives off of me,  
my medicinal saliva,  
the freshening nipple,  
the revolving door  
to my womb.

However it might  
have happened, there I was,  
whistling and wearing an apron  
and the glow of a virginwhore  
or a maiden-princess in waiting.  
I open the top half of the cottage door  
only to sympathetically see  
her under the hood—  
we are at a loss for words,  
yet I eat the apple she offers me,  
I show her to the corner.

She follows me in  
and I know by the heat  
from her groin on my back  
that our exchange is equitable.  
She knows babies come  
from me for her, to replenish her,  
skin and organs:  
she wants all of it.

I have her babies,  
and the dwarves, think  
I am the Blessed Virgin—  
they do not listen  
when I tell them  
I ate the apple willingly;  
the prince will not listen  
when he finds me  
lying in a glass casket,  
passed out under her spell  
with a protruding belly  
and bloody lips.

No, she was not peddling  
products in that basket,  
nor am I a princess  
who wants a prince to wake me  
with his eunuch lips. I am a queen  
who loves a crone  
who brings me apples  
in exchange for a romp  
on a cot with my loving,  
life-giving cunt.

## **The Dress**

**Ana Schwartz**

The dress draped beautifully even  
on the sateen hanger in her closet.  
And while it hung on a cotton imposter,  
the fabric was the real thing:  
the finest rose-colored silk.

From time to time she would touch the  
cool, smooth material gently with  
her two middle fingers, dreaming of  
the event that would summon her  
to wear it.

The dress had hung in the closet ten years.  
Then one day she got the call, and  
she circled the date on her calendar.  
As the weeks passed, she mentally crossed  
off the days on the calendar, passing the time by  
envisioning herself in the dress, her skin  
aglow, her eyes alight.

Until the day finally arrived.

And when she put on the dress,  
and felt it caress her skin, she  
turned to the mirror.  
And it was then, when she caught  
her reflection in the mirror, she  
was finally  
home.

## **Park Slope Hookup**

**Ana Schwartz**

She watched the tea twigs swirl  
fast down to the deep of her mug.  
The melodies of that night's jazz band rose  
higher, floating up with the steam that billowed  
off her freshly steeped tea.

Dare she take the first sip?

From the street shadows scurry in figures  
accompanied by gusts that blast the billowing steam.  
The newsprint from the freebie rag the shop promotes  
has stained her fingertips, leaving charcoal streaks  
on the coolly coloured cobalt mug.

No matter.

She rubs the spots into  
oblivion. Then satisfied, she grasps the  
mug handle gingerly between thumb and  
middle finger, and ventures the first sip.  
And, just then, she emerges from the cold.

Glancing up at her in her long wool coat,  
she pauses mid-sip, mug suspended, eyes opening,  
until, cymbals crashing, gusts blasting, steam simmering,  
she smiles her a wide,  
welcoming smile.

## The Body and Significance: The Art of Linda Stein

Sandra Langer

*Two things can get people to make efforts: if people want to get something, or if they want to get rid of something. Only, in ordinary conditions, without knowledge, people do not know what they can get rid of or what they can gain.*

P. D. Ouspensky

French feminist theorists, Julia Kristeva, Helen Cixous, and Luce Irigaray, who create female language outside the “law of the fathers,” influence the work of artist Linda Stein. Her art is feminist, though not ideological. American-feminist critics, including myself, Arlene Raven, Joanna Frueh, and British-feminists Griselda Pollock and Rozika Parker were all instrumental in spreading these theories during the early stages of the women’s movement in the arts.

From the first wave of activism in the 1970s through the 1980s, women’s rights shaped the thinking of many young women nationally and internationally. Secretary of State Hilary Clinton (the most admired woman in America according to Oprah), recently told *Newsweek*: “I believe that the rights of women and girls is the unfinished business of the 21st century. We see women and girls across the world who are oppressed and violated and demeaned and degraded and denied so much of what they are entitled to as our fellow human beings.” The right to be equal is central to these debates and few artists champion it as forcefully as Linda Stein does. Her rejection of biological determinism and explorations of gender fluidities address sexism and the politics of representation at their roots. It hardly needs pointing out that two major issues—the objective occasion of the female body in art, and the marginalization of women artists—are the most important concerns for feminist theory and practice over the last thirty years and now. Indisputably, individual artists negotiate etiologies of femininity in different ways. The ways in which women, art, and femininity are utilized remains a challenge for all artists—not just feminists. Along with the work of Magdalena Abakanowicz and Eva Hesse, Linda Stein’s work pushes these limits.

Central to these debates is the concept of *gender identity*, originally a medical term used to explain sex-reassignment surgery to the public. Gender, as psychologists describe it, is a *core gender identity*.<sup>1</sup> However, as contemporary scientists are discovering, many factors play a part in gender and identity. Biological factors that influence gender identity include pre- and post-natal hormone levels and gene regulation. Social factors also play

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<sup>1</sup> The right to be equal is central to these debates and few—artists champion it as forcefully as Linda Stein does.

a part and include gender messages conveyed by family, mass media, and other institutions.

Certainly, one of the most influential views is *social learning theory*, which encourages children to develop their gender identity through observing and imitating gender-linked behaviors, and then reward or punish them accordingly. Additionally, a person's gender identity may be inconsistent with their biological sex characteristics, a consequence of which has individuals dressing and/or behaving in ways that are perceived by others as being outside cultural gender norms; these gender expressions may be described as gender variant or transgender. Stein's art explores how to combine male and female traits into one form, resulting in figures that may end up looking more masculine or feminine or androgynous.

After September 11, 2001, Stein (who lives and works near Ground Zero) felt the need to create art that evoked the power to protect and defend people. The result is a series of armored *Knights* that, to myself and other art historians, show the influences of classical Greek and Roman torsos—though Stein says she is not consciously aware of it. Even so, the images that quickly come to mind include the ancient Greek statue *Venus de Milo*, the Hellenic stature, *Belvedere torso*, and Michelangelo's muscular, female *Cumaeen Sibyl*, one of the five sibyls in the Vatican's Sistine Chapel. [Fig 1. *Knight of Tomorrow* 132" x 18" x 16", mixed media, 2005]

In this post-9/11 work, Stein celebrates national heroes and fundamental American values, simultaneously redefining what bravery is and what constitutes a hero. Employing contemporary pop culture, Stein refuses to confine women to the domestic sphere. Her female bodies do not know their place and refuse to remain imprisoned in stereotypes created for them in male dominated society. Rather, they serve to educate, elevate, and disturb fundamental notions pertaining to the female body and gendered spaces.

Stein's transformational sculpture has a long-established relationship to the body in both public and private space. Since the inception of Western art, patriarchal art historians identify the great sculptors as men—Michelangelo, Bernini, and Rodin. In sculpture, the only advantage men once had over women was their physical strength. Consequently, the practice of sculpture has been intimately interwoven with the myth of machismo and the idea that these were heroic men engaged in physically demanding work. As a female sculptor, Linda Stein is a contradiction in terms. In this sense, Stein is the natural inheritor of what Henry James dubbed the "white Marmorean flock," which was a group of independent American women sculptors working in Rome that included Harriet Hosmer.

Hosmer, the American lesbian-feminist sculptor who neither married nor desired to be a good wife, chose to be a good artist. Recently, Hosmer proudly declared: "I honor every woman who has strength enough to step out of the beaten path when she feels that her walk lies in another, strength enough to stand up and be laughed at, if necessary."<sup>2</sup> Nonetheless, Hosmer still found her work disparaged through gender stereotyping. The same is true of African-/Native-American sculptor, Edmonia Lewis and the other women who were part of this group.

Hosmer and her sister artists were accused by envious male sculptors of not doing their own carving, a ludicrous accusation as these men did not do their own carving. It was common practice, during the mid-nineteenth century, for Italian stonemasons to do the heavy work. Hiram Powers, sculptor of the famous *Greek Slave*, regularly hired Italian carvers to do his work, generally adding the fine details himself. Hosmer, who was also a businesswoman, sued and won in court, which put a stop to these vicious rumors. The old idea that women are not fit to be sculptors is nonsense.

Following the trail blazed by these role models, women artists—including Dame Barbara Hepworth, Käthe Kollwitz, Elizabeth Frink, Germaine Richier, Louise Nevelson, Eva Hesse, and most recently Louise Bourgeois—have made the use of fabricators a non-issue.

In the 1970s, a feminist politics of the body emerged that was to inspire a number of women artists. The theorist Lisa Tickner referred to the body as occupied territory, and called upon women artists to reclaim their bodies from appropriation by male fantasies and desires.<sup>3</sup> The reemergence of the archetype of the Great Goddess in contemporary women's art attempted to create, what culture critic Gloria Feman Orenstein called, a new feminist myth.<sup>4</sup> Among ancient people, psychic energy was thought to reside in matter and to contain the divine. The goddess was a symbol of transformation that activates these forces within woman that are identified with holiness and creative power.<sup>5</sup>

Stein, a strong eco-feminist enjoys a close connection with nature, so naturally her work embodies past psychic states that she symbolizes by using wood, stone, shell, bone and other items drawn from nature as in her *Shaman* (2006). Commenting on her process, Stein says she is "usually

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<sup>2</sup> Hosmer, Harriet, quoted in A. Garrihy and P. G. Nun, 'Women, Sculpture and Heroism in the 19th Century' *FAN* (1985) vol. 2, no 2.

<sup>3</sup> Tickner, L. "The Body Politic: female sexuality and women artists since 1970" in *Framing Feminism*, 266, 272.

<sup>4</sup> See Gloria Feman Orenstein. "The Reemergence of the Archetype of the Great Goddess" in *The Art of Contemporary Women*. In *Feminist Art Criticism: An Anthology*. Eds. Arlene Raven, Cassandra Langer and Joanna Fruch. Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1988, 71–86.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid* 71.

drawn to a found object... a piece of driftwood, for example, becomes the horizontal cross bar between the shoulders.... A wooden bowl may become a breast; an amalgam of metals may form a pelvic area.” She continues, “they represent traces of civilization and are marked by humanity. I see myself as rescuing and raising these discarded objects to a higher status and giving them new meaning.”<sup>6</sup>

Stein’s representations, videos, and writings—like those of Mary Beth Edelson, Carolee Schneemann, Nancy Spero, Judy Chicago, Bettye Saar, Nancy Grossman, and Ana Mendieta—challenge society’s models of what being female entails. Stein’s women are not prim, proper, prissy, capricious, flirty, seductive, or any other stereotypic version of womanhood. They serve to educate, elevate, and disturb fundamental notions pertaining to the female body and gendered spaces. In fact, her creations are the quintessence of American womanhood, full of fighting spirit and constantly in the process of reinventing itself. Thus, while her art is international and global, Stein frequently uses an American comic book icon, Wonder Woman to embody female empowerment. She also incorporates Buddhist imagery and makes a point of focusing on the peacemakers. [Fig. 2, *Black Guard*]. Her heroes restrain and contain violent impulses in themselves and others.

