

Sinister Wisdom

70

Sinister Wisdom 70

*30th
Anniversary
Celebration*

Spring 2007

\$6 US

Publisher: Sinister Wisdom, Inc.

Sinister Wisdom 70
Spring 2007

Editor: Fran Day

Layout and Design: Kim P. Fusch

Production Assistant: Jan Shade

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

Coordinator: Susan Levinkind

Proofreaders: Fran Day and Sandy Tate.

Web Design: Sue Lenaerts

Mailing Crew for #68/69: Linda Bacci, Fran Day, Roxanna Fiamma, Casey Fisher, Susan Levinkind, Moire Martin, Stacey Shade, and Sandy Tate.

Special thanks to: Roxanna Fiamma, Rose Provenzano, Chris Roerden, Jan Shade and Jean Sirius.

Front Cover Art: "Sinister Wisdom" Photo by Tee A. Corinne (From the cover of *Sinister Wisdom* #3, 1977.)

Back Cover Art: "Thirty Years of *Sinister Wisdom*" Photo by Roxanna N. Fiamma.

SINISTER WISDOM, founded 1976

Former editors and publishers:

Harriet Ellenberger (aka Desmoines)

And Catherine Nicholson (1976-1981)

Michelle Cliff and Adrienne Rich (1981-1983)

Michaele Uccella (1983-1984)

Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz (1983-1987)

Elana Dykewomon (1987-1994)

Caryatis Cardea (1991-1994)

Akiba Onada-Sikwoia (1995-1997)

Margo Mercedes Rivera-Weiss (1997-2000)

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.

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www.sinisterwisdom.org

Submission Guidelines

Submissions: See page 152. Check our website at www.sinisterwisdom.org for updates on upcoming issues. Please read the submission guidelines below before sending material.

Submissions should be sent to the editor or guest editor of the issue. Everything else should be sent to Sinister Wisdom, POB 3252, Berkeley, CA 94703.

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Submission may be in any style or form, or combination of forms. Maximum submission: five poems, two short stories or essays, or one longer piece of up to 2500 words. We prefer that you send your work by email in Word. If sent by mail, submissions must be mailed flat (not folded) with your name and address on each page. We prefer you type your work but short legible handwritten pieces will be considered; tapes accepted from print-impaired women. All work must be on white paper. Please proofread your work carefully; do not send changes after the deadline. A self-addressed stamped business-sized envelope must be enclosed. If you want acknowledgement of receipt, enclose a separate self-addressed stamped postcard. GRAPHIC ARTISTS should send B&W photos or drawings (duplicates) of their work (no slides). Images sent electronically must have a resolution of 300dpi for photos and 600 for line drawings. TIF's and PDF's are preferred. Include a 3-5 sentence autobiographical sketch written exactly as you want it printed.

We publish only Lesbians' work. We are particularly interested in work that reflects the diversity of our experiences: as Lesbians of color, ethnic Lesbians, Jewish, Arab, old, young, working class, poverty class, disabled, and fat Lesbians. We welcome experimental work. We will not print anything that is oppressive or demeaning to Lesbians or women, or that perpetuates stereotypes. Because many of our readers are in prison, we cannot include explicit sex, obscenities, or art with frontal nudity. No sado-masochism.

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Sinister Wisdom, Inc. is a 501 (c) (3) non-profit organization. We provide free subscriptions to women in prison and psychiatric institutions (20% of our mailing list), as well as reduced price subscriptions for Lesbians with limited/fixed incomes. *Enclose an extra \$10 to \$50 on your renewal to help cover publishing costs (larger donations accepted). * Give *Sinister Wisdom* for birthdays, holidays, and special occasions. * Please consider doing a benefit or subscription drive for Sinister Wisdom in your area.

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A Journal by and for Lesbians

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Notes for a Magazine

Dedication, Invitations, Celebrations, and Appreciations

This 30th Anniversary issue of *Sinister Wisdom* is dedicated with love to the thousands of Lesbians whose lives have been touched by the journal.

As I gathered and arranged the volumes for the photograph on the back cover, an amazing thing happened. I sensed a powerful gynergy flowing, spiraling from the collection of journals on the table. I felt thirty profound years of courage, excitement, connections, resistance, awakenings, hopes, validations, possibilities, laughter, tears, love, creativity, engagement, and stimulation. And yes, hard work, perseverance, angst, resilience and much more. Friends stopped by to admire the collection, to share memories, to celebrate the legacy of the body of work, and to give wishes for the future of *Sinister Wisdom*. Let these celebrations continue in the homes, communities, hearts and minds of the Sinisterhood everywhere!

Appreciations: Thank you to all Lesbian Sisters, sung and unsung. Appreciations to writers, artists, readers, listeners, advisors, supporters, mailing crews, proofreaders, typists, binders, coordinators, donators, reviewers, board members, bookstore Sisters, designers, layouters, organizers, dreamers, inciters, editors, guest editors, web designers, searchers, sparkers, spinners, weavers, comrades, friends, lovers, and others. We invite each of you reading or listening to this issue to join us in celebrating thirty inspiring years of survival and to help us continue thriving for many more years.

“[Let us continue to] be strong of heart; to believe in the importance of lesbian words and images as more than evidence we exist, more than documentation, more than entertainment. To know that the culture we create from our widely various lives is unique, growing as we grow, enriching us and nourishing future lesbians whose roots reach through ourselves back to the lesbians who have come before. We have to believe that what we do now directly affects lesbians to come. To know themselves fully, they must be able to touch, to read, to [feel] the gifts of our hearts.”

Common Lives / Lesbian Lives, #12 (Summer 1984, p. 4).

Fran Day
Sebastopol, California

Notes From Our Readers

Dear SW, You are doing such a great job – it’s wonderful to have *Sinister Wisdom* coming out again on a regular basis. I’ve been contributing writing and art to lesbian and feminist publications since 1978; at that time there were a lot more of them. I’m thankful for those that have survived so long, such as *sinister wisdom*, *maize*, *off our backs*, and *lesbian connection*.

zana, Arizona

Dear SW, I feel great good will toward *Sinister Wisdom* and everyone who has worked to help her manifest.

Rose, New Zealand

Dear SW, Thanks so much for entering me on the subscription list! This kind of reading is so helpful, yet hard to come by in my present location (prison). Keep educating and breaking the spell of patriarchy and all other concepts we women harm ourselves with. Let’s rise and be healthy!

Trianice, North Carolina

I am very impressed with the journal, the depth and breadth of the pieces. Thank you and to all the women who made this possible and for the thirty years of commitment. Blessings of joy to all the hearts,

TziPi, North Carolina

Dear SW, Thank you for sending *Sinister Wisdom* to me. I am incarcerated and don’t have much except what you’ve given me. I appreciate you very much. I’d like your continued support, please.

Urlean, California

Congratulations to everyone for reaching such a significant milestone (30th anniversary).

Jean, Australia

Dear SW, Please renew my subscription and know that if I wasn’t in prison, I would gladly pay for all of your liberating and awesomely inspiring publications. I am so proud of who I am and what I am – your books make me feel free. Please know that your kindness and loyalty to the “cause” strengthens all of us as a whole. I am so grateful to all of you.

Carol, Texas

Congratulations on your 30th year of publication! I could only afford to keep my womyn's publication going for two years in Utah. I know what a struggle you face. Thank you for keeping *Sinister Wisdom* going for so long. I hope womyn continue to understand the importance of this publication and respond generously. Thank you (and the staff/volunteers) for your good work. Best of fortune to *Sinister Wisdom*.

Janice, Utah

Congratulations on 30 years of excellence. A poem of mine was in an issue many years ago and it stills feels like an honor.

Sandia, New Mexico

I want to thank you for your continuing work to chronicle the lives of lesbians in a multitude of ways. Your work makes our history richer. Thank you, also, for giving writers a place to share our memories and inspirations.

Ona, Colorado

Thank you so much for maintaining the lesbian institution of *Sinister Wisdom*.

Julie, Maryland

Sinister Wisdom is a great journal and I personally love it! Thank you!
Amy Daroszeski, Co-Owner, Broad Vocabulary, LLC

i am a 21 year old pagan dyke who discovered the joys of feminism & the lesbian community in my teens... i would prowel about used book stores in search of back issues of *sinister wisdom*, inspired by these woman who came before me. *sinister wisdom* has been a constant source of comfort & inspiration for me over the years. namaste! in sisterhood,

chase

I so deeply appreciate all that you do and *Sinister Wisdom* is such an important Lesbian space that preserves, encourages and expands Lesbian culture.

Jae, New Mexico

Thank you for continuing a very valuable and useful journal.

Lorraine Ironplow (formerly of Mother Kali's Bookstore), Oregon

I was reading the latest issue of *lesbian connection* and saw your ad and I could not believe my eyes - it has been years since I've seen *sinister wisdom* - I would eat up every issue that came out in the 80s and I thought you went out of business. I am so happy to have found you again - you were a huge part of my coming out. Thanks for hanging in there.

alicia

i saved many back issues and appreciate so much *Sinister Wisdom* and all her editors!!!—many thanks,

Harvest

Dear Sisters of *Sinister Wisdom*, Much thanks for sending books to me and other lesbians that are incarcerated. Y'all have certainly helped me get through and I've learned a lot about myself over the last few years especially coming out and living happily now as a lesbian with a beautiful lesbian lover. I read the books several times over and enjoy the stories and poetry as though it's the first time reading and get more out of them each time. This in itself has saved me and allowed me to learn about myself as a woman, lover, friend and lesbian. Keep developing, evaluating, and searching for a better future for lesbians.

Lisa, Texas

Dear *Sinister Wisdom*. I am a 24-year-old inmate and I really enjoy your publication. I just want you to know how inspirational these issues are to youth like me who truly adore every aspect of women. I've been out since I was fifteen and have been able to live comfortably because of strong lesbians who have paved the way, like yourselves. Thank you!

Fonseca, California

Thank You to Our Supporters

Thank you!

Sinister Wisdom would like to thank the following supporters for their generous gifts throughout our 30th anniversary year.

There is still time to send contributions. Please make checks payable to Sinister Wisdom, Inc. Mail to Fran Day, POBox 1180, Sebastopol, CA 95473. Your name will be listed in a future issue (unless you request to remain anonymous).

Sinister Wisdom, Inc. is a 501(c) (3) non-profit organization.

All contributions are tax deductible.

Anonymous (6)

Lea E. Arellano

Jenny Axley

Elliott batTzedek & Karen Escovitz

Bella Books

Denise Berro & Barbara Brydon

Blankenship Family

Bold Strokes Books

Bywater Books

Cathy Cade

Diana Cerise

Becky Banasiak Code

Jan Couvillon

Jemma T. Crae

Corey Deckerman

Marianna deFrancis

Alix Dobkin

Barbara J. Dobson

Emile d'Orsay

Gail Dunlap

Janice Eberhardt

Nancy Estes

Roxanna Fiamma

Terry Fowler

Judy Freespirit

Anna Furtado & Earlene Meyer

Nancy Garden

Pat Gilmore

Sheridan Gold and Dianna Grayer

Sue Goldwomon

Jan Griesinger

Gabriella Heinsheimer

Cindy L. Hoffman

Tryna Hope

In Memory of Elena

jody jewdyke

Theodora Kramer

Patricia Jackson

Mary M. Leno

Alicia Lucksted

Luna Luvster

Joan Margaret

Vera Martin

Chris Mazzuca

Mara McDonald

Cheryl Moore

Marjorie Nelson

Michelle Nichols & Laura Stein

Marjorie Norris

Ollie

Ann P.

Rose Provenzano

Sudie Rakusin

Lauren Ravi

Margaret Reilly
Senecarol Rising & Moire Martin
Kim Rivers
Esther Rothblum
Lisa Rudman
Lucinda Sangree
Teya Schaffer
Mary Schlee
Carel Schneider
Carolyn Shafer

Linda Shear
Susan D. Smith
Tova Stabin
Judith Stein & Meri Lawrence
Bea Stone & Kim Larabee
Sandy Tate
Women in Black, Corner of Roland &
41st, Baltimore
Judith Witherow & Sue Lenaerts
zana



Sinister Wisdom #65 Bulk Mailing Party, October 2005. Clockwise from upper right: Sandy Tate, Luna, Carolyn De Tierra, Moire Martin, jody jewdyke, Lilith Rogers, and Jan Shade. Missing: Linda Bacci, Roxanna Fiamma, Barbara Link, Fran Day and Stacey Shade.
Photo by Fran Day.

by Merril Mushroom

The Great Conference Caper and the Beginning of *Sinister Wisdom*

Thirty-two years ago, in the living room of my home in Knoxville, Tennessee, *Sinister Wisdom* was given a push in its birthing process.

In the early years of the 70s, we dykes were riding high on the new wave of feminism. After being vilified and criminalized throughout the 50s and 60s because we were lesbians, my friends and I thought the 70s swept in like a breath of fresh air with women's liberation — or so it seemed at first. However, because we were dykes, the heterosexual leaders of the women's movement saw fit to exclude us. Being lesbian still was unacceptable to most of mainstream society, and many of our straight sisters were afraid of us — afraid that they'd be considered guilty of perversion themselves were they to be associated with lesbians, afraid that any alliance with us would sully their credibility as real feminists who were concerned with issues of women's equality, afraid of the threat we posed to their acceptance of the heteropatriarchy. Nevertheless, we had our own strong network of lesbian feminists, loud, proud, assertive dykes. Some of us engaged with the straight feminists, pushing for inclusion, even acceptance as a legitimate part of their women's liberation movement, but many of us chose to be separate, doing our work the way we wanted to, as far removed from the heteropatriarchy as was possible.

In 1972, I moved from New York City to Knoxville, Tennessee, where Julia Penelope introduced me to the dykes of the Knoxville Lesbian Feminist Alliance. The South at that time was a hotbed of lesbian-feminist activity, and there was a great deal of networking among the many lesbian-feminist communities in the Southern states. The Knoxville Lesbian Feminist Alliance (KLFA) had a collective house near the university and published a mimeographed newsletter, "Mother Jones Gazette." The Iowa City women's collective came to Knoxville to do workshops for us on health care and self exams. We had lesbian consciousness-raising groups, softball teams, a women's coffeehouse, lesbian writers' group, and a lesbian prom.

Due to the efforts of several Knoxville lesbians who were politically-placed and so had to be highly closeted, yet were concerned about women's issues, we lesbian-feminist activists were able to have a discreet but firm hand in many of the straight women's conferences that were happening.

Even though we would have been shunned as lesbians, we often did damage control and prevented disruptions when the “John Birchers” — radical Christian right-wingers — would show up to picket against anything that smacked at all of the Equal Rights Amendment. Meanwhile, a group of heterosexual women community leaders got a grant to open a women’s center in Knoxville which lesbians were not allowed to attend. However, unbeknownst to the straight women who were in charge, two of the women’s center’s employees were lesbians, and they secretly opened up the center to lesbian meetings.

Since Knoxville was only four hours away from Atlanta, we Knoxville dykes also participated in functions with the newly-formed Atlanta Lesbian Feminist Alliance (ALFA), who also had a collective house and published a newsletter (“Atalanta”). Meanwhile, outside Atlanta in Athens, GA, Julia Penelope was teaching at the University and helping to organize the lesbian-feminist movement there.

Around this time, the AAUW group in Athens received a grant to put on a women’s conference through the University. At first the dyke community was excited about this, but then concerns began to arise: The conference seemed to be developing in an exclusive fashion, geared toward educated, privileged, white, straight women. The cost of admission was very expensive. There was no child care offered, nor assistance with transportation or housing. Issues concerning women on welfare, women in prisons, old women, single mothers, women with disabilities, and lesbian women were given no consideration as topics for sessions. The workshop on women’s sexuality was slated to be conducted by a MAN (a doctor . . .).

Julia and her cohorts diplomatically approached the university women and requested that attention be given to these issues. The university women were not receptive. The lesbian-feminists met, worked to find a solution to this problem, tried to figure out a way to break this impasse. Finally, they decided that the best way to fill in the gaps would be to hold an additional conference themselves, an all-volunteer no-cost alternative conference that would address the issues which were being ignored by the university women.

Julia put out a call to arms, and members of KLFA, ALFA, and other lesbian feminists around the Southeast rallied to the cause of our sisters in Athens. In record time, a space was located and donated — right across the street from the AAUW conference. Volunteers set up childcare, workshops, and housing, did outreach and publicity, and raised a small amount of money for financial assistance. Best of all, Gloria Steinem, who was the keynote speaker brought in at great expense by the AAUW for their conference,

agreed to speak at the alternative conference free of charge. The alternative conference was a great success, and during the course of it, I met Ann.

Ann lived in North Carolina. She and her date had come to attend the AAUW conference and decided to check out the alternative, since it was nearby and the admission was free. (Several of the attendees from the AAUW conference who were curious or interested came to see what we were doing, and many of them offered to lend their badges for admission to the AAUW conference to anyone who hadn't paid the admission fee but who might want to attend any of the presentations.) Ann and I chatted, found each other interesting, and exchanged addresses for future communication. After the conference, we wrote letters back and forth, and then she came to visit me in Tennessee. We developed an enjoyable, slightly romantic, long-distance relationship which involved lots of correspondence and occasional visits.

During one of our visits, Ann said, "I have these two friends from Charlotte — Catherine and Harriet. They're radical separatists, and they've been talking about putting together a lesbian magazine, a politically radical literary magazine that would publish lesbian stories, poetry, articles, and visual art. Catherine and Harriet want it to focus on what they call "lesbian consciousness." They have a great plan, but they're wondering if lesbians would support such a magazine. What would your writers' group think about this?"

"Why don't we all meet together?" I suggested to Ann. "Maybe Catherine and Harriet would be willing to come here, and I'll get the dyke writers over and also other dykes who read, and we all can sit around and eat some food and talk about their ideas. I think a magazine like that would be very exciting!"

So lesbians from Georgia, Tennessee, and North Carolina met together in my living room one lovely weekend, and we talked and talked and talked and ate food. We all were thrilled with the idea of such a magazine, and we heaped encouragement upon Catherine and Harriet. Catherine and Harriet went back home to North Carolina, got to work, and in the summer of 1976, delighted lesbians took the first issue of *Sinister Wisdom* into our eager hands!

Postscript: I recently saw Catherine Nicholson at the Old Lesbians Organizing for Change Gathering in Durham, North Carolina. She is beautiful and wonderful and it was very exciting to see her again after all these years.

Pat Meller and Chris Roerden

Catherine Nicholson and *Sinister Wisdom*

On this, the 30th anniversary of the birth of *Sinister Wisdom*, we pay our respects to its co-founder, Catherine S. Nicholson. Now 84, she recently moved to a retirement community in Durham, North Carolina. Catherine was born August 8, 1922, in Troy, N.C.—about 40 miles northeast of Charlotte. Her father opened the first drug store in Troy and her mother started the first library in the county. Both parents were active in the community and were avid readers. When she was four, her sister, eight years her senior, died, so Catherine became an only child. Her father doted on her.

After graduating from high school at sixteen she attended a small women's college in eastern N.C., Flora McDonald College, and at age 19 she was graduated with a Bachelor's in English and History. Her first job was teaching at a country high school in Denton, about thirty miles from her birthplace. She was only slightly older than some of her students, a fact they recognized and attempted to capitalize on.

After two years of teaching, she enrolled at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and earned a Master's degree in English. For the next several years she taught in western N.C. at junior colleges. Then she was hired by Salem College in Winston-Salem, the oldest women's college in the United States. There she met and roomed with a drama teacher.

Her roommate's knowledge of drama so impressed Catherine that she knew she wanted to study theater. Because her roommate had studied under Elvina Kraus and earned her degree in theater at Northwestern University, Catherine decided to take classes in performance techniques with the same teacher. But Elvina Kraus did not teach in the summer, the only time Catherine had available. She could not afford to further her education unless she also worked, which meant continuing to teach literature at various women's colleges. Although she earned her Master's in Theater, she was disappointed that she could not completely realize her dream.

Eventually, however, she received a scholarship from Northwestern, and that enabled her to become a full-time student. At last she was able to study under Elvina Kraus, and she earned her Ph.D. in Theater.

In the early sixties Catherine was hired by the University of North Carolina at Charlotte (UNCC) and started the Theater Department there. At the local women's center she met a woman who was also teaching at UNCC, Harriet Ellenberger. They became friends, sharing a great empathy for women and anger over the many issues that unfairly discriminated against women.

Catherine was angry at the UNCC officials because they weren't giving artists their due, and Harriet, who was really an anarchist, was angry with government at all levels. They were soul mates in their distrust of authority.

When they left the University, Harriet moved in with Catherine, and their deep personal and professional relationship continued for almost twenty years. Both wanted to be writers, so each of them spent three hours writing each day. Harriet took the nom de plume Harriet Desmoines—after her hometown, Des Moines, Iowa.

Thirty years ago the second wave of feminism was growing and a number of publications were dealing with political issues. However, Catherine and Harriet wanted a forum in which women could express themselves and their dissatisfaction with their lives and relationships. The two women decided to publish a journal as a way to give voice to their concerns.

They called their journal *Sinister Wisdom*. Catherine had encountered those words in a novel written by a woman in the state of Washington. Until then, she had not heard the word “sinister” used with “wisdom.” She says that when she came across the phrase she “went crazy.”

She contributed some of the articles for the initial issue, but Harriet wrote most of them. They simply didn't know anyone else to ask. The first issue was printed July 4, 1976, at a small press near Charlotte, just across the state line in South Carolina. In addition to writing the entire content of the first issue, Harriet and Catherine did everything, from preparing the layout to locating printers and distributing all the copies.