Stein’s art is as transgressive as her messages about the fluidity of gender that has galvanized debates about public sculpture and wearable art’s place in society and culture wherever she has exhibited them. In this way, she demonstrates the complex and critical stance summed up in Claus Oldenburg’s statement that art should “do something other than sit on its ass in a museum.” In a world that is often insane and blood thirsty, Stein’s anti-war work dares to break boundaries in its radical demand for a return to sanity and rational non-violent solutions to the complex realities we confront in the 21st century.

In the last few years, Stein’s work has used the comic book character Wonder Woman (created in the 1941) as a potent symbol for her ideal of justice through non-violence. Wonder Woman’s creator, William Moulton Marston, drew upon Greek mythology to endow his Amazon princess with Athena’s wisdom, Aphrodite’s beauty, Hermes’s fleetness, and Heracles’s strength. Wonder Woman leaves Paradise Island armed with her bullet deflecting bracelets, invisible telekinetic plane, and golden lasso of obedience (later the lasso of truth) to bring peace and justice to the world.

Stein, a life-long pacifist, continues her mission of breaking down stereotypes of gender and sexuality through her series of guardian figures

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<sup>6</sup> Interview with the artist in her studio in New York. April, 2011.

and protectors. Her androgynous figures are layered in found objects—metal, leather, and lace. [Fig. 3 “Two WW Sculptures on Coatrack” and “If Room the Wall WW Sculpture W/WW Shadow”]

Photographs of Stein’s exhibitions and projects are related to the “happenings” that Allan Kaprow, a pioneer of performance art, staged during the 1960s.<sup>7</sup> Stein’s interactive and participatory bodysuits transform gender, allowing women to feel their own authority. Stein excitedly recalls a young woman from the Deep South who, after wearing one of her sculptures, said, “it made me feel like I could tell my boyfriend I didn’t want to have sex without a condom.” Similarly, when a young man put on a large Wonder Woman-layered figure he seemed to take wings flying across the room engaging both male and female partners in a dance of dynamic gender fluidity.

The arrangements of her figures, videos, and wearable objects in various exhibitions and spaces, reflect a formal irregularity in shapes and surfaces as well as distribution and display of individual objects. Her bodies are covered with found objects—metals, recycled leather handbags, zippers, and fabrics. Clad in shining armor, punctuated, encrusted, pockmarked with tactile protrusions and sewn together. Multiple layers accentuate their mottled collaged surfaces.

Reiterating Foucault’s notion of the body as a surface or map for social inscription, the artist establishes the body as her work’s literal and metaphorical ground. Graphic scripts imbedded upon their torsos become indelible fingerprints marking them as beings troubling to the existing order. Stein’s work destabilizes and deconstructs how gender identities are reinforced in a society terrified of difference while simultaneously underscoring the complexities of multiple and fluid identities. Her art creates bisexual objects merging male and female forms, cosmetic and military symbolism, to critique and further complicate conventional gender codes.

Stein’s appropriations and incorporations of historicizing classicism, pop culture, and high fashion are remarkable. Her body suits and wearable art are fashion statements rivaling the savage beauty of fashion designer Alexander McQueen’s flaming creatures., which are audacious, flamboyant, brutal, sexy, satiric, and transcendental. McQueen’s garments are armor for the vulnerable human body. In a similar but more serious and political vein, Stein’s razzle-dazzle draws spectators to her art apparel.

The visual glamor of her latest series of *Knights* (2009–2011) is irresistible. The truncated figures wear skin-tight leather breastplates that

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<sup>7</sup> Kaprow, Allan. *Assemblage, Environments & Happenings*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1966.

resemble *Batman's* costume in film *Dark Knight*. The musculature recalls the garb of gladiators with their massive leather-covered pectorals and thickly-padded thighs. The leather cuirass echo Greco-Roman sculpture and bring viewers full circle to the likes of Spartacus who fought the tyrannical regime of ancient Rome.

As many scholars have noted, it is impossible to understate the psychological and subjective effects of discrimination on an oppressed people. This is especially true for GLBTQ people who, in today's polarized politics, are repeatedly scapegoated by hate-mongering politicians. In relation to racism, political theorist Frantz Fanon sums it up, declaring that the colonizer projects distorted fears, desires, and fantasies onto the idea of a Black body, and in a way that leads to the fragmentation of the Black experience of self. The same comparisons can be applied to women and queers as regards the distortions that this bigotry visits on concepts of masculinity and femininity. Moreover, like the colonized Black body, the bodies of women and queers are sexualized and eroticized by homophobic patriarchal culture.

At the center of Linda Stein's work are radical reconstructions of gender and identity, and of the fragmented female body. Stein's focus on the woman subject—as a signifier who, by her mere presence, enables new meanings to exist—is revolutionary, and in shifting back to the subject rather than the object, Stein forces us to raise questions about space and place as well as gender and identity. Her creations have no fixed categories.

In a more general sense, Linda Stein is a pioneer of cyborg feminism. The figure of the cyborg is part of a new emerging discourse, a new way to tackle patriarchy and its hierarchies. Stein does not suffer from technophobia and uses these new technologies to produce a body of work that transcends simple definition. Her bodies are feminized subjects but feminized from a somewhat ironic vantage point. They recast women's relationship to technology as refusing to imitate conventional arrangements, approximations, and commercial displays that are associated with “normative femininity.”

In such a system, the overall subjugation of women and the domination of man is the standard model. Her refusal to conform to gendered notions of division of labor is also one of the more exciting visions of feminism to emerge to date. Using contemporary graphics from comic books and other media, she overrides simple categorizations of art

and challenges the essentialism that has been visited on women since the invention of the biblical Garden of Eden.

Her armored figures and wonder women are both cyborgs and goddesses, manifestoes that rework the female body from the perspective of her own artistic imagination. This is not the stuff of science fiction, but rather an emerging 21st-century feminism that makes perfect sense. It breaks down the boundary between science, fiction, and social reality, creating an optical experience that is heroic and incorporating women into the formally macho pantheon of heroes and gods.

Stein gives female activities and actions agency. She confers upon them values that insist on actively dismantling various binaries while at the same time creating aesthetic objects of great beauty and richness. Her sculptures glitter and glow like precious objects. They radiate beauty and power with scarified leather surfaces as they oppose the man, machine, and weapons systems of the postmodern military. [Fig. 4, *Mascufem*]. For example, her heroes, such as Wonder Woman, never engage in preemptive strikes or make anyone a military target. One may recall that Wonder Woman only engages in combat in order to safeguard people's autonomy and freedom. She is completely free of the paranoid aggressiveness associated with Hollywood representations of cyborgs in contemporary action films. These are essentially what post-modern theorist Judith Butler calls *gender performances*, in which the regulatory fiction of heterosexuality constrains most of us to perform within the hegemonic norms that defined bipolar feminine and masculine norms in specifically societal contexts.

Unlike movie cyborgs, Stein's highly visible entities can take on big business, corporate America, corrupt politicians, neo-Nazis, skinheads and a panoply of villains, cartoon heroes of old, and newly-minted graphic comic heroes. The potential political purposes of her work, with repetitions of certain iconographic elements—for example zippers that look like scars—heighten attention to the artist's deeply held anti-war sentiments. Frequently, Stein's sculptures are inspired by objects found in nature, old driftwood, branches, stones and leaves.

Another element in the importance of Stein's work is its strong commitment to changing how women's bodies are seen and experienced in our society. Unlike the majority of cyborg-tech nuts, Stein insists on the physical manifestation of the female body in space because it is a physical signifier of gender and difference. In taking on the question that Faith Wilding poses, regarding feminism's mutating to keep up with the shifting complexities of social realities of life conditions, Stein engages in the radical work of inserting the visual presence, the physical manifestation of the hybridized female body into the patriarchal discourse. By doing so, she disrupts the male order, creating the possibility of a new (subjective and cultural) androgynous representation of the female body in both cyber

space and public space. Stein's work uncompromisingly confronts the internet's misogyny and challenges its inherent sexism right at the boundaries.

Creations such as Stein's are not subject to a compulsory heterosexuality and they defy the commodification of both female and male bodies. As this essay suggests, cyber-feminism has many different faces and will produce a new cluster of feminisms in relation to patriarchy, capitalism, and new technologies. Stein's charged objects are in flux; they become living objects, drawn from vernacular culture, and which dispense with hierarchies because they are constantly changing according to location and individual needs.

The American curator and art critic Lawrence Alloway suggests that the reciprocity between artist and viewer, object and environment, forecasts the future, and that it is a future based on maximum intimacy and the viewer's proximity and participation. It is apparent that Stein's work does this, engaging audiences and encouraging them to interact with her sculptures and wearable art.<sup>8</sup> These are objects that on a new life only when spectators become participants in the dynamics her work enables. The reciprocity of static objects and human mobility is an essential part of Stein's aesthetic, and this interaction catapulting her art from the meditative realm into the lived in world. By opening up a complex set of interconnections between location, gender, and sexuality Stein's work speaks not only to new ways of living, but also to fresh ways of defining citizenship, equality, and difference. As an artist and a woman, Linda Stein understands, better than most, the significance of 21st-century body politics.

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<sup>8</sup> Alloway, Lawrence. "Problems of Iconography and Style" in *Urban Encounters: Art Architecture Audience*. Philadelphia: Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, 1980, 15.

## Tom's Story

### Merina Canyon

By the time I was eleven years old, I was afraid something was wrong with me. That's the year I fell in love with Rosanna. When her fresh round face showed up in my fifth grade class, she stood out like a rose among a bunch of ragged weeds. To my eleven-year-old point of view, her dimpled face was excitingly unfamiliar *and* adorable.

Her desk was directly behind mine, and when I turned around to say hi, she said, "You're cute for a tomboy."

"Call me Tom," I replied.

It just so happened that I was a tomboy *extraordinaire*. I was growing up with two older brothers who insisted that girls weren't supposed to be as strong as boys, but that just made me want to be stronger—like them.

A daring idea had occurred to me back in second grade that I might actually be able to *be* a boy after I tucked my long hair into a baseball cap and snuck into my cousin's boys-only birthday party. I wondered if anyone could tell the difference. I told the boys my name was Tom and chased them with a croquet mallet. Then we all jumped out of a tree into a sand pile while hollering like Tarzan.

So "Tom" took one look at Rosanna's new blue eyes and fell in love. The feeling was so strong that every day at school, I seemed to surf on a wave of excitement. Maybe I really could be a boy just like I had been at that party, and all the kids would just accept me, and maybe Rosanna could love Tom, too.

With new concern for my appearance, I chose to wear only straight-legged pants, white Go-Go boots which were all the rage, a neat old pinstriped suit jacket my brother gave me, and my most prized possession—a *real* Beatles' cap with "Ringo" printed inside it.

My best friend, Jody, also a tomboy, had gone with me to the only hat shop in our Midwestern town after The Beatles had been on The Ed Sullivan Show. With saved-up allowances, we each bought a black cap to go with our new Beatles' mop-top haircuts. I said, "You wait, Jody. I'm giving up violin for guitar." Jody already had a new guitar.

Jody was tall and somewhat clumsy, but active and more boyish than I in appearance. She lived only three blocks from me and tried to remember to call me Tom, but just like everyone else, usually forgot. We often walked home from school together and then shot baskets in the alley behind her house. Sometimes we'd practice swinging baseball bats as hard

as we could or jump off her garage roof and land in the dirt pile. We were strong. And we liked it.

Jody seriously impressed me and made me jealous when she got a new gold Stingray bike with a banana seat and high-rise handlebars. It had Tony the Tiger® handgrips, and Jody would buzz around yelling, “It’s GRRRE--AAT!” I just had an old blue girl’s bike that I called Thunderbolt.

I don’t quite remember how I came to confide my secret love of Rosanna to Jody. But I do remember that as we shot baskets in the alley, Jody told me that she had talked to her mom about *liking* Rosanna. Her mom had said, “Don’t worry about it—it’s just puppy love.”

Puppy love! How could Jody go to her own mother and tell her she liked a *girl*? And how could Jody’s mother so casually dismiss it? Even I knew things like that had to be kept secret, and I lived in fear of my mother finding out what was going on in my head. I knew it was weird and I had to be careful.

And now Jody *liked* Rosanna, too? My best friend wanted the same thing I did? If given a choice, would Rosanna choose Tom or Jody?

At some point, we must have decided to put this question to the test because I vividly remember the three of us alone in the playground after school. Rosanna, softly laughing at Jody’s dumb knock-knock jokes, was swaying in one of the swings. Then Jody and I took turns pushing her. The one who was not pushing stood in front of the swing, catching a quick kiss on the lips as Rosanna sailed into the waiting face. I remember that Jody and I had to take off our Beatles’ caps and hang them on the handlebars of our bikes. Rosanna thought the whole thing was cute and said that she liked us both equally.

But I thought I was much cuter than Jody, and I wanted Rosanna to like *me* more than she liked Jody. I believed that Rosanna *should* like me more. She *had* to like me more.

Not long after that, Rosanna agreed to meet me after supper back at the deserted school building. We went to the bottom of an outside, concrete stairwell that only the janitor was supposed to use. Rosanna had just gone with her older sister to the new movie *Beach Blanket Bingo* and wanted to show me how Frankie and Annette kissed.

“You have to have your hands behind your back,” she said, “and then lean way forward until your lips meet mine in a smack.”

I hadn’t seen the movie, but I was riveted to the kiss. It was fun, daring, exciting, and I wanted more.

Soon Rosanna allowed me to wrap my arms around her, and we kissed longer. We didn’t open our mouths (I didn’t even know about that yet), but I could feel her tongue pressing just behind her lips, as if it were

searching for a way out.

At night I noticed my longing and my fear growing stronger. If anyone else knew about this, the world just might fall apart. Of course, Jody knew about the stairwell dates, but it didn't seem to bother her. She wasn't as stuck on Rosanna as I was, and she wasn't alarmed by any of the kids at school talking about us tomboys and how weird we were for *liking* Rosanna.

But *I* was alarmed. I wanted more and more of something I knew had to be kept secret. The desire for Rosanna flowing through my body seemed impossible to cover up. I would play my 45s over and over and fall asleep to The Beatles singing, "*She loves you, yeah, yeah, yeah...*"

One evening, late in the spring, Rosanna and I went from the stairwell at school and cuddled on her front porch. I could hear my mother's voice calling me from way down the street. It was getting dark, and I knew I was supposed to be home before the streetlights came on, but some big magnet on Rosanna's front porch just wouldn't let me go. I was *with* her, and all I ever wanted was to be *with* her.

I jumped when my mother's voice was now only a few yards away, and Rosanna's big sister stuck her head out the door and said, "What's going on here?" I swung around to see my mother in the streetlight holding a yardstick at a sharp angle.

Dashing off Rosanna's porch (somehow breaking that magnetic spell), I ran home as fast as I could with my angry mother trailing behind me saying, "You just get yourself home, *young lady!*"

At home I tried to act like nothing was wrong. "What's on TV?" I said loudly to one of my brothers. He didn't look up. Mom put the yardstick back in the corner by the phone and didn't talk to me.

The next day after school, I followed Rosanna to her babysitting job, and after hanging around a whole hour, I spent all my allowance buying her a hot fudge sundae at the drugstore. She quietly accepted the ice cream but said, "I gotta go home right after this." I had the growing fear that at any moment she was going to draw the line.

Then one day instead of going to the Girl Scout meeting at my own house (my mother was the Girl Scout leader), I had to go to an extra violin lesson for some dumb school performance. I was scared. Girls from my class would be at *my* house with *my* mother, and I wouldn't be there to make sure nobody said anything about Tom and Rosanna. I hurried home with my violin but the meeting was over.

That night I called Jody, and she said that Nan Snyder had blurted out "Merina loves Rosanna! Everybody knows it!" Jody told me that my mother didn't say anything.

But *Merina* loves Rosanna? Didn't they all know I was really Tom? *Wasn't* I Tom? And what would my mother do with this awful truth?

My mother never said a word to me. I walked around in agony both from my intense longing for Rosanna and from my terrible fear that this thing that was wrong with me would be revealed to the world and the world would stop.

The next day after school, I was riding bikes with Rosanna. Jody had been hanging around with us but she had gone home the minute her mother called. Rosanna stopped a half block from her house, and with one foot, balanced herself on the curb. It was her sister's bike and way too tall for her.

She finally said, "I have to tell you something, Tom."

With a jump in my heart, I pulled my blue Thunderbolt around in front, facing her. I tipped my Ringo cap over one eye and crossed my arms in front of me.

"What we've been doing..." she began. She was wobbly on the big bike, and she fiddled with the pedals. "What we've been doing...has to stop." Just then the bike fell out from under her and she crashed against the curb.

I reached down and took hold of Rosanna's handlebars. In one swift move I brought the bike upright. Rosanna climbed back on, a little blood showing on her skinned knee. "I gotta go," she said, almost crying.

I held onto her handlebars for one more second and then let go.

After Rosanna struggled away on the big bike, I stayed there at the curb for a while. The world seemed to spin down. The image of myself as Tom grew fainter and fainter.

The streetlight came on. And my mother started calling me, her voice sharp and high. "Mer-Ree-Naah!" It was louder than I had ever heard it before. I went home.

I went home knowing there was something hurting inside me. And that somehow, I would keep it a secret.

## **Audre Lorde and David Ruffian in Heaven**

*After Hans Ostrom*

**Stephanie Barnes**

They call each other Ruff  
and Warrior Woman. David swivels his hips  
to her poems. Audre calms him with the theory of difference.  
In heaven Audre wears contacts, wears  
silkscreened t-shirts with vests.  
David has gained healthy, lean weight, wears  
a low-cut fade  
and clean white tees.  
They lay head to head picking up each others rhythm  
an up tempo downbeat that he could drum out: forever.  
Audre's poems now contain lines of cocaine,  
fists, and redemption. A direct line to Hitsville,  
USA. His grit makes her smile.  
David learns more about "we" instead of "me". This afternoon  
he will sing excerpts from "The Cancer  
Journals" to the tune of "I Wish it would Rain."  
Audre will end the day by suddenly reciting "My Girl". Alone  
in their adjoining apartments, they will drown out the sounds  
of the city. They will not think of New York  
or Motown. They know why God put them here  
together. It's because they were black  
in America. It's because God  
is a rolling stone. It's because God  
is a black unicorn full  
of rage.

**Sakia Gunn, 15**

**Stephanie Barnes**

*If someone chooses to live a certain lifestyle, they must pay a certain\* price.*

—Ferdinand Williams, Principal of Westside High

I never knew you  
didn't hear about you till two springs  
had come and gone  
and more like us have come and gone.  
This is a poem  
about the certain price you paid  
at that dark, deserted bus stop, innocently  
waiting with a group of friends. A poem  
spray-painted  
in ugly drooling letters  
on the hood of a white station wagon  
a reminder that this  
is a constant warzone  
with no forgiveness for disclosure.  
A poem written in the rattle  
of your last breath  
as you bled out in the comfort  
of familiar arms.  
This is an invisible poem  
for an erased minority, hidden  
in the interlacing intersections  
of black, female, gay. A poem  
about a world  
that washed your life away, that would  
just as easily wipe mine clean. A poem  
of another city, another  
*dyke*, another young woman desiring  
to deny subterfuge.  
I never knew you, but yours  
is another death chained  
to my life line. Another death screaming  
alive, the fear infused in our reality.

## **The Day after Breaking**

**Stephanie Barnes**

My shadow breaks brittle against the linoleum floor  
and she's taking long hauls off a short cigarette  
says it relaxes her, the eddying smoke trails  
I feel my lungs capsize  
sink to the bottom of my body of water  
next to my imploded heart. I drown on my silence  
unable to tape together a plausible scenario of events  
the break of cigarettes between brittle fingers  
    the breaking of streams of daylight across the room  
        the broke of my unsteady shoulders  
pieces settling in between the cracks of my broken shadow on the linoleum  
floor.

## **Cinnamon Rolls**

**Lisa L. Moore**

My feet keep  
slipping away  
from me on  
the couch as  
I sit propped  
against the upholstered  
arm  
my toes cool my  
pen warm my  
lap a piss-poor desk.

I was a piss-  
poor butch in Chicago let  
me tell you—she said.

In Chicago I  
ate a big steak and  
a lobster tail with  
my first lover—a great  
butch, one of my favorites.  
Where are all the butches  
going? lament the femmes  
trying to support  
transitions as their girlfriends  
become  
men.

That's just how she  
now he  
how he  
rolls.  
He loves cinnamon rolls just  
like when he was  
a girl.

## **Acts of Devotion**

*for Camile*

**Lisa L. Moore**

Answer the phone.  
Happy to see your friend's  
name on the caller ID.  
Hear someone else's voice deep  
and serious. Begin  
to listen. Walk  
into the other room.  
Scream.

Drive through sheets of rain.  
Dodge lightning.  
Let thunder hush you.

Madge drives. You wail.  
Madge drives. You don't  
know where you're going.  
Madge drives. You zip  
the hood onto your raincoat.

Please God  
help Camile.  
Please God  
be with Camile.  
Please God      please God  
please.

By the time you get there  
she has asked for help  
breathing. By the time  
you get there, she is in  
multiple system failure.  
By the time  
you get there  
her Punjabi  
grandmother has  
wailed Pa Rabh

take me instead please  
God take me instead please  
God please.

Kerry Cory Liz  
Allison Sherry Paula  
Erin Eric Victoria  
Shane Shane's new boyfriend Molly  
Chia Mama-jit Papa-jit  
Jeanette what's her name again Kelly  
Irfan the other Carey  
where are Jason and Mike  
Jess comes in tomorrow.  
Auntie. Soresh. Brigitte. Anoukh  
Anoukh's new wife. Camile  
wan and chic in an orange  
sari in their wedding  
pictures.