After Catherine's mother died, then her father, she inherited the family home in Troy and some money. She used this inheritance to finance *Sinister Wisdom*, firmly believing that she did the right thing and that her father would have approved.

Following the publication of their first issue, its founders began traveling across the country, meeting women they had been in contact with in the South. In their travels they gathered material for their writing and solicited articles from others.

At first, the journal was not defined as a Lesbian journal; it was for all women. And it tapped into a deep strain of dissatisfaction among women, who kept being drawn to the publication and furnishing articles. When Catherine and Harriet arrived in Lincoln, Nebraska, they stayed for about a year, meeting several women writers in the area. They discovered that they no longer had to search for authors or for volunteers to help with production. Among the more prolific writers they met was Julia Penelope Stanley, who taught at the University of Nebraska.

When Adrienne Rich came to Lincoln she spoke openly of her support for the journal. In Catherine's words, Adrienne “was in love with *Sinister Wisdom*.” Catherine and Harriet later moved to San Francisco, where they

met Susan Lee Star, who also wrote for the journal and became another strong supporter.

In 1981, Catherine and Harriet moved to Shelburne Falls in western Massachusetts. Catherine was soon hired by Goddard College in Vermont, due in part to her work with *Sinister Wisdom*. For a while she commuted to Goddard, but eventually the women moved to Vermont and settled in Plainfield.

After publishing the journal for five years, they turned it over to Adrienne Rich and her partner, Michelle Cliff. The biggest concern of its founders was that the journal continue to be published. They knew Adrienne had the name recognition, requisite skills, and the resources to keep it going. They found it easy to let go because Catherine, nearly sixty, and Harriet, were tired of all the work. Yet they continued doing some work with *Sinister Wisdom* after transferring it. They even received payment for their efforts. Though they never made any real money from the journal, any payment felt good.

Today, Catherine continues to maintain friendships with Harriet, Adrienne, and Michelle, and she continues her lifelong passion of attending theater productions. She has not “outed” herself to her retirement community. She says she’ll deal with it should it ever arise. On August 19, 2006, at the 5th national gathering of Old Lesbians Organizing for Change (OLOC), Catherine Nicholson was honored for her role in co-founding and publishing *Sinister Wisdom*. She says she is surprised, delighted, and proud that *Sinister Wisdom* is alive and well. “It was something that had to happen,” she adds, and is happy she was there to “birth” this wonderful journal. Its archives are housed at Duke University.

Thank you, Catherine. Thank you for your determination, financial generosity, and vision. You created a revolution that has lasted for thirty years and is still going strong.

From Notes for a Magazine, *Sinister Wisdom* #1 (Summer 1976)

By Catherine Nicholson and Harriet Ellenberger

We call our space *Sinister Wisdom* because the root meaning of “sinister” is “from the left side.” The Law of the Fathers equates right-over-left, white-over-black, heterosexual-over-homosexual, and male-over-female with good-over-evil. *Sinister Wisdom* turns these patriarchal values upside down as a necessary prelude to creating our own.

The left, the genuine Left, means revolution. We choose “sinister” because we mean, we intend, revolution. Revolution that destroys the structures of oppression as we seize power over our lives.

And the left side connotes intuition, the bringing into light of all that has lain dormant within us.

Jae Haggard

Our Words, Our Stories, Our Lives

Back in the 70s I joined the wave of 60s idealists homesteading and learning ways to live our communitarian, ecological and humanitarian values. My lover and I bought on extended low payments 80 undeveloped acres in north central Minnesota and began to live our dream, learning everything but everything from scratch. Oh, the stories we all have of those days. Laugh.

For most of our 10 years there I felt like I was living 2 dreams—life on the land and life with my wondrous Lesbian partner. Yet, eventually the isolation caught up with me. I felt so alone, so yearning for other wimmin who love wimmin and share similar dreams.

I went to Minneapolis for a visit and was introduced to more Lesbians than I could imagine in one place. Found more Lesbian friends in months than I had found in the previous 20 years.

More life-changing for me was the introduction to Lesbian Culture. What—we not only are a widespread community but we are a People with a developing Culture? Wow, didn't that shift my paradigms.

I found Chris, Margie, Holly, Tui, Sweet Honey, Alix and all our early singers. I found books by out Lesbians, books with a Lesbian Feminist perspective on every question and issue. Oh, how my thirsty mind and heart expanded.

And, I found Lesbian periodicals. What a voice they gave to give our Lesbian world. *Maize*, *Sinister Wisdom*, *LC (Lesbian Connection)*, *Common Lives*, *Hikane*, *Dykes Disabilities & Stuff* and so many more. With delight I joined the *Lesbian Inciter* collective for 4 years. With enthusiasm for us and our evolving culture, I co-founded a project called Radical Rose Recordings to record our living Lesbian voices. I have been lucky enough to help found or nourish several Lesbian Lands. Not only do we have a Lesbian Culture, we also have a Landyke culture. Big smiles.

I am now the editor of *Maize* and have been part of her production since 1988. I know what work and dedication it takes to publish a magazine. I know how difficult to find enough money and submissions and energy to keep going. Not many of those early periodicals are still with us.

Yet, with the submissions of countless Sisters and the stewardship of an amazing and dedicated series of editors and volunteers, *Sinister Wisdom* lives

on. Goes on touching our lives and hearts. Continues inspiring our creativity and sparking our thoughts. Still tells our stories.

Articles, poems and illustrations express us and our lives. Our stories, put together, express our culture, remind us that we are indeed a Lesbian People. *Sinister Wisdom* goes on creating and recording our Journey and unfolding. Goes on inspiring us.

When I left the farm in Minnesota 25 years ago and found all the voices of our extended Lesbian world, I knew that no matter where I would live I would never feel isolated again. Rather, I feel an extended connection and always feel a part of our larger Lesbian world.

I have lived 18 years on a land in New Mexico called Outland. A land where we can be our biggest Lesbian selves. A land where we too try to create, record and preserve Lesbian voices and culture. I now offer Guest Rooms here so more wimmin can have the opportunity to be among other wimmin, to connect with the Earth, to heal, and to be our most real authentic selves. A place where each woman can find voice to express her Lesbian self and add her voice to our whole. (NMWomensRetreat.com)

I believe we are in this life, each of us, to make a difference in some way. We have LifeWork. Thanks to all those projects and voices that have inspired and kept me company these decades, I have found niches where I too could make a difference. Can we ask more of ourselves or this life?

Thank you every one of you who has kept *Sinister Wisdom* so vibrant for so very long. You more than touch our lives. You inspire, create, record and preserve our lives and culture. You make a difference.

Ida VSW Red

Shared Anniversary— SW, MT, & Me

Thirty years of *Sinister Wisdom*, of Mothertongue Feminist Theater Collective, and of my lesbian life – congratulations to us all for an era of grassroots creativity and activism! Together we have helped build and define our lesbian feminist culture, communities, values, politics, chosen families, and vital new ways of life. So much more than “lifestyle” or “sexual orientation” can possibly describe. No combination of labels – womon-loving womon, lesbian, separatist, dyke, gay, queer, radical feminist – begins to catch the full spirit of the times or the effect of these thirty years on me. Consciousness raising, coming out, falling in love with women, moving to California, and presenting the joys and challenges of my process in the pages of *Sinister Wisdom* and on stage with Mothertongue have been among the most exciting adventures of my life.

In Mothertongue (MT), I learned from Corky Wick and many others the power of the collective, the ability of women – inexperienced or seasoned as writers and actors – to create as equals. MT presents the concerns and interests of the group in authentic voices that move, educate, validate, and activate the listener. Laughing and crying, the audience become fans and members. The process is liberating. Like the herstory of *Sinister Wisdom*, the list of Mothertongue titles tracks the progress of the feminist movement.

From *Sinister Wisdom* I learned to appreciate the originality and freshness of new writers and find support to join them. Several past editors are among my life inspirations. Adrienne Rich for her powerful and touching poetry and for daring to come out as a lesbian and a political being in her poems, risking (and maintaining) her mainstream success. And Elana Dykewomon for keeping the journal going, encouraging lesbian artists, and beautifully writing our true lives. Being in the editorial collective for the “Old Lesbians/Dykes” issue of SW (#53) was a challenge and honor I still cherish. Being published in *Sinister Wisdom* and in lesbian anthologies edited by Margaret (Peg) Cruikshank are great thrills to me, affirming the oft-quoted and seldom owned credo that we are ALL artists.

Living happily in a group household with Jeanne Clark and others for many years expanded my concept of loving family and home and fed my dream of being among artists. None of these revelations would have come to me if Jennifer Ware had not given me the strength to follow my desire and come with her to California thirty years ago. In many ways, *Sinister Wisdom* and Mothertongue showed me how to become a lesbian feminist with a rich life graced by supportive family, friends, and lovers to all of whom I send congratulations on this anniversary.

Janet Mason

Anita Cornwell: Remembrance of Things Present

(This commentary was first aired on “This Way Out,” a worldwide lesbian and gay radio syndicate based in Los Angeles.)

I first met Anita Cornwell in the early eighties at a reading that she and Becky Birtha were giving at a now defunct lesbian and gay community center located on Camac Street, one of the back alleys of center city Philadelphia. Anita was reading from her book, *Black Lesbian in White America*, published in 1983, the same year that I came out as a lesbian.

The room where Anita and Becky (whose first book of short stories *For Nights Like This One* had just been published) read was small and cramped and filled with lesbians. There was no place in the world I would have preferred to be. Many of the women in the room, Anita and Becky included, would come to be important members of my community, intimate friends, and fellow travelers in the life that still lay ahead of me. At the time their faces were still new to me, and these women I had yet to meet, like my list of books I had yet to read, were an endless source of fascination for me.

Looking back on this reading, by these two women who were to become influential friends and alter my course as a lesbian writer, I'd like to say that my world split open, that I was shaken to the core, my perspective inalterably changed. But this reading was almost twenty years ago, and as memory goes, there are many things that have slipped away from me. I do know that this reading was an important part of my ongoing consciousness raising, which in those days seemed to be a daily, if not hourly, event.

Since I can't recall who I was with, I assume I went alone. But I didn't feel alone in the intimacy of that small room which resounded with the leveling honesty of both Anita and Becky's work. When the authors had finished reading I went up to the front of the room and sat down with them. I remember that we talked for a while—and that what we talked about, perhaps, was substantial since less than a year later I ended up in the same writing group with them. But all I recall of our conversation is that I wore purple day-glo socks and the aspect of my personality that was reflected in this was not lost on Anita.

Perhaps it was those purple socks that set the stage for a friendship.

I read both of their books and wrote a review of *Black Lesbian in White America* for *Tell-A-Woman*, the newsletter of the Women's Switchboard, a



Anita Cornwall. Photo by Janet Mason.

collective of which I had been a member, and also published a review in *off our backs*, the lesbian feminist newspaper out of Washington D.C.

Anita's book was fire under my heels. Shortly after reading and reviewing it, I attended a women's liberation conference at Temple University. No doubt many powerful things were said at this conference. But what I remember most was that one of the women on the panel, a white, heterosexual, upper middle class woman who had made a name for herself in the feminist movement, answered a question from the audience by saying something to the extent that the women's movement wanted to include Black women but that "those women didn't want to join us." The audience was a very mixed group, Black and white women and other races, representing members of the local community as well as students and the academics who worked at the university. Hisses and objections to this obviously racist remark rified through the audience, my own voice among the chorus.

After the speakers were done the room was still buzzing with lively dialogue and debate. I entered into a conversation with a conservatively dressed Black woman, a few decades older than me, who had previously been talking to one of the few men in the room. Her mild amusement—perhaps at my youth, or my idealism, or my red high top sneakers—turned to ner-

vousness as I mentioned the L-word in the title of Anita's book. Then I paraphrased Anita's statement "You seem to be saying that I have to be led either by white womyn or Black men. Why can't I lead myself?"

"That's right!" the woman exclaimed, her vehemence and enthusiasm undaunted by the fact that her male companion was still standing by her side.

Her consciousness changed on a dime.

And that is the power of the written word.

Anita came of age as a lesbian in the 1950s, and in her early writings—published in *The Ladder* and *The Negro Digest*—she was among the first, if not the first, to identify as a Black Lesbian in print. Born in the Deep South, "when integration was a term seen only in the dictionary," Anita writes of herself as a young woman hanging out in the Village where "She was looking for some of them, but they were home in the closet growing shoe trees." She writes of her involvement in the women's movement when she was often one of the oldest women in the room as well as being one of the few Black women: "We of the fifties (and the forties and on back to when) not only had to operate from the closet but, worse yet, most of us seemed to exist in a vacuum."

Anita's writing reminds us of the things that were and are specific to her generation, and at the same time she writes of truisms that we would do well to heed today. "Just as there is no such thing as a little bit of pregnancy, ditto with oppression," she writes. And she reminds us that "with all the freedom of expression allowed today, Hollywood's exploitation of womyn is more violent and vicious than even the most pessimistic Feminist would have believed possible just fifteen years ago." And she stares truth in the face baldly by questioning the obvious, "Out of over 50 million womyn in this country, why are so many so content to be little more than charwomyn for men?"

Anita Cornwell writes in a voice that is incisive—as Becky Birtha writes in the foreword of the book, Anita puts forth "...an acute political analysis of both racial and sexual oppressions...both radical and feminist...written long before those words were in common use together." She writes of her collective struggles—joining her voice in a long interview in the mid-section of the book with that of Audre Lorde's—and she writes of her individual struggles as a lesbian writer: "After staring at hundreds of blank pages....I learned to face myself. I learned that I not only existed but that I had every right to my own existence!"

As strong as this voice is, it is my concern that it continues to be heard.

Books go out of print, and politics—though they are still as necessary as ever—go out of fashion. History becomes yet another memory that slides away. I would like this not to happen with Anita.

Anita writes in a voice that is above all else, unapologetically her own, a voice that is capable of reminding generations to come that they have every right to their own existence. And that voice is absolutely necessary. When I think of Anita it is always her voice that comes to mind.

Along with her writing voice, is her speaking voice coming to me across the telephone wires. Our time together in the writing group was short lived since Anita's schedule—writing nights and sleeping days—has made it increasingly difficult for her to participate in an ongoing group. Every few months—sometimes longer—there are gatherings where we get together. At least on one occasion we offended the hostess of a party—a mutual friend of ours—by sitting in the corner all night and talking about writing. More often there is Anita's voice on the phone, an encouraging message left on my machine, or a late afternoon conversation that always alters my perspective—reminding me among other things of the virtues of patience, necessary for hanging in there over the long haul— and leaves me carrying the warmth of Anita's voice with me for the rest of the day.

Over the course of nearly twenty years there are many things that a friendship can contain. One of these things for me is the memory of my mother who loved Anita's work. (Like Anita I was raised by a feminist mother who very much taught me to be my own person.) Another thing is the memory of a movement, the lesbian feminist milieu that I came out in which still shapes my relationship to myself and to the world. Then there is mutual respect, as Anita has always taken an interest in me and my work.

But the most important thing about my friendship with Anita is the affection that one woman can feel for another, deeply connected through the years.



Jean Taylor

Remembering

Like most writers my age I have been writing articles and short stories and what have you about my experiences as a lesbian and feminist activist in the Women's Liberation Movement (WLM) for just about as long as the editors at *Sinister Wisdom* have been publishing this lesbian magazine. And what better way for us not only to have lived and politicised and loved our way throughout these past three decades but also to have documented all of our joys and fears and gains as lesbians in the world.

It hasn't always been easy. But it seems to me, we have lived through and benefited from and contributed to one of the most vibrantly exciting and ultimately satisfying periods of herstory the world has ever seen. This was brought home to me when I began to seriously document in a more detailed and chronological way the details of our WLM events, activities, publications and whatnot here in Victoria, Australia, from 1970 onwards. Even though I had attended many of the events, chanted at the marches, read the publications, spoken up at the meetings and helped set up activist collectives, I was astounded by the extent of our activities and the influence we'd had and the numbers of landmark occasions that had happened. Some of which I'd never even heard of, let alone attended. Then again, from this great distance in time I might just have forgotten about them, not such an unlikely occurrence I'm discovering as I read through my journals to document the 70s, the 80s and the 90s in as much detail as possible.

As any lesbian feminist who was active during the 1970s will tell you, that particular decade would have to be one of the most wildly exciting of all time. If we weren't painting banners to take on the latest demos and march, we were rushing off to collective meetings, setting up refuges, editing the lesbian newsletter and speaking out at public forums. All on the same day. The rest of the week we made love (Non-monogamously, of course), attended our C-R Group meetings, debated the latest issue, anything from up to what age boy children were allowed to attend gatherings, or not at all, as the case may be, to whether to have only vegetarian food at the next gathering and risk criticism or whether including some meat would alienate others, danced our feet off, helped organise a womyn's festival, did the womyn's poetry program live-to-air, attended a womyn's conference interstate, proofread, cut and pasted the monthly magazine, ran it off on the gestetner and mailed it out to subscribers and still had time to make sure we

did our turn on the roster of duties at our lesbian household. In other words, if we didn't do it, whatever it was, it didn't get done.

Remember when we thought we were indispensable? When we imagined that the revolution started now and it would all be over in a matter of months? When we didn't make a move without checking it against some ideologically sound measure in our heads? When we didn't speak out because we were afraid of being ostracised by our Sisters? When we were exhausted, cranky and fed-up with all the endless arguments about every little thing and woke the next morning tired out and kept going anyway? When the feeling of Sisterhood wasn't always as powerful as we would have liked but as there was nothing else like it we supported the notion regardless.

No amount of documentation will properly capture our personal contributions, nor will it do justice to our collective achievements but if we who were there don't write about what we did then our stories will be lost and once again lesbians will either be ignored or our contributions distorted beyond recognition.

This is why I have been writing a lot more nonfiction over these past few years. I have often written articles for our local lesbian magazines, in particular *Lesbiana* (1992 - 2004) and the national magazine *Lesbian Network* (1984 -), doing reportbacks of gatherings, opinion pieces and the occasional monthly column, such as the one in 1993 entitled: "What Are Dykes Doing in the Year of Indigenous People?" But once I started to pull together all the information from the Victorian Women's Liberation and Lesbian Feminist Archives and my own personal diaries and journals about the WLM and realised how much we'd actually done at the grassroots level of activism I became enthused about writing the kind of book that would include every activist collective we'd ever set up, every action and fundraiser we'd ever attended, every conference we'd ever organised and all the marvelously empowering fun times we'd had as well as some of the more acrimoniously painful debates we engaged in to our detriment.

Of course once I got to the end of the 1970s the 1980s loomed in all its quite different but equally crowded magnificence with events and issues and demos all its own. So I began to document some of the more significant groups, gatherings and publications of this momentous decade as well. Which led into, you've guessed it, the 1990s with even more lesbian festivals, lesbian groups, lesbian activities than ever. A bit more research and I have the bare bones of another large book waiting to be written out in all its glorious radical lesbian feminism. I'm not even going anywhere near the new millennium for the time being, except to document my own personal interactions

as I go along, but we all know how much we're still doing, despite the rumour that we've been in a post-feminist era for how long now?

More power to us, I say. This is not to ignore the burn-out, the trashing, the lesbians who've dropped out because the lesbian community has sometimes been too critical or too damaging or not supportive enough. But when all's said and done, it seems to me we've done more than our fair share not only to try and make the world a better place but also to ensure that lesbians can be out and proud and able to take our own not insignificant and creative place in the scheme of things.

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Tellin' It Like It Tis'

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on healing

Billie Dee

Cosmology

*We were young then, brash
and strong: we rode the curve of the earth*

*— proud bellies, big breasts:
the knobs of our spines threw sparks*

*and the shadows we cast across the land
dogs mistook for storms.*

*Each morning we unleashed our hair: long
feral locks that flew in the solar wind.*

*The bellows of our chests would stir
the tops of monstrous trees*

*and song birds sheltered
in the thickets of our thighs.*

*We were brave then — goddesses:
foolish with our love.*

Alison J. Laurie

Lesbian Nation in Aotearoa/New Zealand

Background

Aotearoa/New Zealand has a long history of same-sex relationships. Before colonisation, lesbianism seems to have been commonly accepted in Maori societies.¹ The colonisers brought Christianity and British law, introducing moral and legal restraints on homosexual behaviour. Male homosexual practices became criminalised with the passage of the 1858 English Laws Act, but as lesbianism was not illegal in England it was not included. Other restraints were available to control women's behaviour. British ideologies of the family controlled women's sexuality, denied nineteenth century women property rights and a legal identity, and restricted women's access to the essential requirements for leading lesbian lives, economic independence and the ability to pay for a 'room of one's own', before the mid to late twentieth century.

Despite obstacles, some women defied the prescriptions and lived as lesbians.² By the early years of the twentieth century, increased educational and employment opportunities for women meant that more women could live as lesbians. New Zealand's participation in two world wars created further opportunities and encouraged urbanisation and, by the 1950s, small 'kamp' communities existed in at least Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch. Homosexual women and men used the term 'kamp' here and in Australia, to refer to themselves and their communities.

New Zealand had no equivalent of US style lesbian bars. At least from the 1950s, a publicly visible kamp crowd met at hotel bars, or 'pubs', and in coffee bars. Options for 'kamp ladies' were limited, as from WW1 women were prohibited from entering public bars, and restricted to the 'ladies and escorts' or 'cats' bars provided by a few hotels, where women without a male escort could be refused entrance, ostensibly to control prostitution. Further, until 1967 New Zealand licensing laws prohibited the sale of alcohol after 6 pm, and all day Sunday. Coffee bars became important meeting places for the kamp crowd in several cities.