Slumped in a plastic  
chair you hear on either  
side conversations about  
bacon.

In the empty room  
her grandfather sits. Greet  
him in English. *We're*  
*so sorry*. Take his  
cold smooth hands he  
begins to shake his lips  
tremble we all  
weep. Later bring  
him water in a Styrofoam  
cup. He will wave  
you off.

Irfan "an emergency room doc"  
"it could be twenty minutes or  
three days" "she's not dying  
of cancer after all" "it looked  
ominous last summer at  
MD Anderson" the bone marrow

donor center called me this  
week I'm a match for a  
newborn baby boy with  
leukemia

Paula says, delete all the  
articles Paula says, ask for help  
finding the good poem inside  
the writing Paula says, I was  
so lucky  
to have had good teachers

"don't buy books from me, I'm too  
expensive" "they removed the fibroids and  
endometriosis" "I have parent  
envy" "Michael was badly  
behaved" "I don't want to remember  
her like this" "Dallas is unbearable if  
you're not white" "being Hazel's mother is  
the best thing I've ever done" "we  
adopted him" "Angie, Camile and I  
chose the men's tie instead  
of the ladies' pouf" "she's gone"

the sock monkey  
the sock frog  
and the knitted  
penguin  
with the missing foot  
all live together under  
the new moon.

Kiss. Disinfect every time, then stop.  
Kiss her forehead. Kiss her cheek.  
Kiss your hand. Kiss her tears.  
Kiss of death.

Kiss.

## **Baby-Daddy**

**Lisa L. Moore**

My baby-daddy's church is  
real Jesusy  
and all gay.  
I held Jon close today  
salty tears on my neck  
until long after  
the congregation seated itself again.  
The two of us, wound into a pillar  
stood weeping  
each for a different  
homecoming. Come,  
I said, to my party.

At home            new room to pass  
one another, a drink, my butt, my lover's belly,  
new room  
teak-floored            king-bedded  
grass-green velvet and cherry mohair  
her china            my berries  
in the cut            in the groove  
flowing scarlet and fecund.

Ripple chips and onion dip  
Ruby's Barbeque            box wine  
Leilah's lemon bars  
but José            flaked  
on the cheesecake  
even after we found  
goofy Murphy  
his dog            who ran away  
the night of the UT bowl game  
when José's house was robbed  
the eight-foot door  
kicked in  
somehow

at the top.

My baking challenge: to prepare  
delicious baked goods for all of you  
And thinking of lemon bars  
to unlock the door.

## **It's Not Their Fault**

**Monisha Lakhotia**

Grass blades and dandelions folded under Andy's feet as she walked through the park. Around her, excited screeches of playing children assaulted the air. Andy didn't stop to enjoy their fun. Instead, she kept walking, eyes darting around the yellow-splotched area. Her attention caught on a woman seated in one of the many patches of dandelions. Even from behind, Andy could recognize her.

Sighing, she walked over and plopped to the ground next to her—her friend. The girl didn't jump or budge. She kept her eyes on the horizon. Andy waited; seconds ticked by, but the girl ignored Andy.

"Why aren't you answering my calls?" Andy asked.

The girl didn't answer. She stared ahead, mouth firmly shut.

Andy started to repeat the question, assuming her friend just didn't hear her over the noise of the children playing nearby.

A quiet "I've been busy," cut her off.

"Too busy to talk to me?" Andy asked.

Her friend shrugged. Neither said a word. Laughter from the children filled the silence.

"Iris," Andy started, "What's been up with you?"

"What do you mean?" her friend asked.

"You've been acting strange lately."

Iris snapped her head to face Andy, emerald eyes sparkling with life, "You noticed?"

"Everyone's noticed."

"Oh," her eyes dulled, "What have they been saying?"

Andy hesitated. The rumors floated through her head, each more vicious than the last. She couldn't repeat them, at least not out loud, though Iris probably already knew the false facts attached to her name.

"Nothing," Andy answered, "They haven't been saying anything." Iris rolled her eyes. She turned her attention from Andy to the dandelions around her. Andy watched as Iris ran her hands along their yellow heads, once again ignoring her. None bent under the light pressure she put on them.

"Can't you tell me what's wrong?" Andy asked.

"Nothing's wrong," Iris returned, plucking a dandelion from the patch.

Andy gaped in disbelief. Iris twirled the dandelion between her fingers.

"Yes, there is," Andy insisted.

"There isn't."

"You can't just claim there's nothing wrong and hope it goes away."

"I can when there's nothing wrong," Iris kept her eyes on the dandelion dancing between her fingertips.

"Stop playing with that damn weed and talk to me," Andy demanded.

"It's a dandelion," Iris corrected.

"And dandelions are weeds."

"That's not their fault."

Andy drew her eyebrows together, confused. Iris gave no explanation. She simply continued to twist the dandelion, as if what she said was normal.

"Do I need to call the men with the white jackets?" Andy asked.

"Now you sound like them," Iris pointed out.

"I'm sorry," Andy said quickly. "I didn't mean it like that. I was joking."

Iris shrugged again, dismissing the matter. The excited cries of children echoed around them. Andy blocked them from her head. Her focus remained on her friend and her distraught behavior. Careful words rolled around in her head, forming phrases to avoid hurting Iris.

"Dandelions can't be at fault for what they are," Andy said, "They're not humans. They don't have a say in how they're labeled."

"Then why label them weeds?"

"Because that's what they are. To us, they're weeds and we label them accordingly."

"How is that fair to them?"

"It doesn't have to be fair to them."

"And why doesn't it?" Iris snapped, turning her head to face Andy.

"Because they're just weeds."

"But that's not their fault," Iris insisted.

"Well they can't change that."

"We can though."

"No one is going to change that, Iris. Live with it."

"So just because we're humans and we're so amazing we get to decide that dandelions are morally corrupt and must be called weeds?"

"Who said anything about them being morally corrupt? They're just weeds."

"Weeds are the sin of the plant world. They're an infestation that must be taken care of by extreme means."

Andy stared into Iris's eyes. She didn't know what had provoked Iris's newfound fascination for plant rights but her passion for it wouldn't get her anywhere. Weeds were weeds. Nothing could be done about it, just as there was nothing that could be done about Iris's mental processes.

"Iris," Andy said slowly, "You need to stop thinking."

Iris sighed and stared at the dandelion again, "You don't understand."

"Help me understand."

"I can't."

"Just tell me," Andy pushed, "I'm sure I'll understand." She waited for something that would give her a clue as to why Iris was being more unusual than normal. The park was silent, aside from the children playing. Iris twisted the stem of the dandelion around her finger. Finally, she mumbled, "I'm a weed."

"You can't be a weed. You're human," Andy reasoned.

"But I'm no better than a weed."

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"Exactly."

Frustration bubbled in Andy's stomach, traveled through her veins, took up space in her mind. Andy knew Iris was hurting. She understood that Iris didn't want to disclose anything more than that. Andy didn't know how to help, but she knew she was the only one who would try helping.

"Iris, if you would talk to me, I would understand," Andy asserted.

"No, you wouldn't."

"I'm your best friend. It's my job to understand."

"Just because it's your job doesn't mean you care."

"I do care."

"Oh, yeah? I bet you didn't notice till your friends pointed it out."

"I did notice before that. You've been avoiding me for the past three weeks! Of course I noticed! I just thought that you needed time to get whatever was going on sorted out, that you would confide in me at some point. That's what most friends do. Did you confide in me? No!" Andy paused. "And now you're spouting this bull—"

Andy couldn't finish her sentence. Iris's lips pressed against hers, and Andy's eyes widened. The feel of Iris's soft lips escalated her heartbeat.

Then Iris pulled away, searching Andy's eyes before turning to stare at the horizon. Andy didn't move. Shocked, she was unable to turn her eyes away. Her heart hammered in her ears, and her stomach flipped.

The park was completely silent. No children screamed in the background. If they were still in the park, Andy didn't know—and did she care. All that mattered was Iris, who began running her hands through the dandelion patch in-between them. She understood her friend's incessant weed talk now. Why hadn't she noticed before?

Andy captured Iris's hand. She laced their fingers together. Iris turned her head to face Andy, brows drawn together.

"It can't be that bad being a dandelion," Andy said, "especially when you have another dandelion by your side."

## Subject to Anatomy

*for my great-great-great-great-great-great-great granddaughter, who is my inspiration*

### Bishop C. Knight

I think a lot, especially about this, and my thoughts stir up (my) passions.

Sometimes when I'm looking at someone, I realize they are looking at me. They are not me, and I wonder if everyone else, like myself, forgets that this world is not their own *Truman Show*. (I have always found it humorous that cutely queer Ellen DeGeneres was the character named Cynthia and that she was the producer of Truman's scripted life.) Nope, I will tell myself at these moments, that other person does not know you just had this realization because, no, that person is their own person living in their own skin. Right now, they're looking at me, as I look at them, and that's when I want to eat the other person up. I want to lovingly peel their skin, like I'd peel the skin off a grape, and then investigate what inspirational juices gush through their heart, intestines, and bowels. I do not want them to be a them, or me to be a me.

I talk to the topic of anatomical skin with you because it's the best place to begin an analysis of the human body's presence in and impact on herstory:

Your sweater. Your bra. That ratty t-shirt. Frumpy pajamas, under the white cotton sheets your grandparents gave you. The blouse you bought on last weekend's shopping trip downtown. Hanes, wool socks, silk slippers, booties, scarves, blue ties, blazers, sneakers, sandals, clunky mary janes, flannel shirts.

When I'm uncomfortable, I'll pull my sweater or scarf up around the lower part of my face, forcibly muzzling myself. At these moments, my eyeballs bulge and I say, "No, eyes, no. That's a dead give away. No." So I relax my forehead and try to appear coolly collected. Attentively focused on the listener, I agree with whatever, "Hmm," but my knitted scarf remains glued to my mouth.

Why are you here, right now? Where were you before, and where do you want to go next? When did you decide to style your hair that way? How do you judge your parents as fellow adults; when did you start to see them in this ungodlike light? What does red look like to you; are you color blind? I have to take off my glasses every time I get high. Do you think that's as fascinating as I do? Are you homosocial or homosexual? You should be. What did you dream this morning? How does my voice make you feel? That woman's annoying voice makes me want to kiss her. I've

found that fascinating. How would you behave if murder and cannibalism were socially sanctioned? How about making grades illegal? On the count of three, can we have a global guttural scream? Thank you. Does incest make you angry? I have recently been pondering social anarchy, while the author Donald Barthelme provocatively asks his readers, "Do you feel that the creation of new modes of hysteria is a viable undertaking for the artist of today?" What is your idea of peace, your set of shoulds, and would that really satisfy you? Have you ever stolen anything; why (not)? How would you survive in prison? Do you celebrate Christmas? When was the last time you rode a bike? a horse? a groin? What is your favorite memory from high school? from college? How can this society battle date rape? When is your birthday and, in eighty years, do you think today could be your deathday?

You may sneer but, as you do so, your body is decaying second by second, tick by tock, cell by cell, until one day every smidgeon of your neglected youth will wither away. That is life, and what I would like to know about you is from where your deepest darkest dread stems.

## **Desire**

**Anne Fairbrother**

Such passion I had for you  
Desire fierce fire  
Awe tentative and magical

I adored you  
    Thrilled at your touch  
    My being, my body responsive to yours  
Such desire, such promise of intimacy  
I had for you

Now the embers, barren and sad  
Burn me still with loss, regret, and disappointment  
Ugly scars that hurt me when I move, or when I am still

## **Following In Grandmother's Footsteps**

**Sally R. Brunk**

I am of the Ojibwa tribe, often referred to as the Anishinabe. I am of my Father's clan, the Bear, and yet also my Mother clan the Loon. The bear is the protector of our people; the loon carries the hurt of the tribe on its back.

My Grandmother taught me our language, and many stories and traditions of our tribe before the tender age of five. The elders teach the children in our tribe to lay the foundation for the coming generations. By the time I was five and reading books, I was totally immersed in our culture. To me, it wasn't our culture; it was merely how my family lived.

I am full-blooded Anishinabe, born and raised on my Father's tribal lands known as Keweenaw Bay. But, I am a member of my Mother's tribe in Wisconsin, the Lac du Flambeau band of Ojibwa. My name is Maagwan-ni-niigabokwe, which means: Standing Feather Woman. My Father's name was Nagon-niigabo, my Mother's Bedway-way-gizhi-gokwe. My Grandmother Brunk's name was Gabo-wance and my Grandmother Pine's name was Abe-disa-niikwe. For their own privacy, I will not reveal what their names mean, but would like people to understand where my blood comes from.

My foundation was my Grandmothers. My Grandfathers both died before I was born, I never had the chance to know them, except through photographs. My Grandmothers were the most direct influence on my upbringing; they laid the groundwork of my learning and perspective on which I viewed the world. My first images and memories are of warm, comforting voices in Ojibwa. I see the smiles of my Grandmothers peering down; I remember the toys handmade for me. A beaded rabbit's foot was my prized possession for many years. It also had a purpose for my Grandmothers and Mother: it rattled, and they always knew where I was.

My Grandmothers never spoke anything but our language to me. This was the most important gift they gave me. Because they saw the decline in fluent speakers, it was essential to them that I learn our language. It is in our language that I spent many hours immersed in; wrapped in the hum of my Grandmothers voices. They banded together and decided I would not be a child lost to the boarding schools; that I would learn what was needed to help my family and tribe later in life.

Grandmother Brunk died the spring before my thirteenth birthday, yet she teaches me day after day. Since her death there have been times that I have experienced problems or wasn't following the path that I should. In these times, Grandmother will come to me. In my dreams

and my thoughts, she is there to guide me or reassure me I will survive this crucial time.

Life is a circle and, that circle has taught me, we evolve and better ourselves continuously. We learn from the past and what is offered and shown us. At home, I was given directions and was taught lessons I would need for this life.

The radiator crackled, slowly releasing a warm blast of heat. I sat silently on the floor facing Grandmother's bed. It was eight o'clock in the morning and the room's light grew brighter as the sun fought its way into Grandmother's room. I had arrived with my parents a half hour before. I now waited as patiently as a ten year old can wait, for my Grandmother to awaken. I sat and looked around Grandmother's room. To me, it was the safest place in the world. On every wall were photos of her children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. Generations unfolded on her walls. I have always associated this room's smell with her, it was a part of Nokomis. It smelled of the tobacco, sage, and sweet grass she burned every day as an offering to Gitche Manitou. It also smelled of the candy she hid from my parents as a special treat for her grandchildren. Grandmother always had something for her grandchildren. I held the tobacco I was to offer, and thought of the seventy-mile trip my parents religiously took to this place. I wondered what Nokomis would teach me today.

She was eight-nine and the mother of nine children. Nokomis has survived the taking of the tribe's land, and the boarding schools, which took her children from her. My Grandfather Frank had died in 1964. After his death, my Grandmother moved to a small house built for her on the Lac Vieux Desert reservation. Nokomis was strong willed, but was also gentle and kind. She had the determination to survive anything life could throw at her. She did not demand respect; it was bestowed upon her because she had leadership and a quiet intensity that people listened to. Her magnetic personality is something I still find fascinating. Since the time I could speak, the only language Grandmother would address me in was Ojibwa. To my parents it was vital I learn from Nokomis. Every Saturday, I would sit on the floor and listened to her stories, often closing my eyes, seeing nothing and hearing only her voice. I would lay on the floor near her feet wrapped in her voice and the scent of sage and sweet grass. In the hours of listening to her, notes were never taken, but her words were absorbed into my head, and into my heart. I literally learned by our oral traditions. She was the one to share teachings of right and wrong, to speak of oral traditions of our clan and tribe. Every one of my seven brothers and sisters experienced what I was going through, but had the opportunity of living near Grandmother at the time.

My parents moved from Watersmeet to Baraga in 1968. My Father was hired at the assembly plant Pettibone and two years later, I was born. My Father moved Nokomis from Watersmeet to live with us my first five years because Grandmother said it was a crucial time to teach me. Teachings began for me, long before I even attended school. My Grandmother Pine gave me teachings when my parents could make the two-hour trip to visit her in Lac du Flambeau, until she passed when I was six. It is patience that was taught to me by my Grandmothers and it is the lessons of perseverance that I follow from my parents.

Together, over a span of years, they brought up eight children. They survived the harsh poverty, racism, and hard living of reservation life. They moved their children from the Lac Vieux Desert reservation to the Keweenaw Bay reservation in search of a better life.

My circular way of learning and living began very early. Before I stepped into a classroom, my brain made connections with everything. I searched for a place within that circle where an answer could be found. If I didn't understand something at school or there was a misconception about our people, I ran to my Grandmothers. They often said in their wise and humble manner that the outside world does not always understand Indian people; yet I should never let it hinder me from learning the good parts of education.

I watched Nokomis as she slept. She had a long thick braid of gray black hair she let me play with and brush. Her face had deep lines, which she said were from "smiling too much." Grandmother had deep brown eyes that sparkled when she smiled or laughed. Her nose was round and a little stubby, just like mine. At ten years old, this was the coolest discovery. Nokomis stirred and noticed me. As was custom, I held my eyes down never directly looking at her. This was done as the highest form of respect.

"Come here, child, let Nokomis look." She embraced me and kissed my head. I left to bring her breakfast in to her. My Mother always made Grandmother's breakfast and took care of her on weekends. I waited patiently now, because soon Grandmother would tell me another story. My time with Nokomis was never boring.

"Did your week at school go well, Little One?" Nokomis asked. I immediately went sullen.

"Boys at school pulled my braids and called me Injun. The teacher gave me detention for pushing one of the boys." I reluctantly added.

Nokomis sighed and quietly said, "Its right for you to feel upset Little One, but wrong to use violence to express it." I felt she was disappointed and waited for her explanation.

Nokomis paused and started. "A long time ago before your Papa was born our tribe lived in the village. We didn't live in town, in these houses now built for us. I was the oldest. I had to walk the seven miles into

town to buy provisions for the family. The storekeepers and townsfolk, they didn't like us Natives. At every turn, they called me names, tried to short me on what little money we had, or told me to stay out of town. I was called dirty little Indian, too many times to count. Through all their taunts and vicious treatment, I never said an unkind word. I may have thought it, but never said it. I've been taught better. I didn't say anything at all. I didn't sink to their level of behavior."

Grandmother paused and gently cupped my face in her strong, dark-wrinkled palm. "Do you understand, child? The Brunks' are of the Bear clan and this is the protector of our people. It would be inappropriate to act otherwise." She smiled and waited patiently for my response.

"So pushing those boys for calling me names is bad for our clan?" I asked.

Nokomis explained, "You are responsible to our family first, clan second and then our tribe. All other members are also responsible to one another. This is how our tribe survives." This is how all my lessons and conversations with Grandmother went. Always, she let me come to my own conclusions, but gently corrected me if I was wrong.

I quietly asked, "Nokomis, are you disappointed in me?" She laughed, opened her arms to me and said, "No, Makoose (little bear) I could never be disappointed in you, because you're always learning." She hugged me and gave me some peppermint candy. At that particular point in my life, all was well in the world.

Since the year Grandmother passed on, I have not spoken fluent Ojibwa. Grandmother always kept me in practice and when she died my parents seemed to lose something. A bright light was gone from our lives. They didn't pressure me to speak Ojibwa and a part of me refused. To me, it was a sacred part of my time with Grandmother I didn't want to share with anyone else. All that she has taught me I remember to this day. She taught me to respect my elders, the proper ways of our tribe and many traditions and stories of our animal brothers.

Nokomis never had it easy. She spoke to me often of the difficulty of "walking the red road in the white man's world." She feared I would lose my Native traditions as I grew older and experienced more of the world. Often I witnessed her telling my father he had lost his way, meaning he didn't respect his heritage as he should. Boarding schools robbed much of my father's light and spiritual belief, which is the reason he so desperately wanted his children to know their traditions.

To my parents it was very important that their children receive an education, but also crucial their children learn Native traditions. My parents were victims of the boarding schools; they were traumatized, and lost many of the years they should have had with their own Grandparents,

learning our ways and culture. So my parents took every effort to make sure all eight of their children learn where they come from.

My greatest memories of Nokomis are when I was a small child. I always slept with her and she would lull me to sleep by telling me stories. When I had a nightmare or was sick, Nokomis took care of me. She would take me for walks in the woods bordering our house and show me all the plants sacred to the Ojibwa. We would pick berries together in the summer and she showed me to offer tobacco for the sacrifice made by the various plants and berries we gathered. Grandmother explained the reasons to be thankful. I was taught from a very young age: everything has a reason for being; everything will come full circle.

I took my Grandmother's death extremely hard and went through a period of feeling lost and helpless. I often asked my Mother, "Who will teach me now?" My Mother's only response was, "Grandmother must have felt you were strong enough to learn on your own now." I continued to learn and her teachings influenced me then as they do now in all aspects of my life. All that Gitche Manitou has created will come full circle; I see it now in the following generation of Brunks. Grandmother would be proud. At home, I sometimes watch my Mother patiently teaching her grandchildren as my Nokomis taught me. I once asked her, "Why did you not teach me all that you are teaching them?" She quietly said, "Because it was not my place to teach you."

It took me years of learning to understand the statement my Mother made; but it makes all the sense in the world. I understand now, what I experienced with Grandmother is something very special. It is something not all Native children get to experience with their own Grandparents. I know that someday I will be the teacher; I will be the one to tell the grandchildren of the people that came before them. It is because of what my Grandmothers' taught me then; that I think in this manner now. Those thoughts are in my brain every morning when I offer tobacco. My Grandmothers' took it upon themselves to teach me; because it is the elders in our tribe that hold the knowledge. The elders hold the sacred stories of our tribe's beginning, stories of our animal brothers, and the traditions and old songs of our tribe. It is through them that I realized that life is a circle. The animal, plant and human spirits are connected. Together we live to honor Mother Earth.