Groups in the few pubs that tolerated homosexuals were very mixed, including kamp ladies, kamp men, drag queens, prostitutes, criminals, bohemians, writers and theatre people. Maori urbanisation after WW2 meant that many Maori homosexuals also came to the cities, and Maori and working-class kamp men and women were an important part of the publicly

visible kamp communities in these pubs.³ Private parties were, however, the main way that everyone socialised, especially the older, more middle-class kamp men and women. During the 1930s the first Labour Government built many state rental houses for families, thus freeing up private rental housing in the cities. Lesbians living at home or in rooming houses now had increased opportunities to rent flats or even houses. Home ownership increased after WW2, mainly as families obtained favourable state mortgages. Some lesbians, employed for example by the Post Office, or retiring from the armed forces, could also obtain mortgages and purchase houses. Up and down the country, kamp people began to meet in private houses, often with a keg of beer and the traditional Maori boil-up, with pork bones, watercress, potatoes and other goodies cooked together in a large pot for all to enjoy.

American influences before WW2 were slight in our former British colony. However, US forces stationed here during WW2 increased our awareness of American popular music, food, comic-books and films, and improved communications from the fifties brought rock n' roll and other calls to rebellion for the first waves of the baby boom kamps. As we came of age in the 1960s, the introduction of television brought knowledge of the civil rights movement, the New Left, hippies, flower power, drugs, protest music, women's liberation, anti-Vietnam war protests (New Zealand sent a small force of military volunteers), and eventually gay liberation and lesbian feminism. The kamp communities as my generation knew them changed forever through these new influences.

Lesbian-feminism

When I came out at age 16 in the 1950s, my sources of information about lesbianism were limited. I read *The Well of Loneliness*, which I thought wonderful, despite Stephen's foolishness in giving away her girlfriend to a man. I found a welcoming community of kamp men, who introduced me to my first lover, but we could not find a community of kamp 'ladies'. After my parents found my lover naked in the wardrobe, I left home and, like many other New Zealand kamps, sailed to Australia, where Sydney housed a small group of visible kamp ladies in the back bar of the Rex Hotel in Kings Cross. Despite street-fights, prostitution, criminal presence, and constant police harassment, I felt at home. I returned to New Zealand, and was pleased to find more young kamp women out and about, in the few sleazy pubs where we could meet.

I found Donald Webster Cory's book and learned of the existence of *One* magazine. At the time, we could not obtain US currency, but I ex-

changed money on the street with a US marine and ordered a copy. From *One*, I learned about the Daughters of Bilitus, sent for *The Ladder*, and read about the British Minorities Research Group (MRG) and their publication *Arena* 3. We could subscribe to this, as postal orders for British currency were available. I relate this process to explain how isolated we were, and what determination we needed to obtain connections. We passed information around, others subscribed too, and though we didn't start a lesbian organisation, the idea had been introduced.

I left for London, became active in MRG, and enjoyed a lesbian life where we still didn't dare call ourselves lesbians. Following romance, I moved to Copenhagen to live with a Danish woman, joined Forbund, the mixed homosexual organization, and when Gay Liberation came to Denmark, became involved in the new politics that demanded society change, not the individual. I found women's liberation after a weekend retreat for lesbians arranged by Redstockings, and was delighted to realize that all women might now come out as lesbians.

I set out for the source of some of these new ideas, spending several months traveling around the US with an escaped American headmistress from Massachusetts, collecting lesbian magazines, ideas and contacts, and worked on an issue of *The Lesbian Tide* in Los Angeles learning how small lesbian groups could produce magazines. I returned to Denmark with a suitcase full of US lesbian magazines, and soon set off overland for New Zealand in a Volkswagen van across Europe and South Asia with my Norwegian partner and the American headmistress, arriving in early 1973.

Women's liberation had started in 1970, at Victoria University of Wellington, their first newsletter also mentioning international influences. As they explained, the group formed from a combination of personal grievances against the consequences of women's set role in society, re-enforced by literature on overseas women's liberation.⁴

During the following two years, more women's liberation groups started, a group of women started *Broadsheet*, the first feminist magazine, and the first United Women's Convention was held, attended by over 1400 women.

Gay liberation began in 1972, when a group of lesbians and gay men at Auckland University met to protest that Ngahua Te Awekotuku, Maori lesbian and feminist activist, had been refused a visa to the US because she was homosexual. Though the American term 'gay' was understood at least from the 1960s, it was not in wide use before Gay Liberation started, after which it gradually replaced the local term 'kamp'. Gay Liberation groups formed throughout the country and National Gay Liberation Conferences

were held annually from 1972. Gay Liberation said it wanted to ‘bring out the lesbian and gay man in everybody’s head,’ and promoted visibility and radical social change. However, as conservative gay men began to join, many lesbians became disenchanted by the sexism and misogyny. Meanwhile lesbians in women’s liberation groups found many heterosexual feminists were homophobic and heterosexist. Repeating experiences elsewhere, lesbians began to form our own organisations.

The first national lesbian organisation, Sisters for Homophile Equality (SHE), started in Christchurch when lesbians met to talk about their lives and the new ideas of women’s and gay liberation. I attended some meetings, returned to Wellington, and arranged a SHE meeting there. SHE Wellington affiliated to SHE Christchurch, establishing New Zealand’s first national lesbian organisation, soon with branches and individual contacts in many smaller centres. Some women wanted to use the word ‘lesbian,’ in the organisation’s name, but because most women were afraid to use the term and newspapers refused to print it in advertisements, we settled for ‘homophile’. For example, when I attempted to place an advertisement for a SHE meeting in the *Christchurch Press*; they agreed to print ‘homosexual women’ but rejected the term ‘lesbian.’

SHE Wellington decided to start a national lesbian magazine. Lesbians from Wellington Gay Liberation often helped to organise regular dances, and we called a special meeting to ask for half the money from the last dance to establish our magazine. As no men turned up, we voted ourselves the money, deducting it from the dance takings. In December we met to organise New Zealand’s first lesbian magazine, which we called *Circle* following a suggestion by the late Viv Jones, a cartoonist and artist, who created the cartoon strip ‘Superdyke’ for the first issues. Viv suggested ‘Circle’ from ‘the women’s symbol, minus the cross at the bottom, as a circle can grow bigger and bigger and include everyone.’

We produced the first issue over a weekend, at my flat. We wrote some items, and clipped others from the US lesbian magazines carried overland in the Volkswagen. On the first page we declared ‘It is our purpose to unite the lesbians of New Zealand as part of the ever-growing international movement of gay women.’⁵ I wrote the first editorial, proclaiming that ‘our prime responsibility, time and energy must be directed towards improving the conditions of lesbians, and for all women.’⁶

We printed five hundred copies of the first issue, mailing copies to any woman we thought might be lesbian, including the detective story writer Dame Ngaio Marsh. (Her secretary returned the magazine with a letter stating Miss Marsh was not interested). We sold *Circle* for 25 cents in streets

and pubs to everyone, including heterosexual men, as we thought they might pass it on to women who could become lesbians. Membership of SHE itself was free and restricted to lesbians, the Manifesto stating that SHE aimed 'to provide an atmosphere which fosters the feeling of gay pride and solidarity amongst women.'

From the second issue, we subtitled the magazine '*a lesbian-feminist publication,*' though continued selling it in the street. We received magazines and newsletters from overseas groups on exchange and reprinted some articles, providing stimulating ideas and the feeling of being part of a wider lesbian movement. It never occurred to us that we should ask permission — we regarded the articles just as words to be shared and disseminated. Our reprints in *Circle* included writings by the Furies, translations from Danish lesbian magazines, and items from Australian gay and lesbian publications. This meant New Zealand lesbians reading *Circle* were introduced to the ideas of lesbian feminism and gay liberation theory from several countries. We were influenced by these ideas, and developed them further, producing local theory, which contributed to the lesbian-feminist debates of the period.

Wellington SHE members began Club 41, a venue where the new lesbian cultures met the older kamp cultures. SHE aimed to be broadbased, and though some older lesbians participated, most who attended meetings were young. Class and race backgrounds were diverse, which was both a strength and a point of tension. Lesbian Aid, a telephone contact was set up and operated from the households of SHE lesbians until the late 1970s. Through contacts given in *Circle*, lesbians found groups for support and information, which were invaluable for isolated lesbians and in building social and political lesbian communities. *Lesbian Feminist Circle* published for thirteen years, until 1986.

SHE lesbians participated in radical feminist and gay activities including meetings, conferences, pickets and demonstrations, appeared on television, wrote articles and pamphlets, provided speakers for schools and other groups, and organised the first national lesbian conferences. I returned to Denmark and then Norway for a few years, sending back articles on events there.

SHE made submissions on the Human Rights Bill, arguing for the inclusion of discrimination on the grounds of 'sexual orientation,' and organised lesbian-only sessions at the 1975 United Women's Convention, where their Lesbian Nation banner and tee-shirts were widely photographed, making public statements about lesbian pride, visibility and community development. SHE Christchurch established New Zealand's first Women's Refuge in 1975. However, by 1977, it became difficult to hold

everyone together within one group. In Wellington, SHE continued in tandem with *Circle*, though the wider group gradually fell away. Eventually SHE meetings ceased and Club 41 closed.⁷ It was the forerunner of a number of collectively run Wellington lesbian clubs in various locations, which became important meeting places for lesbian political groups. The tenacity of SHE in persisting with their projects and in keeping lesbian interests foremost, despite opposition, influenced the character of later lesbian communities as they developed. Despite a hostile social and political environment, lesbian groups and organisations formed across a wide spectrum of issues during the 1970s, developing lesbian newsletters, events, lesbian centres, activities, sports and social clubs. As well as working in separate groups, lesbians initiated women's centres, rape crisis, women's refuge, and were involved with women's art, music, publishing and bookshops. Lesbian political groups were involved with law reform, human rights, abortion rights, women's health, among other protest actions, and contributed to peace and anti-racism activism.⁸

Some SHE lesbians worked in lesbian separatist groups with lesbians who came out through the women's movement, especially after conflicts between lesbians and straight feminists at the United Women's Conventions. The Wellington Lesbian Network organised political and social events, establishing the first Lesbian Centre in New Zealand in 1979, which survived until 1982. It was a focus for lesbian visibility and influential in defining lesbian-only space and events. When the Centre unsuccessfully attempted to place an advertisement on the city buses, they mounted a public campaign and organised Lesbian Liberation Week, including New Zealand's first Lesbian March.

Seventies lesbian feminists had set the stage for many later developments, by promoting lesbian visibility and working against heterosexism, sexism, racism and classism, and by affirming that they did not want to be accommodated by and assimilated within mainstream society.

The seventies for me were a watershed between the old and the new, between the hidden life we were told we must lead, and our move forward into an intense period of liberation. It was a time when change was in the air, when we believed that everything was possible and that we would remake the world.

I was personally inspired by a generation of radical American lesbian feminists, whose writing, music and messages profoundly influenced the development of lesbian communities in many countries during the 1970s.

ENDNOTES

1. Maori are the indigenous people of Aotearoa/New Zealand. For comment on same-sex relations pre-colonisation, see for example the Report of the Royal Commission on Social Policy 1988, 2.2.38, and N. Te Awekotuku 'He Reka AnM –same-sex lust and loving in the ancient Maori world.' In A. Laurie and L. Evans. 2005. eds. *Outlines, lesbian and gay histories of Aotearoa*. Wellington. LAGANZ pp.6-9.
2. See for example J. Glamuzina 'An astounding masquerade,' pp.63-84 and Aorewa McLeod 'New Zealand's lost lesbian writers and artists' pp 49-62. In A. Laurie. 2001. ed. *Lesbian studies in Aoteroal/New Zealand*. New York. Harrington Park Press.; also Jenny Coleman 'Convenient fictions: the case of Amy Bock' pp 24- 31 and J. Glamuzina 'Containment of lesbians and lesbianism in the early and mid-twentieth century' pp 32 - 36. In A. Laurie and L. Evans. 2005. eds. *Outlines, lesbian and gay histories of Aotearoa*. Wellington. LAGANZ .
3. See N. Te Awekotuku, Shirley Tamihana, J. Glamuzina and A.Laurie 1993 'Lesbian organising'. In Anne Else 1993 ed. *Women Together, a history of women's organizations in New Zealand*. Wellington. Daphne Brasell Associates Press, pp. 545-556.
4. Womens' Liberation Front, Vol 1, No.1, 26 June 1970.
5. *Circle*, December 1973, inside cover.
6. *Circle*, December 1973, p.1.
7. For a published account of SHE, see Linda Evans 'She 1973-1977.' In Anne Else 1993 ed. *Women Together, a history of women's organizations in New Zealand*. Wellington. Daphne Brasell Associates Press, pp.559-560.
8. For more information see J. Glamuzina, Julie. 1993. *Outfront: Lesbian Political Activity in Aotearoa 1962-1985*. Hamilton: Lesbian Press.

Jean Sirius

A Tribute to Tee Corinne (One of Many)

Tee Corinne chose fame over fortune. She used to say she “could have painted pretty pictures, and sold them, and made a living.” Instead, she joined the lesbian front of the sexual revolution (the one in the 60s and 70s), and made images that couldn’t be published in the *New York Times*.

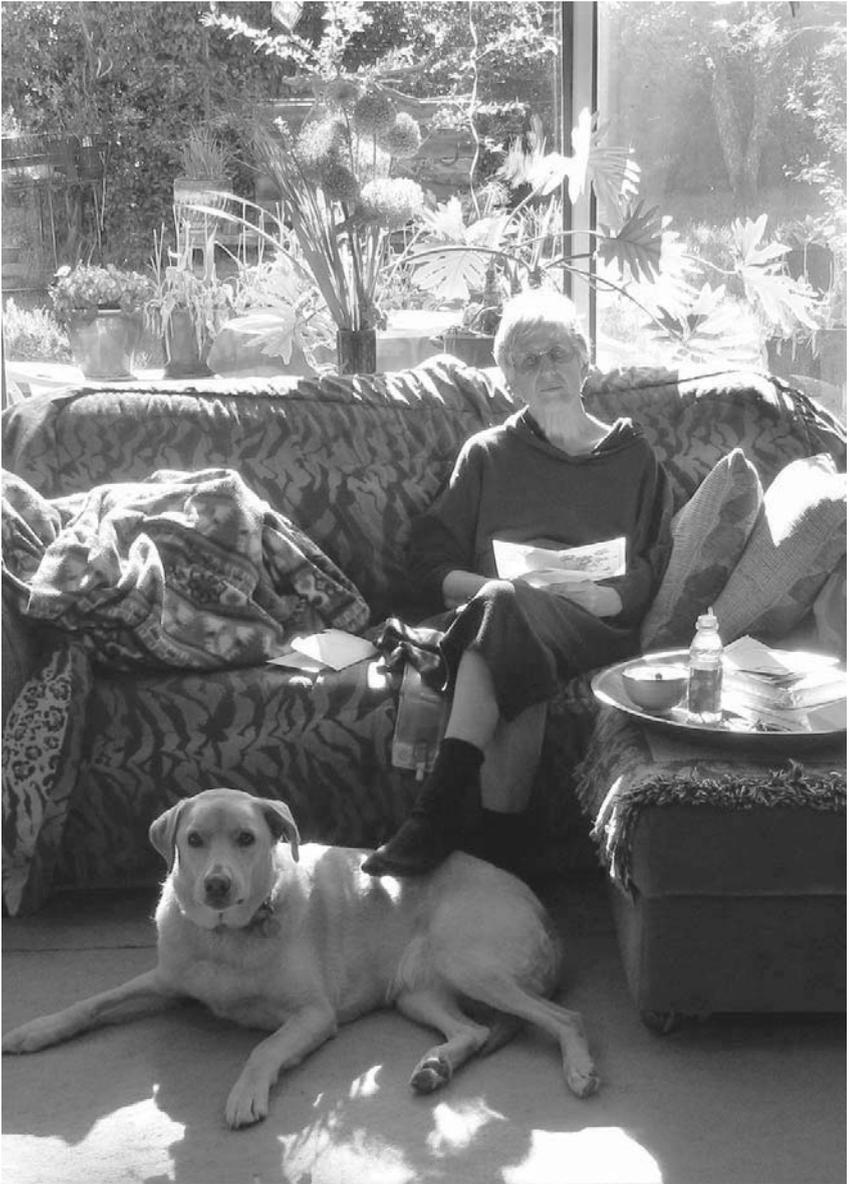
Beautiful stuff. Groundbreaking stuff. When she published the *Cunt Coloring Book* in 1975, there were darn few straight women who even knew what a vulva looked like. Lesbians knew, depending on the extent of their sexual experience, but the coloring book was, in lovingly line-drawn detail, the entire contents of the candy store.

For a book that never made any bestseller lists, it’s managed to remain newsworthy. In the 1980s, it was a projectile in the National Endowment for the Arts funding wars, and in 1999 the “Traditional Values” Coalition sent a copy to every member of congress, calling it filth and pornography, in an effort to discredit James Hormel during the hearings on his appointment as ambassador to Luxembourg. (A copy of the coloring book is in the James Hormel Gay and Lesbian Reading Center at the San Francisco Public Library.)

Twenty-nine years ago, Tee’s solarized photograph of two women making love appeared as the cover of *Sinister Wisdom #3*. As a poster, it became an instant classic, and Tee became a star. The Sinister Wisdom poster was (along with Sara Steele’s watercolor flowers) the standard in lesbian décor for decades.

In the 1980s, Tee decided there was money to be made in literary erotica, and began writing it. She was surprised when people told her you couldn’t make money writing, and blithe when those same people resented that she just sat down and did. After a decade, it came to her attention that kids coming up thought of her more as a writer than an artist, so she stopped.

After her writing career, she turned to teaching, and discovered a whole new way to be famous and appreciated for what she did. She taught drawing, painting, and memoir writing. She wasn’t always out to her classes, being in rural Oregon, which is progressive in some ways (think: “physician-assisted suicide”) and positively regressive in others (bumpersticker: “marriage=man+woman”). When her partner, Beverly Anne Brown, was diagnosed with cancer, Tee had to explain in class why she was such a wreck. Her students, who already understood that she was more special than they could imagine, took it in stride.



Tee A. Corinne

Photo by Jean Sirius © 2006, taken on May 9, 2006.

At Poppysseed, reading fan mail, with her beloved Georgie Anna.

After Bev died, in October 2005, Tee and I often talked on the phone about grief (I'm a local expert), and how terrible it was making her feel. I encouraged her to seek medical attention, but the amount of attention she could afford consisted of recommendations for "metamucil, anti-depressants, therapy." A month later, her liver gave notice. She called to say she had three weeks to live. I offered to come up to Oregon and help.

Four months later, I was all used up, and had helped her complete two major projects. Her book "Lesbian Art Images: Variations on Queerly Appealing Themes" will be published by Haworth Press in 2007. A CD, "Scars, Stoma, Ostomy Bag, Portacath," was made, a collection of altered photographs, taken during Bev's illness. It can be ordered from <http://teeacorinneart.com>. Also, with Tee's blessing, I spent some time with my camera, documenting her journey.

Tee made a difference in the world. She made a lot of differences. Even better: what she taught, what she wrote, what she published, are all out in the world, still changing things, opening hearts, altering opinions, lighting the place up.

It's hard when people die. Hard work for the subject, and grueling emotional and spiritual work for everyone around her. If, however, I got to choose my death, I think I'd want one like hers. Tee had six months in which to get her affairs in order, finish what she thought was important, find out how very many people loved and cared about her. She received attention, care, flowers, gifts, donations, and enough praise to float a battleship.

I hope it's buoying her up on the River Styx. I hope she and Bev are having wonderful, stimulating conversations again.

Postscript:

Tee willed her archives to the Special Collections at the Libraries of the University of Oregon. Donations will help with the work of cataloguing them. Make checks payable to UO Foundation/Libraries, with "In memory of Tee Corinne" in the memo line, and mail to the Library Development Office, 1299 University of Oregon, Eugene OR 97403-1299. Alternately, the Tee A. Corinne Prize for Lesbian Media Artists, established by JEB (Joan E. Biren), would benefit from (tax-deductible) donations to expand the prize. Send check to Moonforce Media, PO Box 13375, Silver Spring, MD 20911, with "Tee Corinne prize" in the memo line.

A note about the images: For Tee's first digital picture, she borrowed my camera and lined me up with a mural of Gertrude and Alice. She said she

took more pictures of me (film and digital) than of anyone in her life besides Bev. While she was dying, I returned the favor.



Photo of Tee Corinne taken by Jean Sirius © 2006 on June 19, 2006. Sketching. Tee continued making art as long as she had the strength.

Ruth Mountaingrove**Two Strong Lesbians**

My life was changed meeting Jean Mountaingrove at Pendle Hill, a Quaker retreat center outside of Philadelphia where I met her at a conference for Single Parents. I fell in love with her and moved to Oregon to the commune Mountain Grove where she was living. My life was changed by the creating with her of the feminist spirituality quarterly *WomanSpirit*. And by all the traveling we did up and down the west coast and across the country to St. Louis, New York state, Philadelphia, Washington DC, Indiana, Colorado, and back to Wolf Creek in Oregon.

Meeting all those women changed my life, but in particular Jean Mountaingrove who so impressed me at the Single Parents conference with her organizing ability. Later I learned that she had been a co-organizer of Single Parents which was attended by one hundred people, two of them men.

It was her organizing ability that changed my life and the many women who came in contact with her. It was her vision that created *WomanSpirit*, *Rootworks*, and the wonderful five day festivals for women on women's lands and the Siskiyu National forest celebration. Her energy was phenomenal.

Our photography workshops *Ovulars* held in the summers at *Rootworks*, our celebrating the Goddess with other lesbians, and *The Blatant Image*, a magazine for feminist photographers, all originated from her.

Probably the next most influential lesbian in my life was Tee Corrine who contributed drawings and photographs to *WomanSpirit* and was a prime mover in the photography *Ovulars*, bringing women photographers from all over the United States to *Rootworks*, our woman's land, to spend a week talking about their work, taking more photographs, trying more formats than 35mm and working in the darkroom.

In addition Tee was vital to the publishing of *The Blatant Image I and II*. When Tee was editor of several lesbian short story collections she persuaded me to try my hand at writing short stories. She published two of mine: "The Chemistry Between Us" and "Almost A Love Story." When she did the CD for Purdue University she included some of my work. She kept me up to date on requests from *Sinister Wisdom* and other magazines. I am grateful to her for all these reasons.

rainbow williams

A Tribute to Tee Corinne

I have been thinking of Tee Corinne, with much appreciation for what she has done for all Lesbian Artists. Tee had family in southwest Florida, an aunt I believe, and came down to visit occasionally. On one of these visits (maybe 1980), she brought her slide show of Lesbian Art and Artists. Sarah and I were newly lovers, and both lesbian artists, so we were thrilled to attend that showing in Tampa. The inspiration was to be long lasting. I was producing a monthly newsletter in Orlando and news of the visit and meeting some of our Lesbian Artists and Musicians was reported. That helped connect us to Great American Lesbian Art Show, a national event, held in many venues across the land, whatever living room, or public space we could get. GALA was the name. Four years later, I had moved to Pagoda by the Sea, a lesbian neighborhood in St Augustine, FL of what had been twelve fishing cottages on Vilano Beach. We had a garage that was turned into a theater for feminist performances for acts such as Alix Dobkin, Holly Near, and many others. I repainted the walls a coat of white and claimed it the Lesbian Museum of Modern Art. I invited Tee to exhibit and she sent a flat photo box full of her sepia and black and white print series called Famous Lesbians: perfect for our 20 by 20 theater, which was done in black and white. A few small sales happened, but that didn't daunt Tee. She said to keep the unsold ones and display them when possible. Sudie Rakusin had a show there, and Beth Karbe displayed her photos, and Carmen and Joa their fun-iture. I had a show with Sarah Carawan. Myriam's sculpture graced the space. My point is this: Tee and her ready generosity started us off. I next saw her at a Lesbian Art opening in San Francisco, 1989 the year of the earthquake. I introduced myself and she remembered the project and me. From time to time, Tee would send out a call for entries and I would think: "She's stirring the pot, keepin' the caldron bubbling!" and smile to myself.

This piece was first published in *mamaraga*, Gainesville FL monthly. Reprinted with permission.

Lauren Levey

Some Lessons from the Trip So Far

Although by 1938 it was clear to anyone watching that German Jews were in grave danger, and despite vocal Nazi sympathizers in the US, New York seemed like a reasonably safe place to call home for Fanny Silverman. An early supporter of women's suffrage, she was finally coming into her own; her children were grown and she was an energetic widow of 57, now focusing her energy on the Zionist dream, a Jewish state in its historic homeland. According to family legend, while walking down one of Manhattan's avenues, Fanny came across a soapbox set up by the American Nazi Party, with a speaker and a megaphone spewing hate, together with a swastika flag and literature. Not unusual in that time and place, but for some reason on this day Fanny just lost it. She said some loud things and knocked over some stuff, the flag crashed down and hateful flyers fluttered and scattered. Then the Nazi men attacked her with a baseball bat to the head. She survived the attack, refusing medical attention, as she didn't trust either 1938 medicine or Jew-hating doctors, and went home to Brooklyn, where she suddenly collapsed and died two weeks later from brain hemorrhage.

Fanny was my grandmother, but I wasn't born until 1947, so I never knew her; but I was taught about her idealism, her righteous anger, her courage, and the deadly cost of all that. The storytelling always ended with the same mixed lesson: You look like Fanny, you act like Fanny, watch out you'll die like Fanny. Said harshly but with love and fear and admiration and hope.

My parents had a well thought out, complex understanding of oppression as it related to Jews. (And by extension, to other groups whose oppression they understood to be like that of Jews in some way; but they were by far at their best about Jews). They shared that understanding with me, in hopes that it would make me strong enough to survive it and even thrive in its presence. My own judgement during the 1950s and early 1960s was that they had chips on their shoulders, wounded forever by the Holocaust and its cultural shadows. In my world at that time, the fresh horror of the Holocaust had temporarily rendered expression of Jew hating distasteful and unfashionable; being young, I assumed it was gone forever, that the world would always be as it currently was. Still, Fanny's story stayed with me, together with the challenge it presented — how to confront oppression without getting killed.

In 1964, the growing suspicion that I might be a lesbian led me to apply only to women's colleges with socially liberal to experimental reputa-

tions; and in 1965 I found myself at Bennington. It was a happy choice. Not only was I not the only lesbian in the world, but it was 1965 and there was a new culture. This is what that culture looked like:

Martin Luther King, Jr., had impressed us with the dramatic effectiveness of nonviolent civil disobedience against social injustice. Students united against the Vietnam war were effective in forcing prestigious universities to bar ROTC military training and recruitment from campuses and to divest themselves of war industry holdings. Bennington student Andrea Dworkin demonstrated against conditions at the Women's House of Detention in New York, drawing media attention; it was eventually closed.

A Bennington student needed an abortion without parental knowledge. We passed the hat, over and over. We raised the \$1200 needed for an MD in nearby South Shaftsbury, Vermont, to do the procedure safely, albeit illegally. That's twelve hundred 1966 dollars at a tiny women's college.

It came to our attention that women students at Bennington had a curfew, while the 8 or so male students (in drama and dance) had none. We made a concerted plan to flout curfew, while expressing outrage at the injustice. After minimal discussions, in which no administrator wanted to justify the gender disparity, the curfew was discontinued.

Our success was intoxicating. It was obvious that sisterhood is powerful, before it became a slogan. How could we have been so successful? We weren't all born strong, and some of us had been victims of abuse — sexual, medical, psychotherapeutic, beatings. Some of us had fears and addictions and strange habits. Overwhelmingly we weren't in therapy; more about this later.

I think the key was our culture, as women, many of us lesbians, others wanting to be lesbians, living together without men. Most specifically, I think it was about the quality of our conversation. The content was important too, we talked about justice, liberty, and civil disobedience; about how a just and free world should be organized, or whether it should be organized at all (someone usually took an anarchist position). But even more, it was about the way we talked. We tried to speak in our own words, as they came to us, but to consciously avoid the words of "experts" whom we saw as enforcers for oppressive institutions. We did not speak solely from the "I", or avoid being judgmental, or buffer the truth to avoid hurt feelings, or label goals or values or behaviors "healthy" or not. Not typically, anyway. Conversations were not safe places, although sustained verbal humiliation for holding an indefensible position would usually be stopped by someone in the group; we embraced intellectual conflict, some ideas won, some lost, we all grew.

We generally recognized that the institution of psychotherapy had been supporting the political/social status quo by pathologizing, incarcerating, and torturing nonconforming women with electric shock, often without

their consent (not that consent can vitiate torture). Such women were among us. On the other hand, I remember a lesbian couple, having just come out to themselves, going off hand in hand to the campus shrink, who gave them each a single Miltown, which they enjoyed with other chemical enhancement as I recall; but they didn't continue ongoing therapy.

We recognized that biological determinism is always an argument to preserve the power of those in power; "be a man" would have been met with eye roll and snort.

We negotiated and developed an oppression analysis that informed our daily lives; it was intellectual, secular, ethical, and justice centered. It could not have been derailed by accusations of "victim mentality" — we knew there was real oppression, and we felt we could change it, all of us together.

We admired confrontation politics, it was heroic, it had theatrical flair, it attracted mates, and we'd seen it work quickly. Seeking safety was barely in the discussion, and neither was tolerance or assimilation; the dominant culture needed to become like ours. We knew that risk taking did not require years of therapy — only community support. We were our own cultural heroes.

Sometime during college it occurred to me that Fanny's fatal error was that she lacked adequate community support at the moment of her challenge to the Nazi soap box; she should have had a gang with her, and media would have helped too.

I've been giving some thought over the last few years to what might be prerequisites for a new feminist community. I keep coming back to feminist consciousness raising groups for women — highly structured and controlled discussions that lead us to more accurate generalizations about the meanings and workings of patriarchy. I have faith that accurate shared understanding leads naturally to concerted action for change because I've seen it happen. The format of CR tends to break through the empty catch phrases and taboos embedded in women's current conversational norms. These norms have been taught in therapy groups and 12-step groups in service to a goal that is not in the interests of women's empowerment as a group. These norms are designed to create a "safe space" (for whom, one wonders, the therapist? the patriarchy?), avoiding confrontation, avoiding generalization, by making every statement strictly personal, preventing the growth that comes when intellectual conflict gets honestly explored and resolved, preventing connection between ideas and between women as peers.

I've run a few CR groups over the last few years, in my living room and other real spaces. I'm thinking about trying to do it online. If you're interested in participating with me in an online CR group (or a live one in my Hudson Valley living room, for that matter), email me at WomenFirst@aol.com; I'm also interested in your suggestions to help make it translate well in the virtual world.

Kit Quan

Gloria, My Home



Gloria Anzaldúa (1942 – 2004)
 Activist, Writer, Mentor, Cultural Theorist, Teacher
 Photo by Annie Valva

I met Gloria in 1978. I was a sixteen-year-old runaway working at Old Wives Tales Bookstore on Valencia at 16th Street in San Francisco. She was attending a Feminist Writers' Guild meeting in the back of the store and came up to the counter to thank me for keeping the store open. I thought she was from another planet. She stood out. She noticed me when I was invisible to most people. I took her Feminist Journal Writing class at San Francisco State the year she had her hysterectomy and she almost died. She told me that when she read my papers, she could tell that I had what it took to be a writer. She was that voice for me for twenty-five years countering my feelings of not feeling literate, not being able to read and write. When I finally wrote something for *Making Face, Making Soul/Haciendo Caras*, she thought I would finally take myself seriously. But my blocks persisted and she had to tell me the same things in different ways year after year.

Except for the few years that she lived in New York, I would visit her regularly and we developed a friendship around food, books, reading and

writing. When she was writing *Borderlands*, I would go to her apartment in Oakland on weekends with my girlfriend and bring fresh organic vegetables. She would cook Tex-Mex chicken wings, her corn and summer squash stew. When she moved to Santa Cruz to Walti Street, I would visit and stay overnight eating and reading while she wrote. We were both night owls, staying up all night. When she bought her house, the visits continued, became longer and I would bring her her favorite foods: potstickers, braised green beans, and chicken chow mein. And when I could, fresh handmade tortillas from the Mission. She loved different Asian vegetarian meats, my braised tofu, Chinese greens and mock duck. Her most recent favorite dessert was homemade Vietnamese yogurt. She said she was eating one spoonful a day to make it last until my next visit. We celebrated our birthdays and holidays together when she didn't go home to south Texas.

She knew more about me and my history than anyone else in my life. She stuck with me through all my relationships from the time I was in high school, through job changes, identity changes, my changing relationship to reading and writing. She challenged me, had the hard job of telling me things that were hard to hear—things that sometimes had me in tears, but she knew what I needed. She said the only difference between me and her other writing comadres was that I didn't believe in myself, that I needed to put my intellectual life first and not let the fact that I wasn't an academic or hadn't read as much as other people get in my way. She taught me how to critique her writings, she welcomed my brutal honesty when I thought something didn't work in a piece. She gave me entry into a world that I thought was off limits to me — words and writing. She was generous with her house and books and gave me my library of books on writing. Year after year, she nurtured the writer in me and when I said, what if I never write my story, she said that it wouldn't change how she felt, she would love me just the same.

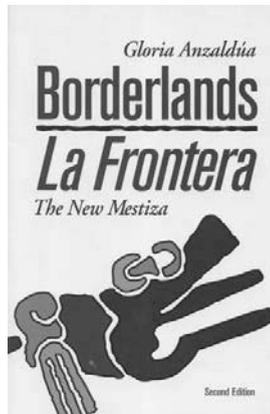
With her writings and ideas and who she was, she taught me to feel and see everything; to connect with nature and animals; to trust my imaginary world, and to build bridges wherever I can; to see different truths, not just one, and to accept my shadow side. She never felt threatened by others even when they were unfair to her in some way. She struggled mostly with herself: her own shadow side, her dysfunctional patterns, her self-sabotage. She would say to me, You are born alone and you die alone. I used to tell her that I would go when she would go because she was the only family I had. She was my home.

The night that Randy told me of Gloria's death, I felt like my world had ended. I couldn't believe what was happening. I had lived in fear of such

news but Gloria always told me that she was going to stick around for twenty more years. She struggled with diabetes and all its complications daily, she had to feed it her energy until there was less and less for her writing, but she was so well read on the disease and all the latest scientific developments and worked so hard at managing her blood sugars, that I believed that we still had more time, at least enough for me to get my shit together to finally work and live with her like we had talked about for years.

I last spoke to her on the eighth around two in the morning. I usually call her in the middle of the night every two weeks or so, or just whenever I thought of her or whenever I was at an airport, or something in my life was troubling me. When her answering machine comes on, I always say, “Gloria, it’s me, are you there, are you up, are you working?” I would give her a little time to get to the phone and she always picked up unless she was on a day schedule sleeping at night, which was rare, only if she had a gig or the occasional day appointment. She would go for days without sleeping. It was our routine to ask each other how much sleep we had gotten — three hours, four hours, almost never a full night of sleep.

Nothing could have prepared me for this day but when I think of all the things that she gave me, the most important thing was the connection to myself, my relationship to words, language, and images no matter how painful or difficult it is. She knew eventually I would have to make language my home, a place of *nepantla*, which was her home too. The last thing I ever said to her was, “I’m coming down. I’ll be there soon.” Now, instead of going to her house, I will find her at the Guadalupe tree on West Cliff Drive where we will still read, write, and eat together next to the ocean.



tatiana de la tierra

All of Us Want to Claim You: Poema para Gloria Anzaldúa

All of us want to claim you
la colombiana in Queens
la boricua in Buffalo
la argentina en Buenos Aires
las chicanas, las tejanas
las scholars, las activistas

all of us say
you named it, nuestra nepantla
the in between
el aquí que viene desde el allá
el más allá that is going nowhere
not now not ever
como tus tierras indígenas
once indígena always indígena

all of us know
you lived it, nuestro dolor
backbreaking labor of survival
blade en tu lengua
sangre en tu centro
batalla wounding but never stopping you
visionary bruja
always dreaming yourself
into another world

all of us loved you
we want you to know this
listen
que te queremos then and now
hear it in Nahuatl en Español en Pocho en Inglés
hear it en la canción del viento
en el silencio de tu desierto
en las rancheras que te cantamos
in the crackling of the candles that we burn for you

ay Gloria, ya que no estas with us
agradecemos tus palabras
frutas de la tierra that you picked with your fingers
so that we could be fed

22 de junio de 2004, ocean drive, miami beach, florida

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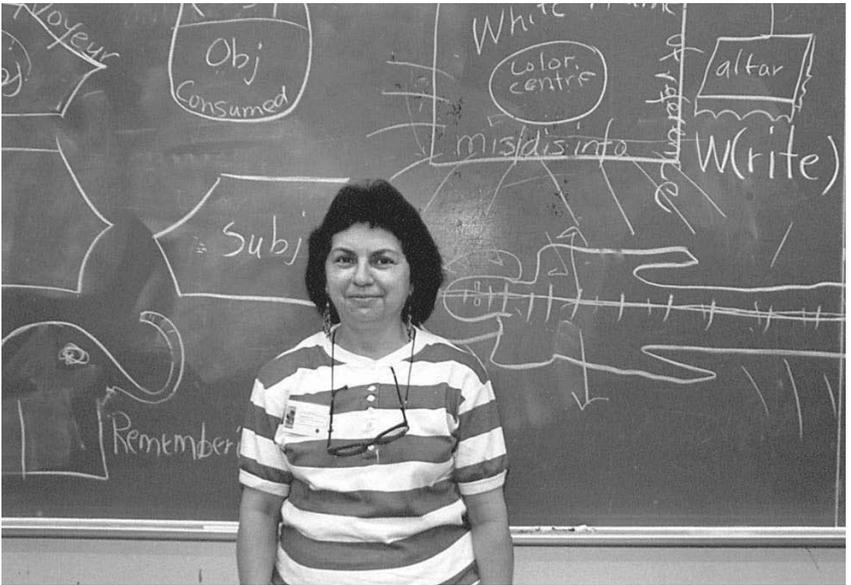


Photo of Gloria Anzaldúa by Cathy Cade: Gloria speaking and drawing about her book *Borderlands* at the International Book Faire in Montreal, 1998.

Denise M. Hise

One of a Kind

“And I’m going to make you think!” are the first words I remember her saying after introducing herself to our graduate molecular genetics class. She assumed what became for me one of her signature poses: a tall, slender woman, piano fingers supporting her weight as she leaned into us over the front row of desks, throwing down the gauntlet. I knew immediately this was someone to whom I should pay attention, that there would be more than science to learn here, so I did.

During the semester, she engaged us not only with textbook material — in fact many of us were hard-pressed to find anything she said in the textbook — but with personal experiences as a research scientist, as a student, as a woman in a male-dominated profession. She shared her love of science and her myriad topics of interest, conveying her love of learning and of life. She incited my curiosity so I was reading every research paper I could get my hands on to understand what all the excitement was about and embarking on serpentine web-surfing expeditions. I read far beyond what was required and learned more than I ever would have in a more traditional class structure. Yes, she had me thinking and I soon came to appreciate her gift as a teacher. She was a vibrant presence and more often than not, my 45-minute drive home passed unnoticed, my mind off playing with the intriguing new ideas she’d presented. I’d return to myself somewhere beyond my intended exit, slightly dazed and laughing that I’d done it again.

Although at first I tried repeatedly to tell myself I was imagining it, I felt some undercurrent of connection with her that I described to myself as shared experience. When she told us stories, I felt them as much as heard them; nuances in her voice seemed to tell me more than her words. Having grown up in an environment where such vigilance was required, this was not a new experience for me and I trusted my gut. But something else was going on too: personal growth. Our encounters always taught me something about myself, gave me pause and brought new realizations to my path of self discovery.

The following semester she was teaching an ethics course and after she described the contents, I finagled my way into it. The first evening she said, “This class will change you.” I couldn’t wait to see how. She assigned a list of topics about which we would write a paper a week. Again I read as much as I could, hoping to gain her favor, but writing those papers over the six weeks of that course turned out to be the most fun I’ve ever had. She’d captured

my imagination and stimulated my mind, offering a too long-absent avenue for expression. I couldn't wait for spare minutes of the day when I could allow my imagination free reign. I carried pen and post-its with me everywhere I went to write down the ideas whizzing around my brain, threatening to blow the top of my head off. I had never been so high for so long; the glaze over my eyes and the perpetual grin on my lips belied my physical presence.

Afterward, there was no doubt the class had changed me. I looked at the world differently. I understood that social change was a process, one in which I could participate. Where I came from, I guess we had enough problems of our own: there was no suggestion of looking outside the home for more. So although I had compassion to spare, I felt powerless, unsure of how to proceed and didn't believe anything I could do would really make a difference. But because of things I read as a result of that class, I realized two important things: that I too was intelligent enough to live a life that could make a difference and that social change happened one person at a time. While we have the potential for moral goodness and are theoretically capable of a sort of moral evolution, it happens very slowly, if at all, unless individuals let themselves be heard and counted. As each of us 'gets it,' as we understand what is equality, what is justice, what is good, we have a responsibility to pass along that knowledge, whether that means taking up a pen or a picket sign, telling our children or our congressional delegates, volunteering at a women's shelter or donating all our millions to world health organizations. Most of us accept without question what is, but once we're enlightened to injustice, we can't pretend we don't know, and eventually wrongs can be righted, equality can be attained, social justice can be achieved...if we each let our voice be heard, somehow.

In the short time I knew her, Dr. B. metamorphosed from a scientist, teacher and Dean of the graduate school to an internationally-renowned ethicist, ordained minister and parish priest. She is undoubtedly the most accomplished woman I've known, the best teacher I'll ever have and the most extraordinary role model for success one could imagine. She's always one step ahead of the game, preparing for her next big move while giving her all at the last one. She takes risks, is game for anything and follows her heart — doing what makes her happy, what gives her energy. The bottom line is she puts a lot in so gets a lot out. I was cognizant enough early on to express gratitude that she had crossed my path and now, years later, I feel the debt of that gratitude ever so profoundly. She played an important part in my life process and her influence continues to enrich my life beyond measure. I think the world of her and know that wherever I go in life, I take her with me.

Bea Loud

Remembering Out Loud

In the 1940s, when I was a child, some people probably thought my family was poor. We were not Catholic so there was no legitimate reason why the number of children in our house increased every 18 months until there were 6: boy, girl, girl, boy, girl, boy. I don't know if this perception of poverty persisted or if the fact that Dad went from being a farm hand to painting for the State of New York changed the perception, as it changed the reality. I know I grew up with the notion of scarcity...not poverty. I grew up hungry for affection, not just plain hungry.