Grandmother's influence is still with me; I still feel her presence everywhere. I see it in my siblings; in the way they treat their children. I was never hit as a child or scolded but we did have discussions of what I had done wrong and how I was to correct it. This is how my nephews and nieces are taught. Our home was filled with love and laughter, and was never a depressing place. I was given a lot of hugs and affection, as were my siblings. Attention was lavished on every child; because we were seen as

the future leaders of our tribe. We have seen each other through many hardships, but there have also been many happy times. Each experience has brought us even closer as a family. My Grandmother and her loving presence have helped me survive many hard times of crisis. She has helped me to become a strong person, proud of my heritage, and willing to teach others what I know.

## **Strained Class Windows**

**Judith K. Witherow**

“You People.” Every time I hear those ignoble words, I know it isn't going to be good. They will always cause me to mentally and physically cringe. When these words are heard since birth, you know which rung of the ladder you're standing on.

“You People” should have indoor plumbing. How can you stand that outhouse? “You People” need to have electricity and running water. Your house looks so small. How many of “You People” sleep in one bed? (I shared a bed with two sisters and in the winter our body heat was probably the only thing that kept us from freezing to death). Why don't “You People” paint your house?

Poverty makes you so damned dumb that none of these things ever occurs to you. Someone pointing them out is like a giant wake-up slap on the forehead. We could have painted any bare wood shack we ever lived in seven different colors, and it wouldn't have changed a thing. People still would have said, “You People” are so gaudy, but that is all the tangible difference it would have made. There would have been less money for food and other survival necessities, but what the hell; it might have made us easier to look at. That's what it is all about isn't it? Looks? Not the kind of looks where someone is rolling their eyes while they are “trying” to talk to you. This habit is the twin of “You People,” and you just want to haul out a piece of tape and hold their eyes still so they can clearly see what you're saying.

I've worked steadily for the past 35 years in the women's movement. I marvel at the serious lack of understanding concerning class and race among many activists. It has yet to be clearly defined or understood by many whom I've assumed would know the answer. I no doubt recognize this lack because of my background. I've taken the time to learn the ways of others and I don't believe it's too much to ask the same be done in return.

For that matter, it's a toss-up whether classism or racism bites the hardest. Most times, I can't figure out why those who should know better still use theories to define what should by now be accepted as fact. Reality: Instead of debating these two issues to death, accept the words of those who've always been there. Trust the women who know the answers from harsh experience.

Don't ask me to supply further information when I've written an article to back up my words. Three times in the last year and a half I've been required to supply unnecessary justification for my work because others held prejudice against my class and racial culture. For instance,

when I stated the word “squaw” is derogatory to my people, a white editor wouldn’t take my word for it. She told me she came from the Southwest and had always used the word and no one corrected her. I’ll just bet no one had, and she considered herself a feminist without question.

I thought writing this article could be done objectively. However, the deeper old buried familial grief graves become, the angrier and sadder I become. If this weren't so Goddess-awful important, the dirt would be thrown back on. But, how will there ever be change unless all sides are truthful?

As a poor, mixed-blood Native American Indian raised in the northern Appalachians, I will invite you into my life and reveal to you the sights, tastes, smells and life-limiting experiences that were in all honesty not a part of your upbringing.

Despite numerous hardships, I graduated from high school and made my family very proud. In retrospect, it’s now obvious I was purposely kept at lower levels even though my grades were always high. No one ever mentioned scholarships or college to me. After graduation, I earned a living at various menial jobs. I didn’t have the confidence which would allow me to apply for jobs that I definitely was qualified to fill.

I believe I was weeded out of the higher education track at an early age. It's not the grades that count; it's your family's potential that is measured by the class yardstick. (“You People” would just take up a space that could be used by someone really serious about education.) Some very fine minds get lost this way. Yes, you could go to college at a later date, but by then life has had so many whacks at you that it rarely leaves you with the time or confidence to try. Survival often means feeding the belly before the brain. The deprivation of either causes lifelong pain. There is only so much humiliation you can cram into a child before you effectively crowd her out of the system.

My father quit school in the third grade to help raise his brothers and sisters. He was self-educated and gave me an abiding love for the written word. My mother stayed in school until the eighth grade. Her one clothing outfit was the top of a dress for a blouse and the bottom of a man's overcoat for a skirt. She never stopped grieving for her lost chance. She often spoke of her proudest moment as winning a poetry recital before the need to quit school arose.

When my father was in his seventies and dying of cancer, he asked me to cover for him because he had told a nurse a lie. I thought she must have asked him about smoking or drinking. He said, “She asked me how far I had gone in school. I thought fifth grade sounded much better so I told her that. You back me up, kid.” I asked him why he didn't just say he had graduated. He looked like someone had pulled a gun on him. “Jesus,

girl, you can't say anything like that." I tried to explain that it was a bullshit question, but he would have none of it.

After many years of subjugation, you become your own overseer. To this day, I see my nieces and nephews trash each other before the rest of society gets a chance. I understand the dynamic perfectly. If you make fun of or hurt each other, then the second time around it doesn't pain as much. You have already been prepared. When you depersonalize pain and suffering you can ignore it. Only when a human face is superimposed on poverty will this barbaric practice end.

The first house I remember living in contained three small rooms. The next tenants used it as a chicken coop. My father had to walk stooped over because the ceilings were about five feet high. He was six feet tall. There was no water or electricity. The creek out back served as washing machine, refrigerator, and bathtub. We never lived in a place that had screen doors or screens in the windows. This allowed everything, including snakes, to come and go at will. We learned at an early age to pound on the floor before getting out of bed. This was so you didn't accidentally step on a rat and get bitten. Why in the hell do rats always overrun the poor? I can tell you it's not for the food. Maybe easier access is the only true explanation.

When it snowed in the mountains, it would drift in through all the cracks that weren't full of paper or rags. We had very few blankets so coats, rugs, or clothes helped to keep us warm. The roof had so many holes that we didn't have enough pots or cans to catch all the rain that trickled through. Too bad we didn't have one of those glass ceilings I hear so much about. I'll bet it could have kept us dry, warm and in our place.

This basically describes the houses we grew up in. Each move was a little better than the last. When I was five, we moved to a house that had electricity. When I was fourteen, we moved to a house that had both water and electricity. We never acquired a place with screens or one that wasn't overrun with rats. Yes, we set traps. Yes, we put out poison. Many times my brother and I would sit in the basement with a .22 rifle and pick them off when they popped their heads out.

People many times equate poverty with laziness. We always worked. Dad worked at a sawmill and as a lumberjack. Later on, he became a carpenter. He never missed work and he never received any benefits.

My dad, a good-looking, proud man, came from a long line of alcoholics. My mother sprang from the same background, but only dad succumbed to it. It still follows the male lineage on both sides of the family. Twice while growing up, I heard people use my dad's name as a synonym for drunk. If the alcohol colored and clouded the ugliness and made life bearable, I can understand and forgive that. Yes, I'm sure the cheap wine

he drank took material and mental tolls on all of us, but it was an illness that he fought all of his life.

One time Dad committed himself into an alcohol rehabilitation institution. Mom had to apply for welfare and sign a non-support order that she was told would never be served. It was protocol. (It was the only time she ever applied for benefits). On the day of Dad's release, after two months of treatment, the police came and took him away in handcuffs because of the non-support warrant. On the way home from jail, he stopped and bought a bottle of wine. It caused a breach in my parent's relationship that never healed. None of us had ever been in any trouble with the law. The law was something you feared with all of your being. It still is for my generation in the family.

Mom worked as a housekeeper for several families. I was ashamed of her for doing so. When high-school girls, whose homes Mom cleaned, would tell me in a loud voice at school what a wonderful job Mom did, I wanted to die. On the other hand, to Mom's final day she would brag about what a good job she had done and how pleased her employers were.

She also waitressed and took factory work and thought it was a great honor that she had never been fired from any job. Me? I just wanted to shake her when she would start these raps and say, "Of course they didn't fire you. You were the perfect shit-worker to fulfill any boss's dream. You never complained, and you left pieces of your heart and health everywhere you worked." I never said it aloud to her.

She would look at me in total amazement whenever I tried to say that perhaps things weren't as cut and dry as they appeared. She was the kindest woman I have ever known. I will never stop missing her truly honest compassion. If there is a place of rest, hers should be an everlasting one.

Work. That's all we knew from childhood up. You name it, and we sold or did it. We picked and sold strawberries, blackberries, elderberries, and blueberries. We sold Rosebud Salve® by the gross. Remember those tacky cardboard signs that said "HOME SWEET HOME?" Sold them. Countless packs of vegetable seeds were sold door to door. Lawn mowing, gardening, babysitting, et cetera, et cetera. One of the hardest jobs was picking princess pine. It's used to make funeral and Christmas wreaths, and grows wild in the wintertime. It looks like wispy little pine trees. You were paid six cents a pound for it. Believe me—it takes more backbreaking work than you can ever imagine to fill a burlap sack to the top. Digging through the snow without the benefit of gloves or boots is something I wouldn't wish on anyone. We would miss school to help with this effort. Whoever was the youngest at the time would be placed in a hurriedly fashioned

lean-to for shelter. Another young one would stay nearby and keep the fire going while the rest of us picked the plants.

Our favorite spot, one where you weren't walking forever to find the pine, was on a state game reserve. One time after picking all day, we dragged our sacks up to the dirt road where Dad was to meet us. Instead of Dad, we were met by a game warden. He made us dump out all of our "piney." He said he had been watching us work all day and he wanted to teach us a lesson. Granddad and the rest of us were afraid, but Mom told us it would be all right.

That night we went back and picked it all up by the light of the moon. Mom said it was too much work picking something growing wild—something that should be ours for free—only to have it wasted by someone who didn't know the first thing about nature.

Because of background and lifestyle, our family is riddled with disease and disability. The water we drank wherever we lived came out of mountains that had been strip-mined for coal. This same water flowed down to the river and killed all of the fish and every other living organism. The little town of four hundred, where we grew up, is now full of cancer, multiple sclerosis, lupus, and many other diseases. I had melanoma, and needed a section of my right foot removed. I have multiple sclerosis and systemic lupus, as do other members of my family. It is uncommon to have so many cases in such a small region. It's not contagious, so what is the common denominator?

I wish there had been a free lunch program when I was growing. I know health problems like rickets due to malnutrition could have been avoided. When I hear anyone go into a diatribe about all "You People" wanting handouts, I go a bit crazy. The main memory of my childhood is always being hungry. Oh sure, we gardened, hunted and fished, but it was never enough to feed eight or more people at one time. You can't be raised with bottom-line hunger and little or no healthcare and have the expectations of others. You learn to settle at an early age, and it remains with you forever. It's one of life's vilest secrets, and those of my background never forget these well-schooled lessons.