What seemed to matter was how we played our cards. We kids grew up playing cards, and watched the adults around us play. They played Pinochle, Canasta, and Rummy. We kids started out with Slap Jack and War, graduating from games of speed and luck to games of strategy like Crazy Eights and Hearts. What mattered in games, and in life, was how you played your cards. Some of my neighbors and friends had far fewer cards than I. The main thing for lower-working-class folk, like us, was to make damn sure you did not go backward into the poverty class.

My main feeling about them, the poor, was fear. Fear of becoming them. I wonder, did they feel envious of us, desirous of our privilege? Did they think, "Why do they hate us?" There were brief times in my life when I was down to my last cards, days without food, or a job. I've felt despair. But I had experienced more, and believed the spring would not run dry.

The well at our extended-family home did go dry, every summer, without fail, beginning around the same time as the cicadas began their songs. Mom and we kids hauled water from Springgaard's spring about two miles away. We used it for drinking, cooking and to fill the wringer washing machine. We kids each had a couple of changes of clothes to put into that washer, and it was possible for us to take a weekly bath; each of us, in descending age order, into the same tub of water. I was grateful to be in the middle of the line-up. The position of my little sister, next to last, must have been harder. It was important to be clean and to be polite. We did not want to be known as poor-white-trash.

When I was 34 and she was 31, I met a woman who was the same age as my younger sister. They had first names in common. Neither my new friend, nor I, went by our given names, so I shall call her Out Loud, which is a name she used much later when we became two of the five Loud sisters. To

my initial horror, Out called herself poor-white-trash. She had grown up with that label, and had been treated accordingly. Now she claimed it for herself to try to keep the rest of us from erasing her by denying her reality.

The first evening we met was at a feminist book discussion group on the East side of town...the college area. She grew up on the South side. I was a transplant from the rural Northeast. We were both having a very hard time discussing class and feminism in the academic/theoretical way that was expected of us. So, we left and continued our more reality based discussions over beers, and did so for years to come.

I had a minimum wage factory job at the time and lived in a collective household with six other people, so I was doing ok. Out did not have a job and I did not know how she lived except that the girlfriends who she, like many of us, changed on a regular basis usually provided a roof over her head. She provided them the things that money couldn't buy. She was a handsome, sexy Irish woman, jet black short cropped hair, brown eyes always clouded with smoke. Her everyday attire was a black t-shirt and in colder weather a black leather jacket, with crisp clean jeans worn at the hip and held up with a two inch wide leather belt. That belt had several interchangeable buckles. One, I re-member, said: "No one ever raped a .38." She carried a .38, usually in her car. Her hips were barely definable and she wished that her breasts were too...but they were pendulous. She tried not to, but she hated this about her body.

We shared some physical traits and many values, but I was scared of poverty and scared of guns. For us both it was a matter of pride to resist the patriarchy's occupation of our minds and bodies in as many ways as we could. We supported each other in this. Advertisers, religions, politicians, fathers and brothers, even sisters, all were intent upon twisting us to fit their ideas of the submissive feminine. Her body paid a terrible price from its earlier occupations. Her menses and her depressions kept her confined to a darkened room for days on end. All her medical assistance came from a free medical clinic with good intentions and poor funding.

Out medicated herself with alcohol, tobacco, pot, uppers from the streets. She often put on a brave face and would resolve to feel good by doing good. In these times she'd usually organize something: start a Lesbian Action Core, raise money for the lesbian mothers defense fund (though she was never a mother), organize a Take Back the Night march and rally, or raise money so other women could have a temporary safe harbor in a battered women's shelter or so lesbians could find a home on near-by womyn's land. She had a hard time stepping foot on that land that she so faithfully and vigorously supported, because she was afraid of snakes in the grass.

Out was a very clever woman. In 1975 she figured out a way for herself, me and a couple of her other friends to attend the local college and have it all paid for...books, tuition and a small living stipend. This, in some circles is known as a scholarship. I actually completed a degree because of that vocational rehabilitation. She though, was queen of the incompletes and never did get a degree. It didn't matter, because it was just a way to make a living, for a while. Definitely the easiest job I ever had. We learned what we wanted and thumbed our noses at the rest. We took the drugs that they passed out, though we didn't always swallow them. We both did a required bi-monthly head-shrinking session and spent the rest of the month trying to expand our awareness to include other options.

Besides that job as a student I never knew her to have a job. She told me her earliest job, as a child, was as a numbers-runner in her neighborhood. And now, in the early 70s, she was some sort of a modern day Lesbian Robin Hood. I did not want to know the details even when she would offer to bring me in. I was scared of getting caught. My working class cautions were deeply ingrained.

Though we often lived in different parts of the country we remained best of friends/sisters for the next 15 years. She was living in the desert southwest where she believed it was easier to detect snakes in the sand, and where there was very little grass. I was still in the Midwest that last September when she visited. She told me she was taking Prozac but she was still depressed. For some time now, she had been in a committed stable relationship...no more earning toaster ovens for either of us. We joked about having done our parts for the cause.*

Out helped form my thinking about class privilege and poverty. As I think about poverty in the 21st century I see barefoot children scouring the garbage dumps in Mexico looking for anything that will help them survive one more day. I picture tens of thousands of homeless grief-ridden women and children in camps, refugees displaced by their occupiers in Sudan, in Palestine, in Iraq. I picture being forced to make a shelter, if not a home amidst hundreds of vacant-eyed strangers, who know that not only are they hungry and homeless but also that they are feared and despised by those who now must provide for their minimal and temporary existence.

I am safely separated from their suffering. I am protected, for now, by my willingness to go along with privilege. I cannot smell the stench, hear the exploding missiles, feel the brutality that occupies all their senses. I do know that to live to be 50 would be a very long time for most of them, and for most of the 37 million Americans who are officially poor. They will

never forget that they are despised, dispensable, disposable...trash. And I think of my dear poverty-class butch-dyke outlaw sister. I think how so very *not safe* it is to be any one of those identities.

I knew that the taking of Prozac was an act of desperation for her. As was her final act of walking into a supermarket deli on the eve of the day when my people eat turkeys and celebrate the benevolent pilgrim's occupation of this beautiful land and The People whose home it was. I am left to wonder why she chose this time, this place to pull that .38 out of her black leather jacket pocket, put it to her head and end her suffering. In her pockets no identity. Simply a scrap of paper with these parting words: "I am homeless".

I am left to wonder. I am left to grieve. I am left to resist the occupations, to create, to use my survival skills and my privilege to continue to slap jacks and share my memories.

*Just google Ellen Degeneres and toaster oven to decipher this reference.

sinister wisdom 45



LESBIANS & CLASS

Photo by Tee A. Corinne

Vickie Sears (1941 - 1999)



feminist • teacher • author • storyteller •

*Vickie Sears spent much of her childhood in the foster care system, including seven years in a Seattle orphanage. She received an MSW from the University of Washington, and worked as a feminist therapist, writer and disability advocate. As a young adult, Vickie explored many of the world's religions before returning to Cherokee spiritual practices. She started writing when she was six years old and was the author of *Simple Songs* (Firebrand, 1990) a book of short stories, which she dedicated "To all the children who have ever lived in an orphanage or foster home and had a dream." Her stories and poems also appeared in *The Things That Divide Us*, *Hear the Silence*, *Gathering Ground*, *Spider Woman's Granddaughters* and *A Gathering of Spirit: North American Indian Women's Issue* (*Sinister Wisdom*: #22/23.)*

Photo by Tee A. Corinne

Jeanette Howard Foster (1895 - 1981)



writer • historian • librarian

“Towering indeed must be my debt to the lesbian literature historian Jeannette Howard Foster, an independent scholar of immense, unsung erudition who spent most of her professional life as a librarian at the Kinsey Institute....I first encountered her classic bibliography Sex Variant Women in Literature – issued privately at her own expense in 1956, at a time when no reputable publisher would touch the subject of female homosexuality – when I was an undergraduate...in the early 1970s.....Foster’s richly learned study, a true labor of love, was hidden away in a special noncirculating, “Triple X-rated” stack behind the front desk {at the library}. Many were the otherwise moribund evenings I spent perusing it: my first – and still most treasured – introduction to the literature of lesbianism.”

Terry Castle, The Literature of Lesbianism: A Historical Anthology from Ariosto to Stonewall, Columbia University Press, 2003, p. xix.

Photo by Tee A. Corinne

Margaret Sloan-Hunter (1947 – 2004)



activist • organizer • lecturer • writer

Margaret joined Chicago CORE at the age of fourteen, organized tenant unions and rent strikes and campaigned against lead poisoning. One of the early editors of Ms. Magazine, she toured extensively giving more than a thousand lectures on sexism and racism. Her articles, essays and poems were published in numerous publications.

Photo by Tee A. Corinne

Sarah Aldridge (1912 – 2006)



author • publisher • lawyer

Sarah Aldridge was central to the creation of Naiad Press in 1972 and A&M Books in 1995; both were created to make sure Lesbian and feminist writers had places to publish their work.

Aldridge's partner of 57 years, Muriel Crawford (1914 – 2006) said, "She used to tell me it was all about having a chance to tell our stories....She was a strong-willed, principled person — first and foremost a feminist spirit. She really believed that women needed to band together to help each other."

Photo by Avery McGinn

Barbara Macdonald (1913 — 2000)



activist • writer

Photo by PGar

Karen Anna (1943 – 2000)

*photographer •
teacher •
community builder*



Photos by Tee A. Corinne

Terri Jewell (1954 – 1995)



activist • writer

Pat Parker (1944 – 1989)



activist • poet

Photos by JEB

May Sarton (1912 – 1995)



writer

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Monique Wittig (1935 – 2003)

*novelist • poet •
social theorist*



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Photos by Tee A. Corinne

Valerie Taylor (1913 – 1997)



*novelist • poet • feminist •
social activist*

June Arnold (1926 – 1982)



*writer • co-founder of
Daughters, Inc.*

Marjorie Norris

When I Learned I Was a Warrior

*I learned by trial and error,
Punching at windmills, me
My own Donna Quixote, but
Then the movement came,
And I began to understand
The colonized mind
That my sisters and I
Had to overcome, the power
That lived in our throats and
Chests and guts, the survivor
That made us aware, and kept
Us looking around. My
Children made me look
At life in a new way,
And I wanted them to be
Warriors too, I taught
Them to be brave
But to share their
Hearts, what was under
The breastplate, to
Honor the feelings of
Others, as I had theirs.
I learned through women's
Music, and at the feminist
Bookstore, I learned through
Vietnam and Taking Back
The night. I learned about
The chains that society
Held, and I vowed to burst
Through them.
And I did, slow, then fast,
All with the help of women*

To my Sisters Everywhere

Jacqueline Elizabeth Letalien

Liberation Trilogy

Conception

In 1970 the peace and Vietnam antiwar movement gains some strength. Many women become fully engaged in the organizing of large actions, demonstrations and conferences. About 1971 or 1972 we realize that this creating, organizing, manifesting is done by women. We also are expected to make the coffee, do the cooking, the cleaning and provide sex.

One day in about 1971, I am driving my red javelin along the streets of Amherst, Massachusetts. There's a woman hitch-hiking and there's the rule that women stop for women. She gets in and moves the conversation into women's issues. She lets me know that there's a women's consciousness raising (CR) group that meets in a farm house down the road.

This is how it starts this culture klatch of the daughters of the mothers of coffee klatches. This is where the daughters talk about the coil and the collateral damages it does to a woman's uterus. This is where there's talk about the fact that in Massachusetts it is illegal to have an abortion under any circumstances. It is illegal to show pictures of, display, discuss contraceptives of any kind under any circumstances.

This is where my involvement with the women's liberation movement starts, meetings in farm houses and university dorm rooms of Amherst, Northampton. We are moved to make changes without being fully prepared for what we are about to do. We have no current role models. We look for contemporary women authors and find few. Information about our herstory is hard to find, certainly this knowledge isn't taught in any schools or universities.

Most everything is male owned and operated including women. These are the days when there's still the rule of thumb and lawful for husbands to beat wives. (A man may not beat his woman with a stick wider than his thumb.) These are the days when it isn't possible for husbands to rape wives. (The rule is that wives may not refuse their husbands.)

In the wider world, it isn't possible for women to be raped without our consent. The prevalent belief of the time is that if a woman lives through a rape, she hasn't done enough to fight off the attack. This is somewhat similar to the trial of a witch who's bound and thrown into water, often with rocks on her person. If she drowns, she isn't a witch; if she floats, she is a witch.

In the seventies it isn't that we hate men so much as we are inspired by issues which all share the common ground of making choice available to women: birth control, abortion, work, sports, child care, health, sexuality, economic value. It isn't so much that we loathe male directed limitations; it's that we are dedicated to the power, strength and worth of women.

The women who do want to write about women's liberation find it is difficult to get published by publishing houses run by men, by newspapers run by men, by magazines run by men. Even if we do get published, it is difficult to find a market with bookstores run by men, distributors run by men, marketers run by men.

We have undaunted fervor and committed intention. We are on fire; we are fire. Women on the east and west coasts open women's bookstores, invest in women's presses; newspapers and magazines sprout everywhere. We incite a movement and invent the means with which to spread the word. Women musicians write their own songs, press their own records, book their own shows. We are empowered in the peace movement and dedicated to the women's liberation movement.

Women's consciousness raising groups are transformed into a plethora of flourishing women's centers, cafes, restaurants as well as women's collectives of political, film, educational, health, sexuality focuses. Women's studies courses and then departments are birthed by the tireless, often payless, work of students and faculty. Conferences interweave the communities as we are moved to change everything.

Many of us are so very young, in our late teens and early twenties. We are fully engaged in a struggle that is older and bigger than we are. Somehow we rise to the occasion, full of dreams, dedication, determination. The shy become present, the quiet become vocal.

Emergence

In 1971 I live in Hadley which is the field between Amherst and Northampton. I have three women roommates who are close friends of mine. I'm full of hope in the Spring when we make plans to live together in the Fall. In the Summer there's a slight change in my life; I come out as a lesbian. This potentially idyllic pastoral household becomes a macabre soap opera.

Merry slams the oven door shut: I don't understand your being a lesbian. The coming out rush is subsiding; I'm tired and cranky: just exactly what is it, you don't understand. I couldn't possibly guess her answer: I don't understand how you could be in love with other women. I'm confused: why

do you say “other” women? Now she’s cranky: how could you possibly be in love with any other woman besides me; it makes me jealous. I have no map; I’m getting lost: does this mean you want to be my lover? She isn’t helpful: I’m not a lesbian; and I’m angry at you for being one because you’ll fall in love with another woman. No map, not even a compass will tell me where I am.

I’m in love with Lily; this is true for years. She’s an old friend who’s responsible for bringing me out as a poet. In our early days, we spend long nights creating art by candlelight. I write many abstract poems about universal love, cosmic agape; these poems are really about my loving Lily. We don’t say this to each other; we can’t know that then. Our love is “platonic” except she has this funny habit. Sometimes when she sits next to me, she rubs her body against mine and purrs. I feel a strange heat rise. I say “strange” because I don’t know then why it’s there. Now that I’m out; the purring ceases.

Before we enter The Great Silence, she tells me my mother is drinking a lot of wine since my letter telling her I’m a lesbian. This is troubling news since my mother is an anti-alcohol fanatic. This is a portent of years of bitter haggling over my being a lesbian. Then my mother stops; the drinking, not the haranguing. It’s painful enough to drive me to drink. I don’t stop for a long time.

Into this situation I bring a wild lover who’s bisexual. The common view at this time is that bisexuals are really people who haven’t made up their minds one way or the other because there are only two ways to be, straight or gay. Then lesbians don’t exist (women aren’t viewed as sexual beings) neither do bisexuals. Diane is a lone amazonic voice that says she has the capacity to love doubly. She has an inner duality of perspective; she thinks everyone, gay and straight, has a point. This equivocation makes me furious since there are lots of points aimed at me because I’m a lesbian.

In the midst of this drama, Merry’s sister Kate goes off to a fundamentalist religious group and returns in an altered state of reality. The girl now lives in the Twilight Zone. She doesn’t speak; she just smiles, mumbles and rocks. Then one night she slams her fork onto her plate and says: I don’t know what you’re talking about with this word lesbian; whatever it is, Jesus will forgive us. Now I’m rocking and mumbling; I’m not smiling; yeah but I might not forgive.

At the table Diane conciliates: if we talk it out, I’m sure we’ll come to an understanding and resolve this problem. I’m not in the mood: I’m a lesbian and I’m tired of getting shit for it; I don’t understand why I’m getting shit

for it; I just want to be left in peace to be a lesbian, and not have to explain it over and over. The only problem is that the straight people at this table need to change their attitudes about lesbians.

After everyone leaves the table, I sit there for a long time. I go to the heart of the matter. I'm a lesbian because I choose to be a lesbian. I'm a lesbian because I love women, because of the love I feel for women.

Deliverance

Pride month is a time of reflection on, celebration of my being a lesbian. This is a 35 year old choice. There are those now who buy the scientific theory that being gay has to do with genes. Perhaps. What I don't like about this theory is that I can hear right underneath it, I am gay and I can't help it because of my genes. Frankly it's actually an aspect of me that I don't want to change, help, justify.

Before gay liberation, gayness is considered a sickness to be cured. The American Psychiatric Association underscores this by listing homosexuality as a sickness. Gay people are subjected to electroshock, aversion therapy and various other forms of torture to achieve the cure. Although APA changes the status and removes us from the list, the damage is already done. If I accept the genes theory, then it's guaranteed they will want to mess around with my DNA (to prevent homosexuality).

Whatever the latest theories are, I believe that my being a lesbian is a choice. Choosing is not easy. It's difficult to represent a choice because then it's considered as something that can be changed. Well-meaning people see this as an opportunity for heaven credits by healing the sick. Or, they think that if they find the right way, they can get me to change. The trick is that I'd have to be willing to change and in this instance, I am not willing.

It's hard to explain why I make such a choice. It has exposed me to shattering losses. I lose most all of my friends when I come out, my family is acutely frantic about it all and they lose me. In the early seventies when somebody beats up a dyke because she's a dyke, the pervasive view is that this is just another risk of being gay such as losing a job, child custody, or housing. I'm outside society. I can't say that I don't care about that, that my feelings aren't hurt by that, that no damage occurs by standing strong against the mainstream.

When people ask why I'm a lesbian, I don't have a better answer now than 35 years ago. People still don't understand any better now than then. The stunning reality of this misunderstanding is that when I say I love women and that I'm in love with women and that there's an incomparable depth of

understanding with women, even now, people's eyes glaze over because we still don't believe that women deserve that depth of love.

In the seventies I have the youthful chutzpah not to care about social inclusion; I take pride in being an outlaw. I challenge all comers: macho men who don't understand how I could possibly enjoy sex without a penis, with reticent queers who don't understand how I could possibly enjoy life without approval, with political activists who don't understand how I could possibly indulge being in love, bar dykes who aren't conscious of the necessity for visibility.

In the bars I have to fight for my place because I'm neither butch nor femme; I stand and fight to make my place as an androgynous bar dyke; yeah I go to the university, what's it to you. Among the university activists I have to be gay and proud when sometimes I'm just plain scared of the risks we take but of course there's no admitting that fear.

A "baby dyke" friend recently recommends reading *Stone Butch Blues*. I go skipping into reading the book. At the end of chapter one, I'm crying. End of chapter 7, I'm crying harder, deeper. I cry tears that I could have cried decades ago. With the crying the wall's mortar melts, bricks break and fall; I am exposed. A wall comes down that has separated me from life. Yes, I am proud; yes, I am equal; yes, I make this choice. Strangely these assertions are the bricks of the wall. When it comes down, I'm surrendered to a simple truth. Being a Lesbian is the complex will of the spirit, the simple logic of the heart: I am a woman, I love myself; I love women. I'm a lesbian because I am content to be a lesbian.



Chase Nascent

for audre lorde

*no one had noticed yet
that the struggle of women
wasn't just the struggle of a white upper class
that the struggles of a white woman
were different
from the struggles of the blacks
that poetry was a method
for deconstructing social myths
a chance to let all our words flow out
from our aching finger tips*

*no one had noticed yet
[as my ex referred to herself
all those years back]
that you were a triple threat:*

*gay
female
black*

*and the lesbians were made invisible
in the women's liberation movement
and the women were made invisible
in the gay liberation movement
and the gays were made invisible
in the black liberation movement*

*and you were left
so aware
of the areas in need of improvement*

*and so
you fought with the words
mightier than a sword
and into each speech
and poem
and book
it was obvious your heart was poured*

*the knowledge you've given me
and all others
to explore known prejudices
and unearth all the others
to work
to give birth
to a new sense of equality
and how that word relates to every
part of humanity*

*and i have your strength now
tattooed into my skin
your words that resonate
all throughout
and all within
a reminder of how far we've come
and how far we have yet to go
a reminder of how much that
if we remain careless
we could lose*

*your wisdom forever etched on me:
"your silence will not protect you."*



Audre Lorde
(1934 – 1992)

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Robin Fre

K. G. and Me, Fre: The story of my love and years with Kay Gardner

The seventies when *Sinister Wisdom* lesbian journal began, I and lesbians across the land were starting a grand adventure, a time of great discovery. I quit college, left my New Jersey-shore home and came out as a feminist lesbian witch. I embraced a new sexuality, a new reality then, one that felt both familiar and significant. I believed then, as I still believe now, in lesbian culture: I have lived it for thirty plus years; it is my ground, my politics and my inspiration. The oldest of three sisters, I recognize and embrace a larger sisterhood, a connection that feels deeper and older than blood.

*“Everything that ever was will be,
Everything that will be has always been.
Changing, changing yet ever the same
Changing, changing, come round again.”*

I loved and lived with Kay Gardner for many years from 1978–2000. We were both practicing witches, honoring the Sabbaths and magic in all we did. We enjoyed bonfires on rocks by the sea. She came into my life as a lesbian “star;” her first album “Mooncircles” having been released a year before. We met at a witch’s Sabbath in the Catskills Mountains where a circle of lesbians lived.

Afterwards we all gathered at Lesbian Central - Whiteport— within a room filled with womyn. Kay, the lesbian “star” seemed unreal. Offstage and earthbound, her presence still was intimidating. I watched her be kind, sign tapes, but generally stay apart. When it got late she asked where she was to sleep. I piped up, “My bed!”

A silence fell over the room. I escorted the “star” up the stairs to my attic loft. She said she remembered hanging feathers and glint of crystals; I remember the curve of her back and the strength of her shoulders. I found out later she was a swimmer. We cuddled that night and talked in the morning, but she had places to go. Years passed while we both closed doors on former relationships.

At a feminist demonstration against the misogynist film “Snuff,” my Catskill lesbian community made a connection with some dykes in Maine who invited us to visit. My friend, the greenelf Greenwind, went with me to

spend the summer of 1978 by the sea. Kay knew those dykes too, for they supported her music and I “ran” into her again. In fact, she knew them very well. Her recording company—Wise Womyn Inc.—moved into their basement in Stonington. Greenwind and I were hired to paint their house; and the inevitable happened. Kay came over to visit. We three had a lovely time sitting in front of the massive stone fireplace.

She invited me to dinner at her new house. Though warned by my hosts that she was a flighty bird, sure she would fly on me, I went boldly on. Now, I am a working-class girl from New Jersey who had never seen a piano, much less a grand one. The little piece she was working on was “Rhapsody.” As I listened to her make music, I fell in love with this gentle, strong womyn and her soothing music.

Summer’s end took her to Boston while I returned to the Catskills. To visit, we had to hitch hike the Massachusetts Turnpike; Kay’s car had been demolished by a friend just before she left Maine. Fall moved on, and my dog, Hecate and I moved into her life.

Kay founded the New England Woman’s Symphony. Womyn’s classical music was offered and loved by womyn who never had a clue that it ever existed. That was one of Kay’s many gifts. She saw potential, in people, in groups and especially in womyn. She was a natural teacher. She saw the potential in me to cook a chicken for the famous conductor Antonia Brico. Many times she saw more potential in me than I had. The night ended with my first migraine and a burnt chicken.

The symphony folded after a year. Kay and I moved back into her four-floor 100-year-old house in Maine. There was an equally old tree off the front porch, and a back porch with a view of ocean and islands to take away the breath. The house needed work, but its potential was extraordinary, and its structure sound; it was built on a giant granite shelf.

Kay made her income touring; she was gone for weeks at a time. I needed something to do, to contribute. Having experience with womyn in group homes, I decided to open “Sea Gnomes Home,” turning our house into a lesbian retreat. Our womyn’s guest house brought in income during the summer when Kay had little work. I ran the house, made enough to pay the taxes, and imported my beloved lesbian community to coastal Maine.

1981: my first thousand dollars in the bank from summer’s income, I bought two tickets to Ireland. Counting on camping we carried all we needed but we realized why Eire is so green. It rains at least once during the day; too wet to be in a tent. This found us staying at inexpensive bed and breakfasts which dot the country. We found wonderful people who gave us rides, who

took us home and fed us Irish staples: porridge and blood pudding sausage, fresh eggs and clotted cream. We were on the trail of Grace O' Malley, the Irish pirate queen who snubbed her nose at Queen Elizabeth and ruled the European coast for decades. Kay had in mind an opera, but Eire had something else in mind.

One day on a western coast, I witnessed a visit from Kay's muse. On a ledge, in the mist of thick fog the sky cleared, and as the fog dissolved I saw an old castle. It was ancient magic within the fog. Now every time I hear Kay's "Castle in the Mist" on "Rainbow Path" I see that castle. Ireland is inherently magic in itself. We steeped ourselves in lore of stone circles, magic groves, and wise ancient oaks. I looked for elves but found none within noble oaks.

Kay and I made a commitment in our first year together to recommit to each other every seven years. Our seventh year was at hand: 1986. We wanted a ceremony this time, and since we were witches we wanted a Wiccan handfasting ceremony with ritual that we created, that meant something special to us.

We invited sister witches for our ceremony in the woods. We wore wild rose and daisy garlands around our heads and jumped over the broomstick in the traditional Pagan bonding ritual. Ritual deepens commitment, just as the company of friends makes promises more intimate and binding.

We promised each other we'd ride out the changes, and support and love each other in any adventures that would come. Mostly, we committed to love for another seven years. It was a quiet seven years, and oodles of fun. I went with Kay everywhere she drove, crisscrossing the country, playing for and teaching lesbians across America, sometimes I even went with her when she flew. While she performed and taught I actively discovered my identity within her celebrity: my quilts sold well.

Kay and I re-committed again seven years later in 1983 with champagne and flowers. Things were changing. Kay's years of empirical research, workshops, and teaching became an incredible book, "Sounding the Inner Landscape," and even more incredible album, "A Rainbow Path." All the while her own body was giving her grief. I was becoming well known for my fabric art and quilts. Our souls were joyous, but our bodies weren't.

I was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis in 1988 at age of 38, in the prime of my life. I was devastated. My life as I knew it gone. Plans, dreams, trips—all disappeared before my eyes. I laid for over a year on the couch, while Kay researched MS.

Our life-lines, once parallel, now diverged. My deteriorating ability to stand, walk, or control my body was hard for me but horrible for others. It

became impossible for me to run Gnomes' Home. I moved into a subsidized apartment and began taking college courses. I had begun taking college courses at home, being wheeled in on my dreaded wheelchair, but now I was a real scholar! My goal became a Bachelor's degree, in anything. Kay became ordained as a Priestess of Isis. She started a school to train other priestesses. She brought the practice of feminine-divine to Bangor, Maine.

In 1999, our twentieth year together, Kay invited me into our woods and gently announced that we would never make it to our twenty-first year. Though I had sensed this coming for years, I was floored. I nodded to her, focused on breathing with pine trees, but never really reacted, or was I in shock?

"We" were dead, I felt dead. Life went on. I knew we were soul mates, and we also knew there no such thing as forever. I cried, crying all the time. I placed her picture on a nearby shelf shrouded in black cloth, focused on the death part of losing my love, life. Who I had been was essentially dead.

I finished up that school year with a cloud around me, ended that semester with an unacceptable, to me, C. The haven of song - womyn with wings, started and directed by Kay, became a hard option. Wings had braved me through many a crisis but was no longer comfortable for me to be in circle with her. I had gotten gratefully through school. By myself I loaded up my van and moved all my things out of Kay's house, a house I had cared for and grown to love. I said goodbye to the town in which I had worked and was still a part.

My love I tucked deep inside. I had grown and changed so much in the years I lived with Kay. I went to Florida and camped at the Pagoda, a lesbian colony. Close to the ocean I sat, as close to sea as I could and asked the endless surf, "Why now?" Though focused inward on my pain, I would sing this song, look up, and the ocean and palms became alive to me.

*Now is the only moment be in the moment,
Breathe in the moment, love in this moment,
Be here now, in this moment.*

At a distance of a thousand miles, I called Kay. She told me she loved another. I was numb but heard it was true in her voice, for I heard that soft sweet love in her voice. There were no tears. I had cried out all I had. I was ready to face whatever. I turned my face towards home but wondered where my home was? For twenty years Kay had been home. Back in my apartment in Orono I focused on graduating; I decided 2000 would be my final year. I

had switched majors from psychology to anthropology as a senior in one, freshman in the other. In the back of my mind I pictured myself moving back to my always-remembered, always-beloved Catskill Mountain lesbian community. Full circle, I had built a life there before, I would again.

On a blustery day in March, I had received word of a death in the Catskill lesbian community; Sarah. I knew I had to go to give my final blessings and comfort my tribe. After the funeral, I stayed on in Woodstock, sleeping on Rainbow's couch, digging a garden in the rocky soil outside her door. Hands in dirt grounded me. Already, I saw my new native friend walking in beauty. I closely listened to the stream running across the back yard; streams have always given me good council. Before I went back to Maine, I applied for Section 8 housing in Woodstock.

A year later when I was told an apartment in Woodstock was waiting, time went into fast motion. Women came to pack up my stuff, men came to load. My life in a swirl, I never even told Kay I was leaving.

We never spoke again. Six days after I moved in to Woodstock, Sofia called. Kay was dead, actually physically dead. Suddenly my love, my life-mate was gone of a heart attack at age 62. What a shock! What a tragedy. Even though I was no longer her spouse, I loved her deeply.

I drove back of course, hardly aware of the long drive. I still had the key to my old apartment, now empty and lifeless. Days filled with reunions of old friends and family who showed up en masse for the funeral. Kay, loved by so many, was honored and testimonies abounded. She had touched so many lives. Voices sang softly:

*My spirit lives on in the mountain,
My spirit reaches towards the sky,
My spirit lives on in the mountains,
I am not gone I am all around.*

2006, now, I still see myself at Kay's funeral. I am the sobbing ex-lover aboard the three-wheel electric scooter. I am sobbing, crying for my loss, crying for the silencing of her music, her words of deep wisdom. I cry with a sudden desperate loneliness; I always believed we would love again. This crying was *deja vu*, of course. I had done this, the grieving, the cloth over her picture, the pounding of my chest and sleepless nights. Finding myself in Acadia Mental Hospital, I sobbed for six days.

I miss her, I still cry, but with relief for her. Her body had been a distraction, a trial. Isis has given her wings; now she is truly flying.

The voices continue stronger:

*Oh mighty Isis! Spread your wings beneath us,
Lift us safely to the sky.*

*Oh mighty Isis! Wrap your wings around us,
And take us safely home again.*



Photo of Kay Gardner (1941 – 2002) © 2006 JEB (Joan E. Biren)

Kay Gardner, born February 8, 1941, musician, composer, lesbian, and pioneer in Women's and healing music. Since 1970, she made this her life and her career. A friend, a lover, a mentor and mother she sailed through my life for 25 years.

She married early and had two daughters. She began composing music at age four. She started entertaining in coffee houses in the late 60s playing folk songs with her guitar. She studied music at the University of Michigan; received her bachelors degree from SUNY Stonybrook. Here she connected with Alix Dobkin, came out as Lesbian Feminist, and co-founded the openly lesbian band, "Lavender Jane Loves Women." Her first solo album "Mooncircles" startled the lesbian community by having one side without words. Kay promoted, produced, and marketed Women's Music as Urana records, Even Keel and Wise Women Enterprises.

In the late seventies, Kay pursued her lifetime dream of conducting a symphony orchestra, where women musicians played pieces by women composers. Kay encouraged the inclusion of classical music within the women's music festival circuit. In the eighties, she focused on the ancient art of healing with music. She wrote *Sounding the Inner Landscape—Music as Medicine*. Then she created "A Rainbow Path," seven compositions, each focusing on a different chakra.

Kay's body of work includes musical compositions, recordings (www.ladyslipper.org), articles, and a book. She collaborated with various artists; received numerous awards including an honorary doctorate from the University of Maine at Orono. Kay lived in Stonington, Maine for twenty years. She became an important part of that coastal town by donating her time, her energy, and her expertise. She conducted and led the community band for the Fourth of July parade for many years.

She started the Bud Carter scholarship fund, named after a musician who died too early. She believed everyone had music inside waiting for a chance to be set free. All that music needed was some support and encouragement. Kay co-founded a weekly radio show on WERU focusing on women's music: "Women's Windows." In the early nineties, Kay co-founded "Woman with Wings," a sacred singing circle of women's voices. When she became the Unitarian Universalist's music director, Wiccan rituals became part of the Sunday services. The congregation continues to honor Kay.

Kay Gardner was a gifted, innovative thinker, a revolutionary in a purely womanly way. An important part of the second wave of feminism, she provided music that fueled a generation of new thinkers. She was a composer, partner, mother, grandmother, priestess, teacher, visionary, and an exciting performer. She saw herself planting seeds of music and healing throughout the land. She is missed and mourned by all who knew her.

The songs throughout this essay were written by the members of the all womyn ensemble "Women with Wings." Their CD was produced by Kay and released as "Hand to Hand Heart to Heart."

And a lone voice begins:

*A womyn in the tribe has died.
A womyn in the tribe has died;
Each womyn comforts each womyn
Comforts each womyn each,
A womyn in the tribe has died.
A womyn in the tribe has died.*

Another voice begins:

*Knowing love my heart is open to the sky,
 Knowing love my heart is open to the sky,
 Knowing love my heart is open to the sky,
 Knowing love my heart is open.*

Songs printed with permission from the songwriters.

<i>"Everything that ever was"</i>	Debbie Christo c.2002
<i>"Now is the only moment"</i>	Debbie Christo c.2002
<i>"My spirit lives on"</i>	Linda Kohler c. 1996
<i>"Oh Mighty Isis!"</i>	Linda Kohler c. 1998
<i>"A Womyn in the Tribe has Died"</i>	Robin Fre c. 2002
<i>"Knowing love"</i>	Sofia P. Wilder c. 2002

Chants: *"Hand to hand and heart to heart"* www.ladyslipper.org.

Chrystos

**Barbara Cameron Nation Shield
(1954 – 2002)**



Photo © 2006 JEB (Joan E. Biren)

Barbara Cameron Nation Shield was one of the most important people in my life. She understood exactly what I was talking about. We knew each other for thirty years. We had a lot of discussions that contributed to my political development, and to giving me a sense of dignity about my place in the world, and my right to be in that place. A lot of who I am is a result of that friendship. All of the pride in myself came from her and I continue to miss her most profoundly, especially her laugh, and she laughed at some really painful and difficult moments which taught me another way to survive them too.

Kelly Cogswell

Barbara Cameron

Born May 22, 1954 in Fort Yates, North Dakota, Barbara Cameron was raised on the Standing Rock Reservation by her grandparents. According to her partner, Lynda Boyd, at age nine she read an article about San Francisco and told her grandmother that one day she would live there “and save the world, too.” She did her best to fulfill her promise.

After two years in Santa Fe, New Mexico, where she attended the American Indian Art Institute, majoring in photography and film after high school, she moved to San Francisco. There, in 1975, just a few years after the Stonewall riots in New York, she co-founded Gay American Indians with activist Randy Burns.

At the time, “It was just about impossible to stand up and say who you were. If you had a job you’d get fired. Your family might disown you. You certainly would be ridiculed,” recalled Maurice Kenny in “Changing Ones: Third and Fourth Genders in Native North America.”

Cameron’s refusal to be queer in one corner of her life, and Native in another, is as radical and transformative now, as it was then. Being both gay and Native American put Cameron in conflict almost everywhere she was. In “Gee, You Don’t Seem Like an Indian From the Reservation,” Cameron wrote, “We not only must struggle with the racism and homophobia of straight white America, but must often struggle with the homophobia that exists within our third-world communities.”

Even in gay communities of color she sometimes felt on the outside as a Native American. “Racism among third world people is an area that needs to be discussed and dealt with honestly,” she wrote. “We form alliances loosely based on the fact that we have a common oppressor, yet we do not have a commitment to talk about our own fears and misconceptions about each other.”

Cameron, committed to breaking the silence, still managed to be “very respectful of other people even when she disagreed with them,” as Chrystos remembered. That gracefulness in the face of disagreement made her a successful organizer and bridge-builder on a number of fronts, from San Francisco’s Lesbian Gay Freedom Day Parade and Celebration to Jesse Jackson’s Rainbow Coalition, on whose behalf she was a delegate to the 1988 Democratic National Convention.

She was mayoral appointee to the San Francisco Human Rights Commission and the Commission on the Status of Women, and supported the efforts of women working to improve life in Nicaragua, as well as the international indigenous AIDS network.

Barbara Cameron died at home in San Francisco on February 12, 2002, and was brought to her final rest at Wakpala, South Dakota, on Standing Rock. She is survived by Linda Boyd, her partner of 20 years, their son, Rhys, and a large network of family and friends. A book of her writings and photos is in progress.

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Ida VSW Red

Sister Mothertongue

[Mothertongue Feminist Theater Collective is also celebrating its 30th anniversary this year.]

*Women, let me tell you
I hadn't known sisterhood
'til I was licked by Mothertongue
folded into her group hug
embroiled in her endless process
seared by her creative fires
scared shitless just offstage
awed by audience intensity
bathed in laughter, in applause.
I'd never had a sister, you see
until sister Mothertongue grabbed ahold of me!*

*First performance: first all-woman space
first all-woman show, first pro-woman theme
I'd ever heard. My excitement soared.
Our lives, drama? Our lives, important?
Our lives worth sharing, celebrating
showcasing, taking on the road?
This, a life-saving revelation for me.*

And the collective keeps giving credit, expanding the boundaries, making space for us all, time for the endless check-in of our feelings before the recounting of our pain and the process of learning how to present ourselves fairly, making room for our differences, dredging up our herstory, soliciting from other women the perspectives we lack.

Like birth sisters, we argue and wound each other — sometimes from deeply held polar positions or to get new points of view on the floor, some-

times out of pure cantankerousness, competition (though we don't like to admit it), or out of old scarcity fears, inadequacy fears. But to outside threats, we'd defend each other to the death. Mostly we like and love each other and find plenty of room for our large selves.

*We're lovers of women, justice, life — this life
this pain, this process, this joy we share.*

*Women, I didn't know sisterhood
until I met up with sister Mothertongue!*

Ida VSW Red

A Mothertongue writer & performer, 1976-1996



Weisbaden Labyrinth. Photo by Ina Auerbach.

Renate Stendhal

Remembering 1000 Women: The Women's Memorial Labyrinth in Germany

In the past two decades, labyrinth movements have been spreading on both sides of the Atlantic. Labyrinths in different sizes and shapes — the most famous classical example can be seen at the Cathedral of Chartres — have been rediscovered everywhere across the world, in temples, churches and in the open air. New labyrinths are sprouting in schools, parks, gardens and hospitals as inspirational tools for meditation, meditative walking, healing and peace. Most of them are initiated by women, peace activists and feminist activists like singer/songwriter Margie Adams in the USA, and church women like Lauren Artress. Most labyrinth walkers are women who see the labyrinth — as one woman put it — as an alternative to “the short traditional paths from A to B, the easy answer, prejudice and standard solutions.” The form is not to be confounded with the maze. The classic labyrinth, set in stone, mosaic, or simply cut into the grass, conveys openness and clarity. It was designed according to geometrical-cosmic laws with a path that leads from the entrance inward to the center and simply winds back outwards to the exit. The long, elegant curves with their sudden turns are a beautiful symbol of life's rhythms and changes. It takes time to complete the path — time for surprises, insights and emotions to happen along the way.

I have walked a number of labyrinths in different countries and been moved in different ways by the experience. Recently in Germany, I walked an altogether different labyrinth. Its form is a woman-shaped variation of the original, designed by a Swiss artist, feminist and political activist, Agnes Barmettler, together with Rosmarie Schmid, the Swiss founder of the International Labyrinth Project. Their Zurich labyrinth, part of an initiative to create public spaces for women, was adopted by a German organizer of unusual women's projects, Dagmar v. Garnier, and turned into a traveling labyrinth dedicated to the memory and heritage of women.

In Dagmar v. Garnier's “Frauen-Gedenk-Labyrinth” (Women's Memorial Labyrinth), the spiraling path is laid out in flat, square stones — 1000 of them, to be exact. Each one is to become a memorial stone, with the name and life dates of one important woman of the past and a brief description or quote from her work. The name of her patroness — the woman who

has sponsored the stone — is inscribed below (sometimes several women have grouped together to come up with the money for the sponsorship).

The idea of 1000 great women honored and remembered in this way derives directly from an American work of art — Judy Chicago’s 1979 “Dinner Party.” This major installation that “set the table” for 1000-some women of historical importance, profoundly moved and inspired v. Garnier. Dagmar v. Garnier is a Frankfurt citizen, a dancer and folklore dance expert with her own folklore ensembles. After lobbying intensely and quite in vain to bring the Dinner Party to a German Museum, she came up with the first of her grand visions. She rented the Frankfurt Opera for a rousing ball night — “Das Fest der 1000 Frauen” (The Celebration of 1000 Women) — and invited women from all over Europe and beyond. Each woman was supposed to represent one of the 1000 great ancestresses honored by “The Dinner Party” and to embody “her” woman with costume and regalia at the ball.

I came from Paris to represent The Amazon, dressed in a white tuxedo, one naked breast painted with a shiny red snake. Judy Chicago came from the States, dressed as Judy Chicago. The event was a huge success and “The Dinner Party” finally made it into a Frankfurt museum. Meanwhile its offspring, the Women’s Memorial Labyrinth, has grown into a vast grassroots movement. V. Garnier has visited over a dozen German cities by now, setting up the alluring stone spirals at prominent sites, each time involving local schools, universities, adult education programs, libraries, and city parliaments. Without any grants, any support from state or church, simply through the voluntary effort of women from all walks of life, the traveling labyrinth has involved thousands of women in an extraordinary network of activism.