Does society still not get it? An unhealthy child will be an unhealthy adult. A sick, uneducated adult will not be able to work and contribute like a healthy, educated one. This dynamic will cost from the cradle to the coffin if it's not interrupted. Unlimited resources that are now being spent to wage war all over the globe could be redirected to save the same number of people.

My hope is that stories about abject poverty and lack of education will be read and not forgotten. If more people aren't willing to work to help us change our destiny the loss will soon be insurmountable. If the problems

caused by classism and racism aren't worked on continually we will never equally share the benefits of society.



Former home of Judith Witherow in the Pennsylvanian Appalachians.  
Photo by Sue Lenaerts.

## Book Reviews

***Conditions of War*** (Northampton, MA: Fighting Words Press, 1993) and ***The Vegetarian Myth*** (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2009) by Lierre Keith.

Reviewed by Robin ní Catáin

Lierre Keith's, *Conditions of War*, written in the Lesbian Avenger's era, is an aching, honest, tender and fierce account of one small group of women's efforts to fight back. It opens with the news of the murder of a woman in the small New England town where a handful of young lesbians have organized to spray paint and resist. The book chronicles a crisis in the group that brings to a head some of the hidden dynamics of abuse that are as inevitable in patriarchy as they are endemic. The final action, both of the book and, likely, of the group that, like so many, is crumbling under the weight of the pain and betrayal of what patriarchy has made us, radiates a power that brings goose bumps and chills down the spine. Though the topic may seem heavy, Lierre's writing is a delight. Her light touch, humor, and tenderness make the heroine's journey to strength and freedom an anthem. The book leaves one with the feeling that, even living in conditions of an undeclared war, hope, joy, and redemption are possible.

Lierre's more recent book, *The Vegetarian Myth*, is an even more important work for our community. In it, she describes her twenty years as a strict vegan, what it did to her health, and the reality of how our dietary choices actually affect our planet. Like many of us, Lierre read *Diet for a Small Planet* as a teenager. It started her on a course that many of us have taken—believing that a vegetarian diet would save the world. Unfortunately, things are more complicated than that and for many of us a vegetarian diet is simply not healthy. As it also turns out, most of the sources of protein in a vegetarian diet (soy and grains) require agricultural practices that may be disastrous for the planet. For those of you who experience robust health on a vegetarian diet, reading this book may compel you to rethink your dietary choices.

As a lesbian who chose not to become vegetarian (because my body couldn't take it), I found *The Vegetarian Myth* to be a compendium of everything I'd always wanted to say to the friends who made me feel guilty for eating meat—intentionally or not.

For those of us who experience health problems, this book could literally save our lives. If you, or someone you know, is vegetarian and is having obscure health problems, or if you are concerned about how our diet affects this achingly beautiful world we live in, you owe it to yourself to

read this book. *The Vegetarian Myth* is available through most booksellers. *Conditions of War*, and *The Vegetarian Myth* are both available at the author's website: <http://www.LierreKeith.com>

***Missed Her: Stories*** by Ivan Coyote (Vancouver, BC: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2010).

Reviewed by Robin ní Catáin

I first encountered Ivan Coyote's work on the side of a Port-a-Jane at the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival. As soon as I got home, I went online, found and printed her essay, "In a Word: My name is Ivan and you can call me she." I still have a couple of copies to hand to friends when it seems appropriate.

What struck me about her work—compassion, heart, and a response to our gendered lives grounded in real-world experience—is also found in *Missed Her*. Ivan reminds me of me, and to quote the 12-year-old girl in one of the stories, "nobody ever reminds me of me." I don't read much fiction, and avoid literature like the plague, mostly because it reflects a world that, well, I don't really want to be a part of, a world that pretty much wants no part of me. But *Missed Her* is a refreshing antidote to that dilemma, like a spring rain on salty cheeks.

Coyote's stories are the best that fiction can be; she describes things as they are, and manages to do so in a way that calls us to be better: more hopeful and loving; more generous with each other; more grateful and in awe of all that life can be.

Ivan Coyote calls herself a storyteller. She performs and writes stories, mostly short vignettes that encapsulate some jewel of our humanity. Like the mythic traditions of old, these are teaching tales, and what they teach us is the power of love to redeem our world, and build healing bridges across any divide.

Her stories make us proud to be a woman, a butch, a trans, a lesbian—and proud to be yourself—after all, isn't that what stories are supposed to do? Reading Coyote's stories reminds me that I may have survived my twenties because courageous women like her did the work she's doing: representing, showing up, going to those schools and standing on those stages and speaking truth.

If you need a warm hug—or a wet, sloppy kiss on the cheek from a beloved family member—especially if you never got those hugs or kisses from family. Ivan did—if not literally, at least emotionally—and she's very generous in her sharing of what it's like to have unconditional love and acceptance.

I highly recommend reading *Missing Her*, it's so good that I'm going to read the rest of Ivan's work myself. *Missed Her* is available on the author's web site: [www.IvanCoyote.com](http://www.IvanCoyote.com), or

***Girl Unwrapped*** by Gabriella Goliger (Vancouver, BC: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2011).

Reviewed by Ruth Mountaingrove

We first meet the girl on Sabbath, pre-adolescent, so this is a coming of age and coming out novel. The time is the 1960s. Toni is an only child. Her parents are scarred by the memories of the Holocaust, by their having to flee for their lives, mourning those relatives they left behind and a secret Toni keeps trying to learn.

Toni is a tomboy. She has a gang of friends—all boys—and is happiest when she is in torn jeans and beat-up sneakers. She is the despair of her mother Lisa who brings home beautiful dresses for her little girl who doesn't appreciate these gifts. Both parents, we are told are well dressed. Her father is an accountant and a collector of rare books. Sometimes he shares this with Toni who loves to sit on his lap but largely he is a remote man. There are words that Toni must not say, that are not spoken aloud, histories she is not told about.

We next meet Toni at her menarche where she cannot believe she must bleed every month. At her mother's insistence they move to a better neighborhood and Toni loses her pals.

In high school, like many an adolescent, Toni does not fit in and she hates gym because she has to take showers with the other girls. She manages to put it off until the other girls have gone. She has a friend Judy who is just as awkward as she is. When Toni says she wishes she was dead, her shocked her mother says "But do we ask death to take us, no, no, not even in our darkest moments. To die is to give Hitler victory."

When she is 15, Toni's parents send her to a co-ed summer camp so she can make some friends. She likes the boys to play with but cannot get excited as the other girls do, and when Janet, one of the camp counselors, touches her shoulder, Toni falls in love. Toni doesn't understand why she feels the way she does, but begins to look up words in the dictionary and read some Freud in her father's rare books. Now she knows she is a lesbian. What to do about that?

Toni torn between Janet and suicide stops in at a little store where she sees school supplies, tomorrow school begins and buys supplies deciding to be an egghead. She will get the best grades, which she proceeds to do much to her parents delight. Well almost. Her mother thinks she is over doing the exercise routine.

While her parents deal with the Egyptian-Israel confrontation Toni studies Virgil. She is a senior. One night there is a rally of the Jewish community and she goes to it with her family. Toni meets one of the boys who was at summer camp with her. He tells her a bunch of them are thinking of flying to Israel to work on a kibbutz, tells her Janet is in Europe.

The next time we see Toni, she is living in Israel, a scholarship student at the Hebrew University. She is on a bus to Jerusalem to look for Janet. She has graduated from high school with honors—all because of her unrequited love for Janet.

Janet is living with her boyfriend as a hippy: drinking and drugging. They “adopt” Toni and become a trio. At the university Toni is learning Hebrew. She is still in love but is about to be disillusioned. At this point Toni’s father dies of a heart attack and her mother sends for Toni who flies back to Montreal for the funeral and the sitting Shiva. Toni and her mother become close in their mutual sorrow and Toni’s indiscretion in Jerusalem passes. After her father’s death, Toni learns that the secret in her family is that her father’s sister was an epileptic and her parents felt Toni would be too or her children.

From here on Toni’s story is like many lesbians. She learns where the gay bar is. Toni finds her first lover there. There is a breakup. She comes out to her mother. Toni gets a job working in a bookstore. She moves out of her mother’s apartment into her own space. She is in her freshman year at McGill University.

Gabriella Goliger is wonderful storyteller. She takes you right into the moment. What I like about this book is that Gabriella weaves history into Toni’s life bringing a richness to the story. You are there, back in the 70s and late 60s—in vibrant lesbian herstory.

***Living Room*** by Dodici Azpadu (Albuquerque, NM: Nuema Books, 2010).

Reviewed by Ruth Mountaingrove

This is a novella or even a long short story. Events take place over a period of three days when our butch Carmen comes home for her mother’s funeral a full Catholic three-day affair. Carmen has been ostracized by her family and vice versa but she learns over a period of the three days that some of her assumptions were not what she thought.

Carmen has a drinking problem—and a lover, Gina, her enabler. Carmen looks like her older brother and dresses like him. Her fem Gina arrives from Albuquerque to meet Carmen’s family much to

Carmen's chagrin. Carmen has assumptions: her mother had died a lonely old bitter widow; not at all. Her mother's friends loved her—they played bingo together. They told Carmen what a fun person her mother was. Carmen assumes that Gina would be a disaster, which was why she had left her at home, but in those three days, Gina is accepted into Carmen's family. Carmen also thought her brothers would shun her, but instead they supported her and understood Gina.

Now to complicate things: there is Carmen's ex-lover, who wants forgiveness. Carmen has never told Gina about Linda and that they had a relationship of ten years. Linda is dying of cancer. Each lesbian is now in her second Saturn return. Carmen had assumed that Linda didn't love her when they broke up, but Linda does love her and even helps Carmen clean out her mother's apartment, using what little strength she has. When Carmen goes to Linda's wake she meets Linda's lover, who is a mirror image of herself. They find some comfort in their mutual grief. Gina, ever watchful, arranges for the yea them to fly back to Albuquerque the next day after the will is read.

Carmen's alcoholism can be contextualized by the times, when the one of the only places you could meet another lesbian was in a bar run by other lesbians, or the Mafia—especially if you were a butch because your appearance would set you apart in the 1940s. The underground culture was hard to understand: the need to wear a piece of women's clothing in case the bar was raided by the police.

When I came out in the 1970s, the time of the Women's Movement, we new lesbians did not understand the bar culture. We were political feminist lesbians. What was there to be afraid of? Even though some caution was advised in heterosexual land, butches still needed to be careful. Being a butch is not easy even in these more accepting times. The butch is different. The butch assumes the male role, which sometimes arouses anger in young heterosexual males to the point of gay bashing.

*Living Room* is told from the point of view of the butch and how she sees her life. The butch is wary, she is protective, she is loving. She is also angry at what she perceives as non-acceptance in the heterosexual world. In some ways this book reminded me of the *Bebo Brinker* series, only these women are not young, they are in their sixties. What has happened to Bebo? Did she leave the bars? Did she discover the Women's Movement? Probably not—she was a teen-ager in the 1940s. Did she die of cancer as Linda in the *Living Room* does?

A blurb for *Living Room* suggests this book is another *Nightwood*, but it is not. Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood* is much darker. Read it and see what you think.