This year in May, at the twenty-year anniversary of the opera ball, the city of Wiesbaden was chosen as the site for the labyrinth. Wiesbaden is an ancient spa town half an hour northwest of Frankfurt. In the old center, not far from the “Kochbrunnen” (the Cooking Well) that spouts boiling mineral water even today, the stone spirals were laid out in a beautiful town park in front of the baroque Staatstheater (the town theater and opera house), across from a pond. White tents accommodated food stands for the wanderers, sitting areas for lectures and presentations, and shelter from the occasional spring rain. A small stand offered information materials, books and postcards. At night, guarded by women, the spiral path was lit by a thousand candles (kept in three wooden boxes at the periphery.) For the entire month of May, commemorative labyrinth walks, concerts, art shows, performances, film presentations, political gatherings and historical lectures marked the memorial labyrinth as a “place of learning.” At least one infor-

mative or celebratory event was scheduled for each day of the month. In the course of one weekend, for example, audiences could take part in a discussion about Hannah Arendt, hear about the famous labyrinth in Chartres, celebrate the 20th anniversary of Simone de Beauvoir's death, get acquainted with the numerous Jewish women remembered in the labyrinth, learn about Islamic women and their mystical pioneer poet Rabi'a Al-Adawiyya (713-801), reflect about "The Role of Men in Matriarchal Cultures," or join v. Garnier in another attempt to bring women's art to a German Museum: in this case Judy Chicago's "Birth Project" (1980-85).

The high point of the anniversary was a special 3-day "Fest-Kongress zur Geschichte bedeutender Frauen" (Celebratory Congress for the History of Eminent Women") that marked the half-time of completion: Some memorial 500 stones had been sponsored and dedicated by women who were now invited to congregate, exchange their knowledge, enjoy art exhibitions and presentations, a ceremonial labyrinth walk and another great ball. For the occasion, v. Garnier had rented the famous Wiesbaden Kurhaus (House of Cures) with its vast colonnades and baroque ballroom. Once again, the 500 patronesses were called upon to appear in costume in order to symbolically stand in for their chosen woman, or to commemorate their original Frankfurt Opera appearance.

I went to Wiesbaden as the sponsor for Gertrude Stein whom I consider my earliest muse. Should I dress as Gertie? In a burlap skirt and sandals, a flowery blouse and a funny little hat? I also came for the anniversary of my own creative involvement with the Women's Movement in Europe. I had co-authored the first feminist multimedia show, "In the Beginning...of the End — A Voay of Women Becoming," which was to be shown as part of the Fest Kongress. Back in the eighties, I had repeatedly read at Dagmar v. Garnier's Frankfurt Salon and had collaborated with her on consciousness raising workshops and dance rituals. In order to accommodate my past and present roles through my costume choice I decided on a black tuxedo with a red twine spiral as a symbolic Amazon reminder. I gave a presentation on Stein, then carried my freshly engraved stone through the labyrinth to its definitive spot while the attending women stood in a circle around the outer rim, "holding the space." The beautifully engraved memorial stone shows Stein's motto exactly the way she used it on her letter paper: "A rose is a rose is a rose is a rose" written in a circle with a small rose in the center.

For me, as for many women I talked to, walking the Women's Memorial Labyrinth was a particularly touching experience: walking and simultaneously reading the stones was like spinning through a vast network of memo-

ries, reminders, reminiscences from one's own past. A witty friend of mine, whom I had lost track of a long time ago, made me smile when I came upon the stone she had sponsored for "The Eternal Fool." There were other "archetypal" designations — for example "The Wise Old One," "Witches," or "The 13th Fairy." The alphabetic order of the stones follows the women by their first names, not their last or family names which — as tends to be the case with women — are subject to change. Coincidentally, the alphabet made neighbors out of Teresa von Avila and Tina Turner, Romy Schneider and Rosa Luxemburg, and created the unlikely trio Margaret Mead, Margaret Mitchell and Margaret Sanger. Ice princess Sonia Henie was rubbing shoulders with Nazi resistant fighter Sophie Scholl. Virginia Woolf and Vita Sackville-West were as closely united here as Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas in their grave on Pere Lachaise. Within a few steps around the path, I passed Isadora Duncan, science fiction author James Tiptree (alias Alice Sheldon), sociologist and Peace Nobel Prize winner Jane Addams, writer Jane Austin, Chimpanzee expert Jane Goodall, Jeanne d'Arc, Jenny Marx (wife of Karl), and 17th century Mexican poet Sor Juana de la Cruz, before arriving in the present with tree activist Julia Hill. Every turn of this "Wanderschaft" through the history of women and the women of history holds similar serendipities and dizzying associations.

I was surprised to discover that some members of my past feminist circle had died and that a few others had made their way into the labyrinth while they were very much alive. Among the stones dedicated to living women were a number of writers, teachers and political activists who had clearly created one of those labyrinthian turning points in the lives of the women who had chosen to honor them. With a certain sadness I noticed that had I wanted to honor a personal friend of mine, the late artist Meret Oppenheim, I would have been too late. In fact, many stars from my private Hall of Fame and Preference had already been chosen by others, writers Karen Blixen (alias Isak Dinesen), Else Lasker-Schüler, Sappho, Lou Andreas Salome, anthropologist Marija Gimbutas, mystic Mechthild von Magdeburg, artists Niki de St. Phalle and Frida Kahlo, or, in a charming group dedication, "The Women of the Left Bank." Small objects of veneration — shells, flowers, artifacts were carried into the labyrinth and deposited on or next to the stones. As all the women in their fantastical costumes gathered to ritually walk the labyrinth, an unknown patroness handed me a smooth, shiny, round pebble to decorate the Gertrude Stein stone.

It was a spectacular sight to see the almost 500 women gather for the ceremonial labyrinth walk, many of them in elaborate historic and artisti-

cally inventive costumes. The Swiss initiators of the International Labyrinth Movement, crones Agnes Barmettler and Rosmarie Schmid, spoke about the spiritual power and political relevance of women remembering women and our “herstory” in this gathering. Then the long spiral set into motion, accompanied, from the top of one of the white tents, by Swiss composer Francisca Gohl and her ensemble. Gohl had composed a beautiful, haunting melody in a 7 by 4 walking-and-swaying rhythm, called Tapuat (Labyrinth) — the Hopi Indian word for source, origin, cradle, mother and child. Sung and accompanied by flutes and drums, it was the perfect support for the long, slow procession. A number of women carried their newly consecrated stones into the labyrinth with them. The young patroness for Meret Oppenheim brought with her her own beautiful copy of the “surrealist” object *par excellence*, Meret Oppenheim’s “Dèjeuner en fourrure” — the fur-lined teacup and saucer.

Dagmar v. Garnier, the architect and choreographer of the event, had tried to figure out the mathematics of the walk, determined to find a walking order that would allow all of the patronesses to stand next to their stone at the very moment the music stopped. The music stopped several times, to the confusion of everyone, but no doubt a few of the 500 women had arrived at their commemorative stone. Nevertheless, I am sure the Goddesses present in the Women’s Memorial Labyrinth — The Wise Old One, The 13th Fairy, The Eternal Fool, Demeter, Diana, Freya, Sheila na Gig, etc. — would have smiled tenderly on behalf of the organizer’s passion.

Note:

The list of names with brief personal explanations by the patronesses can be accessed online under www.frauen-gedenk-labyrinth.de, or at <http://www.fest-der-2000-frauen.de/>.

Women who would like to sponsor a labyrinth stone — at the cost of 1,000. Euro — can contact: Kunst- und Kulturverein Das Erbe der Frauen e.V. (Dagmar v. Garnier, Schneckenhofstr. 33, 60596 Frankfurt, Germany.

Diann Bowoman

In Memory of Marnee Kennedy ~ Fall 2000

Marnee Lee Kennedy was a talented, multi-faceted womyn who felt life in a wide range of strong emotions — boundless joys, deep fears, passionate loves, cutting anger and determined stubbornness in the face of adversity. She was a caring and patient mentor and a devoted friend to many of us over a twenty-year period. Marnee was a loving partner, best friend and sister activist with me for nearly two decades before we separated a couple years before her death. She was an attentive parent and a strong role model for my birth son, Marc during those twenty years.

I mourned her loss greatly when we separated and again when she died. I needed something of Marnee in the world; I couldn't stand to have nothing left of this unique lesbian but my memories and a small collection of her artwork.

Marnee Kennedy knew a lot about people and the world from avid reading and quiet observation. She loved being close to nature and worked to educate about and stop environmental abuses. Marnee believed in the power of an individual voice to create positive change. She frequently raised hers, espousing radical ideas well ahead of any cultural acknowledgement or approval. She initiated serious discussions with strangers and friends alike: actively listening one-on-one to women's thoughts, feelings and experiences; educating and sometimes preaching. In this way she often eased pain or opened doors no one else realized existed.

Marnee would never call herself an artist, claiming all her creative efforts just copied nature or someone else's work. But despite that stubborn refusal, her whole life and the lives of her family and friends overflowed with her arts and her creative abilities.

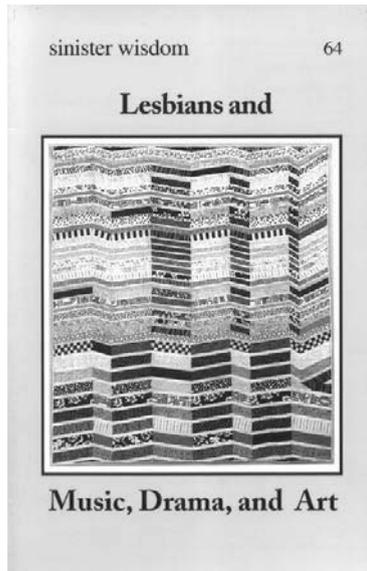
In spite of several disabilities, Marnee's mind and hands were always busy. Before we met she had written poetry and songs, as well as compiling extensive research for a book which was never completed. She tooled leather, drew detailed layouts which she silk-screened onto tee shirts, gardened, crafted using offerings from nature, cooked, and refinished furniture. Marnee enjoyed music, especially folk songs & ballads, accompanying herself and others skillfully on the acoustic guitar. She undertook carpentry projects of all sizes, designing and building: practical items for use around our home; an intricate scale model of our dream log home; a garden shed and a stacked wood cabin that we lived in for a couple of years. She remodeled our living

room and built a porch onto our last home. Marnee experimented in numerous mediums, like clay, paper mache, wood-carving, quilting and other needle crafts. She was always trying something new.

Marnee's most striking creations were the faces she brought to life on paper and on tee shirts. With charcoals and pencils she brought females, unknown & famous, living & dead, right into the room with us. Using her own pointalist technique, Marnee developed a series of portraits entitled "A Living Herstory Series," images of lesbian and women activists and 'firsts.'

The idea of "What I Do Is Art" grew from years of watching Marnee's constant need to work with her hands, using and enjoying many of the things she brought to the world, and observing the pleasure and satisfaction her creation gave her. Yet I heard her frequent denial of being an artist. Marnee felt she wasn't really an artist because she wasn't formally trained, but self-taught, and she seldom sold or made money from her works.

Marnee was a private womyn. She wouldn't want a lot of fanfare or public attention. So "What I Do Is Art" was born. A small group of women gather in a quiet & beautiful natural rural setting at Degrees of Freedom Retreat Center in northeastern Ohio, each having seven days & privacy in which to practice our art. Evenings are spent sharing meals, ideas, feelings AND validating each other's creative work & the world's need of our self-expression.



Lilith Rogers

Martha Courtot



Martha Courtot (1941 – 2000)
Photo by Tee Corinne

Back in 1983, when I first moved to Sonoma County, California I was introduced to the wonderful poet, Martha Courtot, by a mutual friend—Ida Red, in fact. I immediately was fascinated by her—her gift with words, her deep intellect, her beauty, her spirituality, her laugh. It wasn't long before we were lovers and, as you can tell by the poems below, we had a very passionate connection.

Our affair only lasted three years but it was a wonderful, amazing three years and led to so much growth for me. And, although we were no longer lovers, we had a strong friendship that lasted until her much too early death in the spring of 2000.

Martha was the embodiment of *Sinister Wisdom* and we were blessed to have her in our community.

Martha was a deeply spiritual woman, a seeker of truth her whole life, a rebel who could never be silenced, contained, or tamed. She was fierce in her mothering, living and loving. I miss her still.

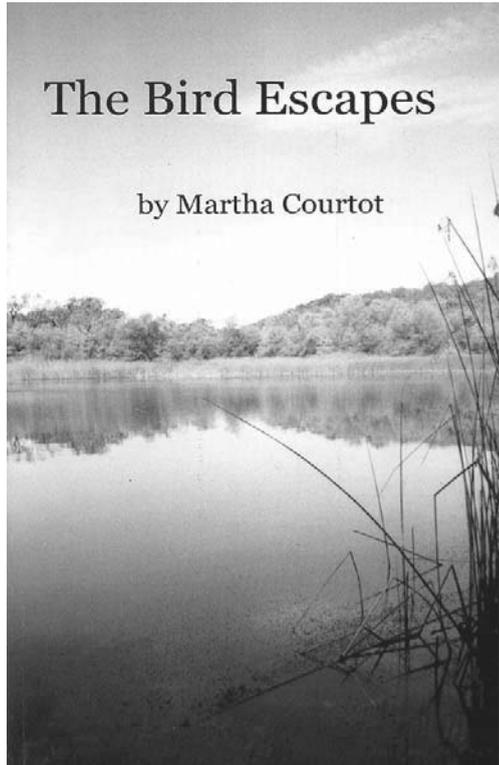
Lilith Rogers

Hills

*My lover, like the hills here,
 is big and round and rich.
 (I do not come from these hills. I come from plains—
 flat, dull coastal plains.)
 When I see these hills
 I think of my lover—
 of her belly—
 round and creased
 as they are.
 I see the folds in the hillside
 and I think of the deep furrows
 the babies growing
 so long ago
 inside my lover's great belly
 have etched forever into her sweet flesh.
 (I do not come from hills or people who love flesh.
 I come from that place of flatness, that place
 of sterile sadness.)
 These hills here
 look so smooth and soft.
 I long to embrace them
 to bury my face in them
 as I bury my face in my lover's smooth skin.
 "You are so soft,"
 I whisper to her then—
 marveling, marveling
 at her fragrant, succulent softness
 enveloping me, enfolding me
 extending all my sensitivities
 well beyond their usual limitations.
 (I was not raised in this third dimension. I was
 not raised to relish such fecundity.)
 Sometimes when I 'm driving in these hills
 I laugh.
 They are so bold and jolly, these hills here.
 I laugh at their boldness,
 I laugh at their colors—
 deep green, sharp gold, furry brown
 as the season tells them*

*as they tell the seasons.
I like them solid and firm against an ocean sky
I like them shadowy under a gray fog
confused in a winter rain.
I love them in full moonlight.
Driving in these hills
my lover makes me laugh, too.
“You,” I sing to her,
“You lover you.
Like one of these great hills here
you spread yourself before me
you roll yourself under me.
I loved you before I even saw you
loved you first when I saw these hills—
these hills you live in
these hills we live together in now.”
(Surely once, long ago, I must have come
from these hills, too.)*

April, 1984



Lilith Rogers

Appearances Can Be Deceiving

1

*What do you see
 when you look at us—
 a dumpy woman with a mustache
 in rumpled clothes and purple sneakers
 sitting across from a brown-eyed
 freckled skinned, fat lady?
 Are our hands resting near one another
 on the worn Formica table top?
 Are we talking quietly
 or perhaps just sitting silent?
 Do you imagine
 we are trading recipes, perhaps,
 or childrearing tips?
 Or—that we are both so dull
 that we have nothing at all to say
 and so sit patiently
 waiting for our meal?
 What do you see when you look
 at us?
 If you could truly see
 you would find two women who—
 until now—
 had each never met another person
 as passionate as herself.
 Though each has tried
 many partners of both sexes
 neither has found
 another
 willing to fly as high into pleasure
 plunge as deeply into desire
 as she herself just KNEW
 there was to go.
 And now—
 they have met.
 They have met and recognized
 one another.
 They have met—
 and met*

*and each time they come together
they meet once more
on a further plane
a higher passion
a deeper desire.*

2

*What do you think
as you watch us
eating our large breakfasts
with such obvious appetites?
Do you say to yourself,
“What a shame
if only they ate sensibly
they could lose weight,
could even become attractive.
Perhaps, too, if they did something
about their hair
the fat one could easily cover
that little bit of gray
she has in hers
the other’s is so straight
so hopelessly unstylish.
And their clothes—of course.
And why not a bit of make-up
to emphasize
what few good features
they DO have?”
What do you think as you watch us?
If you could REALLY see,
you would discover two women
who think one another
the MOST beautiful lover
either has ever seen—
two women who spend
countless happy hours
touching, petting, gazing at
cherished features—
eyes and necks and breasts
and ripply bellies
arms and thighs and hands—
yes those hands
again lying quite still*

*have only recently been so busy
touching, squeezing and stroking
all of that soft, warm flesh
which you so casually despise.
Those four hands
have just been kissed, licked, bitten
and sung to.
Those plain, aging, unadorned hands are—
to these two women—
incredibly delicate,
wonderfully sensitive caressers
of one another's most intimate vitalities.*

3

*If you could really SEE
the couple at the next table
you would find two women
exhausted—temporarily—
from pleasure
famished from orgasms
eating their very late breakfasts
with the heightened appetites
that come
when ALL other appetites
have been sated—
at last!*

September, 1985

Kirsten Hearn

Tribute to Tina Grigg (aka Tina Clare) (August 24, 1961 to June 9, 2001)

The Ethics Girl with a Brain the Size of a Planet

“What do you do when a dear friend decides to die? You are shocked, sad, you cry and there is a terrible sense of loss. “She found the ultimate pain relief” said a participant at Tina Grigg’s memorial celebration, on 14th July 2001. So, I think, in the end she made her choice, she found her calm release. But it doesn’t make the pain of losing her any easier.

In the hours after I heard the news, I wandered the olive groves (I was in Spain at the time), at first desolate, then angry and then just plain sad. Why did she do it when her chosen family loved her so much, her partner Val was always with her, in mind if not always in body? Could we have done anything different? Had we gone round when she didn’t answer the phone that last Friday, would she still be alive today? Maybe, but would she just have put off the time, till she found another opportunity? Who knows?

Friends were quick to reassure us of their admiration of our support for Tina, “a real and tangible living demonstration of how non-biological families can really be there for each other,” said one. We had chosen each other, for better or for worse, in cloudy times and in sunshine — we gave her all the love we could, but it was not enough. “And they call it ‘pretend,’” I raged to a hairy heterosexual man, the nearest human at the time as I paced the peaceful Andalusian orchard.

Born in Essex into a working-class Catholic family originally from the north of Ireland, convent educated Tina was a precocious child, a voracious reader and a rebel from the beginning. Armed with an English Lit degree from Bristol University, she entered personnel management, lectured on employment law, jointly edited “Croner’s Reference Book for Employers” before turning her back on the establishment to fulfil her rebellious tendencies, as an activist for women’s, lesbian, peace and green campaigns. Possessing a clear and beautiful soprano voice, Tina sang her way through life, including a spell as a “top” in the London Feminist Choir, (The pre Madonnas), and the disabled dyke acoustic group, The Tokens.

She was brilliant, engaging and had a wicked sense of humour and impeccable politics on every issue, arising out of her strong and deeply felt sense of ethics and social justice. When well, she was a powerful advocate

and support to her friends. I, for one, could not have managed to live independently during a time of great stress for me, had Tina not been there in the background, organising, helping and making sure the practicalities of my living alone as a blind person were sorted.

In the late eighties, she had the first of a number of psychotic breakdowns, culminating in her being “binned.” Even then, she led the other “inmates” to revolt, encouraging them to drink their flower water as soon as the nil by mouth notice went up above their beds, the warning signs that this day was to be an ETC day.

Over the years, Tina was to have a number of other breakdowns, between long bouts of deep depression and months, even years, of relative stability. During such times, she turned to writing poetry and found an eloquent and vibrant voice, keenly sketching out her life as a mental health system survivor, a cat lover, lesbian and tree lover. Her “mistressery” of language, brittle sensitivity and subtle wit were also evident in the thoughtful book reviews she penned for *Boadicea*.

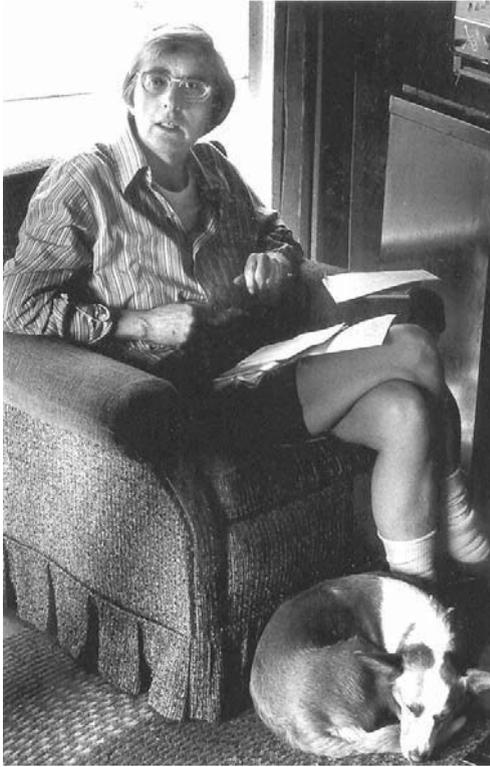
And now this extraordinary woman is gone. I shall never hear that lovely voice rising in joyous song or feel her tugging at my arm, eager to show me yet another damp and slimy but to her, beautiful tree. But she has left me with such gifts — a true appreciation of the importance of chosen family in a homophobic and hostile world, a love of green spaces, the pleasure of playing my tongue over a chilled piece of Green And Black organic dark chocolate and the ever growing sense that I am well and truly alive and am damn well gonna live life to the full, because I’m doing it for her as well as for me.