## Contributors

**Stephanie Barnes** is an army brat for whom poetry has been one constant. By day, she works menially for the government and on nights and on weekends she runs her own micro-press, *Tattooed Tongue Press*. Her work appears in *Muse Quarterly* and has poems forthcoming in the anthology, *Geechee to Gumbo*. In 2007, she printed her first chapbook, *Love Letters Scribbled on a Concrete Wall*, and a second, *A Citizen of Fists* is forthcoming. More of her writing can be found online at: [www.IndelibleInk.jigsy.com](http://www.IndelibleInk.jigsy.com). She lives quietly in the Atlanta area.

**Sally R. Brunk** (Ojibwa/Lac du Flambeau) is Bear Clan and the youngest of eight children. A writer and poet, she centers on the bond of family, and the Native American way of life. She was interviewed in *Quiet Mountains Essays* and her work was published in *Mother Warriors Voice*, *SAIL*, *C-Literary Magazine* and *Moccasin Telegraph*. Sally is also in the anthologies *Sharing Our Stories of Survival: Native Women Surviving Violence* and *Voice on the Water: Great Lakes Native America Now*. Sally has her own book of poetry entitled *The Cliffs: Summer Soundings*.

**Merina Canyon** began writing stories when she was six years old and much later earned an MFA in Creative Writing. Her stories have been published in *Best Lesbian Romance 2011*, *Best Lesbian Love Stories 2009 and 2010*, *Sinister Wisdom 76*, and *Fraglit.com*. She is currently at work on a true story from the 1970's that weaves together the revealing letters of two young women: one in a state prison, the other in a prison of her own mind. Their sisterhood creates a story of survival and freedom. Merina Canyon loves cats, canyons, and creative correspondence.

**Elana Dykewomon** has been a cultural worker and activist since the 1970s. Her seven award-winning books include the classics, *Riverfinger Women*, *Beyond the Pale*, and 2009's *Risk*. Dykewomon was an editor of *Sinister Wisdom* more than fifteen years ago and is delighted to see it thriving again with new energy. She co-coordinated disabled and senior access for the SF Dyke March; offers private writing classes and editing—[www.dykewomon.org](http://www.dykewomon.org). She lives in Oakland with her partner, Susan, surrounded by friends, stirring up trouble whenever she can.

**Anne Fairbrother** gave up on men, and lived alone for 17 years. Then, in her fifties, she fell in love with a woman—the most intense experience of her life. Unfortunately the relationship ended. Anne lives and teaches in

central New York State, waiting to heal; waiting for She who is coming for me.

**Merry Gangemi** holds an MFA in poetry and fiction from Vermont College of Fine Arts and an MA in comparative literature from San Francisco State University. She is the producer and host of *Woman-Stirred Radio*, on WGDR/WGDH a community radio station on the campus of Goddard College, and lives in Woodbury, VT with Elizabeth Hansen. <http://woman-stirred.blogspot.com>.

**Liz Demi Green** is a graduate of Vassar and Mills College, a poetry slam champion, a prose stylist, and a playwright. She has been featured in readings, slams, theatrical ensembles, and workshops throughout California. She was a 2010 Lambda Literary Foundations' Emerging LGBT Writers' Fellow in fiction and is at work on her first novel, *The Ella Verse*. Green teaches English at Bay Area community colleges and plays trumpet with the Brass Liberation Orchestra. [www.lizdemigreen.com](http://www.lizdemigreen.com)

**Azaan Kamau** After falling in love with journalism, Azaan's goal is to give voice to people and topics that have been muted or swept under the rug. A journalist, poet, and photographer, Azaan's work has been published in *GBF Magazine*, *SBC Magazine*, *Sapience Magazine*, *Women In The Life Magazine*, and others. Her photographs been published in various media and included in The Getty Underground, part of the Getty Museum's annual staff exhibition. Azaan won the World Pride & Power Organization's Emerging Black Leader of the Decade (2008). [www.azaankamau.webs.com](http://www.azaankamau.webs.com)  
[www.gloverlanepress.webs.com](http://www.gloverlanepress.webs.com)

**Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz** is a writer, poet, activist, scholar, and teacher. A pioneer in women's studies, she taught the first such course at the UC Berkeley in comparative literature, where she earned her Ph.D. For five years, she directed the Queens College/CUNY Worker Education Extension Center in Manhattan. She currently teaches at Queens College in Jewish studies, history and comparative literature, and recently taught in the Bard College Prison Initiative. Born and raised in Brooklyn, a graduate of City College/CUNY, she worked in the Harlem Civil Rights Movement as a teenager, and continues to be active in progressive movements, anti-war, LGBT, feminism, anti-racism, labor. For several years, Melanie edited *Sinister Wisdom*. She was the founding director of Jews for Racial and Economic Justice and co-founded the JFREJ radio program at WBAI (99.5 FM), *Beyond the Pale* <<http://www.jfrej.org/radio.html>>. Her books include *My Jewish Face and Other Stories*; *The Issue Is Power: Essays on Women*,

*Jews, Violence, and Resistance*, and, most recently, *The Colors of Jews: Racial Politics and Radical Disaporism*.

**Bishop C. Knight** is a queer woman of color and longtime subscriber to *Sinister Wisdom*. A DONA-trained birth doula as well as a writer, “Subject to Anatomy” is Bishop’s first piece of published writing. She revels in the typical challenges of her late-twenties life phase—namely, becoming more serious about one’s profession, desiring greater intimacy from close relationships, and delving more deeply into creative practice. Bishop resides in the Greater Boston area and is usually wearing her favorite soft black sweater.

**Monisha Lakhotia** is a native of Lafayette, Louisiana with a complicated mix of Caucasian and Indian (South Asian). She is an English major at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, and is working on a collection of short stories and a novel.

**Jessica Mason McFadden** is a stay-at-home mother and graduate of Western Illinois University, where she was awarded the Cordell Larner Award in Poetry and was named Departmental Scholar. Her work has appeared WIU’s *Women’s Voices Journal*; and recently online, in *Read These Lips*, and *Breadcrumbs Scabs*.

**Cheryl Moore** is a long-time contributor to *Sinister Wisdom*.

**Lisa L. Moore** was born in Calgary, Canada and currently lives in Austin, TX, where she is a member of The Austin Project ensemble of artists, activists, and academics, and participates in Hoa Nguyen’s poetry workshop. Moore is the author of *Sister Arts: The Erotics of Lesbian Landscapes* (Minnesota, 2011). She blogs at [sisterarts.typepad.com](http://sisterarts.typepad.com).

**Ruth Mountaingrove** is a poet, writer and a photographer and has been writing book reviews for the *L-Word* for 18 years. Previously she did the same for *WomanSpirit* 1974-84 and *The Blatant Image* 1981-83 where she was a co-publisher and co-editor and also with Jean Mountaingrove. For more L-Word reviews see [www.lwordmamajudy.com](http://www.lwordmamajudy.com).

**Robin níCatáin** (NiDalaigh) is in the process of changing her name to Robin ní Catáin (nee-ka-hoin), which is Irish and rhymes with "coin". She came out in the mid-80s when lesbian-feminism was an amazing flowering of lesbian culture (soon to splinter into finger-pointing horizontal hostility). She spent about ten years in the middle of nowhere in Arizona, and

returned to a different world: no more women's bookstores, music labels—even saying the word "lesbian" makes young women flinch sometimes, but it's made me more aware of what's left—like *Sinister Wisdom* and the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival—and determined to do what I can to preserve, protect and nurture what's left of that glorious flowering of lesbian culture. She is helping *Sinister Wisdom* bring book reviews, and can be reached me at: [SinisterBookReviews@gmail.com](mailto:SinisterBookReviews@gmail.com)

**Ana Schwartz** was the ultimate tomboy back in her native Canada, much to her mother's dismay and her father's amusement. After reading Edgar Allan Poe one snowy morning, she decided to stop skateboarding for a moment and put pen to paper instead. Ana currently resides in Brooklyn with her black cat E. Anastasia Schwartz. When she is not working her underpaid but fancy-titled day job, she enjoys baking, yoga, running, films, and blogging for the Life section of Velvet Park Media.

**Elaine Sexton** is the author of two collections of poetry, *Sleuth* (2003) and *Causeway* (2008), both with New Issues Press (W Michigan U). Her recent poems, art reviews, and essays have appeared in many journals, including *American Poetry Review*, *Art in America*, *Poetry*, *O! the Oprah Magazine*, as well as *Bloom* and the *Lambda Book Report*. *Causeway* was a finalist for the Publishing Triangle Audre Lorde Poetry Prize. A member of the National Book Critics Circle, Elaine teaches at the Sarah Lawrence College Writing Institute, and the CUNY graduate writing program.

**Erin Pamela Stewart** is curious about everything. She lives with two cats at the head of Lake Superior in Thunder Bay, Ontario, Canada. Besides writing, she enjoys—among other things—making likenesses of friends and family out of construction paper, playing the baritone ukulele, wearing ties, and riding trains. “After Almost Breaking Up” was originally published in the first issue of *807: A Northwestern Ontario Literary Review*.

**Samn Stockwell** has been widely published, and her two books, *Theater of Animals* and *Recital*, won the National Poetry Series and the Editor's Prize at Elixir Press, respectively. She has an MFA from Warren Wilson College and has taught for many years at the Community College of Vermont. She lives in Montpelier, VT with her wife, children, and pets.

**Judith K. Witherow** identifies as a writer, storyteller, and poet. Her writing is based on survival and social issues. Her book of poetry *All Things Wild* was released in 2003. Her essays have been published in numerous scholastic collections, anthologies, magazines, and alternative periodicals. In 1994, she won the Audre Lorde First Annual Award for Non-fiction.

She was awarded “Community Builder for Decades” by WPFW (Pacifica) Radio in 2007. Judith and her partner, Sue, have been together for decades. Together they co-edited *Sinister Wisdom* 68/69 “Death, Grief and Surviving.” Judith is on Facebook; her website is [www.jkwitherow.com](http://www.jkwitherow.com).

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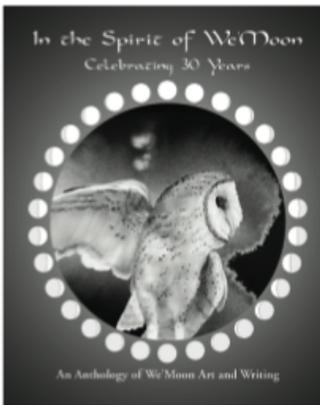
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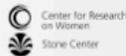
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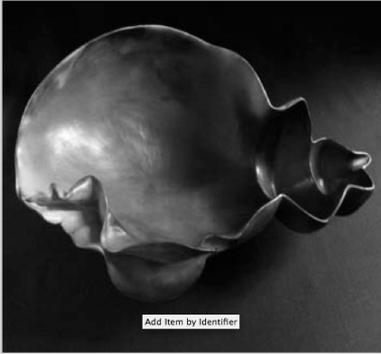
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