Tina is survived by her partner of eight years, Val Stein and her two radiator cats Puffin and Luna who have reverted to the wild, in their new home with Marina in Wales.

(July 2001, for *Boadicea*, London-based disabled women’s newsletter)

Cathy Cade

Elizabeth Freeman (1919 — 2006)



This photo of Elizabeth with her beloved dog is how I most remember her.
Photo by Cathy Cade 1975

I first met Elizabeth Freeman at her home in Wolf Creek, Oregon when I was visiting friends living nearby at “Women Share,” lesbian land outside of Grants Pass. I was drawn to what I called Elizabeth’s New England women’s intellect, for she reminded me of my grandparents’ widow friends we used to visit in the summers when I was a child. These were smart, vibrant women, forever running to the next room to bring back the latest fabulous book they were reading. That was Elizabeth, but she was no widow. At 56, a former WAC during WW II and a retired high school teacher and counselor, in addition to books, she was excited by her new lesbian community

(which a bit later would include her lover Elana/Elaine Mikels) and her beloved nephew Carl who lived across the road.

I was 33, had come out as a lesbian feminist four years earlier as part of the women's movement, and was equally excited by the growth of lesbian communities. From the very first there were other sources of special energy between us. Though I was happy to be wearing my liberating jeans, tee shirts, and, yes, the flannel shirts and hiking boots of my generation, her soft butch intense attention thrilled my femme heart.

I think too there was a kind of inter-generational excitement flowing between us as I told her of my activism and showed her my photographs; as she reported on her work with the Older Women's Network and Oregon Women's Land Trust. Now, at 64, I am beginning to have some of these exciting inter-generational relationships with younger appreciative lesbians — that are not without butch-femme undercurrents.

I returned to Wolf Creek in 1977 for the Older Women's Network workshop held at Elizabeth's. I was newly pregnant by donor insemination. What a surprise this young generation of lesbians must have been to her.

Like fairy godmothers Elizabeth and Elana arrived at my house shortly after my son was born, bringing with them Billie from Woman Share to help care for me. I named my son Carl, in part after Elizabeth's gay nephew, Carl Wittman, who I'd known in the South through our civil rights work. At a time when many lesbians questioned giving attention to boy children, Elizabeth's demonstrated love for her Carl was sustaining.

I visited Elizabeth once after she moved with Carl and Allan Troxler to Durham, North Carolina. By this time Elizabeth had gone beyond the avid reading of my New England widows and was excited about her publishing company "Crone's Own Press," which was publishing writings of old lesbians. She also co-funded a housing co-op for women, supported the Self-help Credit Union and demonstrated for peace, gay rights and the environment. (This August I will return to Durham for my first national gathering of Old Lesbians Organizing for Change.)

I love you Elizabeth. We knew we loved each other then, for our faces would light up in each other's company, but in those days I'm not so sure we said "I love you" out loud.

Marge Nelson

Remembering Elizabeth Freeman

I think about the old dyke movement as a mighty river with tributaries flowing into it from all over the country and beyond; grass roots organizing at kitchen tables, bedrooms, coffee houses and computers every where. So although it's not accurate to designate one person as the leader of all this, I want us to remember and honor Elizabeth Freeman who with her partner, Elana Mikels was dreaming and creating this powerful vision over thirty years ago.

In March 1977, in Volume I #1 of a publication they named *Our Own*, Elizabeth put out her dream of old women living together in communities. Especially concerned with women who were alone and isolated, she imagined a network of these communities: the Older Women's Network, or OWN. Her brainchild was a directory of members that would encourage communication around the country. Over the next years, OWN mushroomed to the midwest and the east; it included OWL (Older Women's Land), Options for Women over Forty at the Women's Building in San Francisco and morphed into the Old Lesbians Organizing Committee, and into a national organization, OLOC: Old Lesbians Organizing for Change.

I met Elizabeth when Polly Taylor and I parked our RV in her driveway on Coyote Creek Road in Wolf Creek, Oregon, August 1977. She and Elana were so welcoming of us, so encouraging of our dreams. We had left Buffalo, New York and were touring the country seeking the older women's movement. And here it was. After three weeks, we drove with them down to Woman Hill in Napa for a retreat of OWN that would bring together country and urban dykes. Elizabeth and I stayed in touch over the years, but I felt sad when she left the west coast.

In the summer of 1989, the Old Lesbians Organizing Committee met at a national conference at San Francisco State University. Elizabeth was here and stayed with me. A group of us demanded that the organization focus on ageism, racism and other issues pertinent to old dykes. That was when we changed our name to suit our more activist and political ambitions. Since then, the national organization has declared ageism as our primary concern, but local groups carry on as we see appropriate. There is so much history here that we need to be collecting!

I have a lovely memory of the last dinner of the '89 conference where I sat at a table with Elizabeth, Catherine Nicholson (co-founder of *Sinister*

Wisdom), Shevy Healy and her partner, Ruth Silver. Shevy was excitedly talking with Elizabeth and all of us about assuming a national leadership role in OLOC. Elizabeth, who by this time had become focused on local organizing for Co-op housing in Durham, North Carolina was very encouraging to Shevy who went on to become a vital leader for OLOC.

I feel so grateful to Elizabeth through whose vision I found a community that continues to give my life heart and meaning. I know that I shall not forget her.

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Old Lesbians/Dykes

Sandia Belgrade

Home

*After a 30 year odyssey
your body is where I land
love had shipwrecked
weighted by the freight of Calypso—
and was the other one Circe?—
home did not register on my*

*compass land had its own temptations
the young girl set out
roaming, tasting the wines
encountering false travel guides
a wolf spider covering an entire wall
in Mexico Pacific sirens —
some now dead—
weaving the spirit lines
phosphorescent stars blurred the lip
between the wrinkled sand and the shore
I had to climb out of my own myths*

*Nothing felt home till I returned and knew the place
the body retains what the mind discards
fingers swimming with sea anemones
through the waves of desire
have memory old hungers
remain in the wizened heart*

*Love in old age knows what the sails are made of
how navigation is karmic
how the compass—having experienced
the spiders and sirens—points home
back round to the weaver
and I go down on the universe*

*The older woman lands awake
beside your familiar body
my beloved polestar
fingering the human compass
I go down on the universe*

Katherine

Sharon Silvas (1944 - 2006) Colorado Publisher Believed in the Beauty and Empowerment of Women

Sharon Silvas, who died on April 12, 2006 at the age of 62, was the voice of the Colorado women's community through *Colorado Woman News*, a publication that she founded in 1988. That same year she started the Colorado Women's Chamber of Commerce which was the first in the country, now boasting over 1000 members.

Born Judy Sharon Habush in Portland, Oregon, she and her family moved to Milwaukee, Wisconsin when she was ten; she detested that city because of the American Nazi sympathizers she saw in parks during the summer. Silvas was born in 1944 a year before World War II ended and she grew up knowing camp survivor friends of her parents. Although the atrocities of Hitler were not discussed much at home because the genocide was too painful and overwhelming, it of course left an indelible mark on her young soul.

Silvas was a local and modern example of the Jewish and Jewish feminist ethic of social justice in action. She worked for the Anti Defamation League (the Jewish advocacy group) and was the public relations coordinator for the Colorado National Organization for Women in the 1970s. Silvas was a radical feminist who distrusted government. She had Emma Goldman's (the Russian Jewish anarchist who was forced to leave the US in 1919 during the height of the Red Scare) quote on her office wall: "There has never been a good government."

Silvas believed in self-determination for women. That included her belief that women should take care of their own abortions through natural means so that the power struggle and the permission that women today are still seeking from men would end. Silvas always knew the underlying issue of social problems was abuse of power and she resisted patriarchal control her whole life.

Silvas published *Colorado Woman News* monthly from 1988-2003 until she was diagnosed with stage 4 colon cancer. She then published it online. The magazine was a way to keep feminism and mostly women's accomplishments in the public eye so that our lives would be recognized and known.

For Silvas the biggest highlight of her publishing career happened in 2002 when a fiction manuscript by Kris Radish called *The Elegant Gathering of White Snows* became part of her book division (Spinsters Ink Books) and was bought out by Random House. Silvas always knew how to spot great talent and Radish has gone on to publish additional novels with Random House.

I would say one of the messages of Sharon Silvas's life was the importance of all women to be woman identified/feminist regardless of sexual orientation. She spoke truth to power in her radical feminist editorials and she came out publicly as a lesbian in *Colorado Woman News* after the passage of Amendment 2 in November 1992. Her courage was well received in the GLBT and mainstream community.

Silvas will be missed as a great feminist writer, publisher, visionary, business and community leader, partner, mother and friend to many. She died peacefully on the first night of Passover which was fitting for a woman who most of all stood for freedom and liberation.

She is survived by her partner of 14 years Katherine; her sons Geoff, Jonathan (Denver) and Daniel Leventhal (Baltimore); her nephews Jesse and Issac Rembert (Denver); her sister Susan (Gene) Kauffman; her niece Melynda Schneider and first cousin Mary (Sanford) Barbas of Los Angeles, California.

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Marilyn Murphy

In the Presence of Greatness: Barbara Deming

Because we had friends in common who insisted we meet, Barbara Deming invited my companion lover and me to visit her at her home on Sugarloaf Key when our RV trip took us to the Florida Keys in February, 1984. All we knew of Barbara at the time we received the invitation was that she was a peace activist, a writer and a Lesbian who was convalescing from a painful and debilitating kidney ailment. We obtained her book, *Remembering Who We Are* and read it aloud over morning coffee on our way south, learning some of who she was and how she thought. We were very impressed by the person revealed in the book. Still, we were reluctant to intrude on a stranger, especially one who was ailing, even though our intrusion would be minimal. We would park in her yard; live in our camper; stay only one night.

Nothing, really nothing could have prepared us for Barbara Deming. To be in her presence was to be in the presence of greatness. She was what some would call an “old soul.” I had to fight the urge to kneel, an ingrained Catholic reflex. Joan of Arc came to mind and stayed there — for both of us. We opened our camper door at her knock. “Hello! I’m Barbara. May I come in?” And her spirit entered our space before her body did. We consciously had to force ourselves to behave in an ordinary way so as not to embarrass ourselves or our extraordinary guest. I have few “new” words or similes to describe our experience of Barbara Deming and find myself falling back on those of my Catholic past. All those stories of angels and saints whose holiness shines through their faces and hands, causing awe and reverence in the hearts of those who saw them reverberated in my mind each time I was in Barbara’s presence.

Barbara climbed into our camper that first afternoon swathed in sweaters and coat, muffler and gloves, hat and boots. “I can’t seem to get warm,” she explained, this sixty-seven year old, tall, bone-thin woman with her glowing saint’s face. So we talked first about her health, with Irene, a nurse, urging her to eat for strength and to see a traditional physician, “just in case.” We talked of Lesbian life; she and Irene pleased to meet another Lifelong Lesbian, to discuss the differences feminism made in their lives. She wanted to know about our work, Califia Community, the *Lesbian News*, my writing. She asked our opinion, our views, on issues she was thinking about. She listened to us with her entire person at attention. The intensity with



Barbara Deming. Photo ©2006 JEB (Joan E. Biren)

which she listened left us feeling that what we said was important to her, that we were important to her, that we were important. When she began to tire, she reached out her hands and grasped ours. “I’ve loved our talk,” she said. “You will stay, at least a few days, so we can talk again, won’t you?” Since we would have accompanied her to the court of the French Dauphine, we easily agreed to change our plans.

Barbara’s place, in a sparsely populated area on Sugarloaf Key, was a small Lesbian enclave, four plain houses surrounded by greenery, trees, shrubs, flowering plants, giving

the place a secluded atmosphere. Here she lived with her beloved companion, her Lesbian neighbors, and a constant and ever-changing stream of visitors, strangers like Irene and me, and her friends and comrades from the civil rights, peace and women’s liberation movements. Because Barbara was there, the place seemed shot with magic. I wanted my children with me, my sisters, my mother, my friends. I wanted to share this experience with all the people I cared about.

That sharing is impossible now. Barbara died on August 2, 1984. Memorial services were held for her in many places in the east. Friends are writing and publishing moving accounts of the passionate way she lived her dying. Yet few Lesbians know of her life, her work, her books. Barbara Deming? Who was she? She was a powerful woman, a shaper of American society, a LESBIAN whose life and work and words could be a source of pride and inspiration to her Lesbian sisters. She could be lost to us because of sexism and homophobia and the resultant difficulty Lesbians encounter when we try to make ourselves known to one another.

Barbara Deming was born in 1917, the daughter of a well-to-do Republican attorney and a woman of privilege. She attended a private Quaker school through high school. She studied literature and theater at Bennington College. She worked in a variety of jobs related to literature and the theater, including one as film analyst for a Library of Congress project housed at New York City's Museum of Modern Art. She was an aspiring writer. Most of her work of that period was not published until later, but several of her pieces appeared in magazines like *CHARM* and *THE NEW YORKER*. She traveled extensively, too. Her life through her mid-thirties, as it appeared on the surface, could have been a film starring Katherine Hepburn as the earnest, attractive, dedicated-to-the-single-life career woman, needing only Cary Grant or Spencer Tracy to give her a happy ending.

Barbara was a Lesbian however, rejecting, by sixteen years of age, a traditional life. She learned early to question the so-called truths of her sex, her race, her class, her entire culture. She developed into an American liberal, a Democrat, in favor of civil rights and unions, against racism and the loyalty oath. She was, in fact, similar to the Lesbians of her race, class and generation we know. She might have stayed "ordinary", for a Lesbian, if she had not studied the writing of the Mahatma Gandhi after a trip to India in the fifties. "I realized I was in the deepest part of myself a pacifist," she wrote. She committed herself to non-violent activism and was to become the foremost white spokesperson for non-violence as the sane and ethical way to live one's life and to bring about peace, racial justice and women's liberation.

From 1960 until her death, Barbara lived her truth... "The truth, above all, that every human being deserves respect. We assert the respect due ourselves, when it is denied, through noncooperation; We assert the respect due all others, through our refusal to be violent." This truth took her to Moscow, Cuba, Vietnam in the cause of peace. It succored her during her many imprisonments in the jails of her own country for acts of civil disobedience during demonstrations for peace and racial justice. It gave her the strength for her fasts; and it enabled her to endure the physical and verbal abuse to which she was subjected by the racists and warmongers on the streets, by the Internal Revenue Service, by the House Un-American Activities Committee, and by the former husband of her beloved companion in the courts and in person. Her truth, as she lived it, made Barbara the kind of person who could listen intensely to each person. It was that quality that illustrated the depth of her respect for each person. She would not only risk her life and go to jail for us; she was also willing to listen to the least of us with the attention she gave to those with the power of life and death over the whole human race.

Barbara Deming's written work is known and cherished by thousands of women and men who do not know she was a Lesbian, or who are "shocked" to learn she was a Lesbian, or who admire her "even though" she was a Lesbian. These are the people who write "respectful" obituaries and articles in major newspapers, obituaries and articles which erase her Lesbianism from her life and who will erase it from the history of the nonviolent movements for peace and racial justice in our time. This erasure is the final violence done to her; it is the removal of her sexuality when she is no longer here to protest the outrage.

We, her Lesbian sisters, know that her sexuality is likely to be the place from which she grasped the truth by which she lived. Once, when her Lesbianism was under attack she wrote, "In short, my pride was for the first time, perhaps, assaulted IN ITS DEPTH. One's sexuality...is so at the heart, the heart of one. And just as one fears physical hurt to that part of one's body, feels its vulnerability, so one fears the psychic assault—and of course, yes, precisely because it is most deeply joined to what is spiritual in us, what allows us to lose the cramped sense of being only single selves." And again, "...because I am a homosexual I know in my deepest being what it feels like to be despised." It becomes the pleasure, the privilege and the responsibility, of Barbara's Lesbian sisters to remember she is one of us, and to make sure her Lesbian life is not erased from history. Those of us who do not already know her, can meet her in her books. * One last letter was written by Barbara Deming to all of her sisters twelve days before her death. It is her last gift to us.

To so many of you: I have loved my life so very much and I have loved you so very much and felt so blessed at the love you have given me. I love the work so many of us have been trying to do together and had looked forward to continuing this work, but I just feel no more strength in me now and I want to die. I won't lose you when I die and I won't leave you when I die. Some of you I have most especially loved and felt beloved by and I hope you know that even though I haven't had the strength lately to reach out to you. I love you. Hallowed be (may all be made whole). I want you to know, too, that I die happy.

*A good place to start is her last one, a collection of the best pieces from all her previous work. The volume includes information about her life and her political evolution by its editor, Jane Meyerding, and a wonderful introduction by Barbara Smith of Kitchen Table Press. Its title is *We Are All Part of One Another: A Barbara Deming Reader*.

Reprinted from *Are You Girls Traveling Alone? Adventures in Lesbianic Logic*, by Marilyn Murphy (Clothespin Fever Press 1991) with permission from Irene Weiss.

Ona Marae

Remembering the First Lesbian in My Life

It was 1977 and I was 13 years old. Briefly, I had known camp counselors who were big and strong women, but she was the first one to walk into my life to stay. She was, as the stereotype would have it, my gym teacher and coach. She wasn't, however, big. Shorter than I, she stood about 5 feet tall with long flowing hair. But make no mistake, she was a strong female, none the less!

I was severely lacking in female role models in my life and the entrance of Coach made a great difference. She coached all the junior high girls teams, as well as the high school volleyball and track teams. She also taught high school Physical Education and Biology. In a few short days, I had found my hero. She did teach me that clumsiness was no excuse for not trying. Heavy-set and far from graceful, I had always been the laughing stock of the PE classes. Coach stopped that and helped me specialize in something I could actually do well: serving in volleyball. And it worked. In 8th grade, I served a perfect 15 point game.

Because of her encouragement, (and my secret, or not so secret crush on her), I would try many things in junior high that no one else would ever have convinced me to try. Run the mile competitively? You've got to be kidding! But I did it because Coach needed someone. This round girl ran from one light post to another, chanting to myself, just one more post and I can quit. Her cheers of encouragement were enough to keep me running till I reached what seemed the end of a horrible distance.

High School was easier. Though I was still heavy set, I was always one of the first ones to finish wind sprints, hoping she would notice me. I specialized again in serving and earned athletic letters for being able to come off the bench in times of trouble and change the tide of the game. That confidence she gave me was life changing.

Off the court, things were difficult. I was beginning to recognize I wasn't the same as other girls, and I didn't want to be. I played sports, half because I wanted to be around the jocks who played sports, and half because it gave me more precious time with my coach. After my year of Biology with her was done, I did a special independent study in Advanced Biology under her tutelage. I was never so happy as when I was in her room with just her, laughing or discussing whatever was on our minds for that day.

Things at home were hard at well. My father had left us and my mother was a housewife with no schooling or training. Many times I worked after school or practice, cleaning homes for fifty cents an hour, so that we would have grocery money. Coach also was supportive through that. During the break at volleyball tournaments, the entire team would ride the bus to a restaurant for lunch. I would sit on the bus with my homemade meal waiting for them to return. She never challenged my pride by offering me money I couldn't repay, but there was always a brownie or cookies to share when she returned.

There is one memory I will never forget. I had begun drinking heavily while visiting my father on weekends. It got me in a lot of trouble, including being gang raped at a keg party the summer before high school. I was awkward and definitely ill equipped to deal with the social life of my father's new family and life. Drinking with them was the only coping mechanism I had. The weekend before Christmas of my freshman year, Coach took me aside and promised me a scholarship or some way out of this small, nowhere town if I would quit drinking. I quit that day. My trust in her was complete. If I studied and practiced hard, her words would come true and I would find a way out.

I hit my suicidal moments in high school. Living with a mother with an untreated mental illness was hard. Sometimes I would come to school with a suitcase, not knowing where I was running to, but knowing I had to get out. Coach was always there for the conversation that helped me reconcile my own sanity with my home life.

I didn't have any idea that Coach was a lesbian until I hit high school. Then her roommate, a woman electrician, would join us for the end of volleyball practice, shagging balls. She was a very nice woman and one day, it just hit me. They lived in a trailer, way out in the country, and this woman had moved and changed jobs to follow Coach to this school district. I didn't have hard proof, but it was clear enough.

I did get as much hard proof as I ever would my junior year. Some sort of vague argument about how many hours Coach was teaching came up before the school board. She was teaching all six periods, but not receiving the extra pay that teachers in that situation received. It seemed like a stupid thing for the school board to do, when it was so obvious with other teachers. And then the rumors started. She was really being run out because she was a lesbian. I was crushed. Many of her girls were crushed. We sat in the hall crying when she gave us the news.

The end of the year was a wreck. She kept trying to hold us on task, and all we could think of was her leaving. The track team would snuffle in the middle of practice. My advanced biology experiments all deflated like the balloons I used to simulate the lungs. This woman had given me hope and a future and I was losing her.

Finally she gathered us up for a talk. Yes, this was hard, but hard things happened in life and you just had to deal with them. Her leaving didn't mean she didn't care about us, and wouldn't be cheering for us. She just wouldn't be coaching or teaching us. We did our best, half-hearted though it might have been. We tried to just suck it up and deal with it.

One of the hardest things was not having her and her partner along for athletic events and practices. The next coach must have had a miserable year. He came into a group of grieving girls and tried to change everything she had taught us. That wasn't going to happen.

Finally graduation came, and I was able to leave that school and town. Coach had been right, straightening up my life had worked and I had a full ride scholarship to a small Midwestern college. While there, I signed up for every Physical Education class they had. I was still heavy set, but had learned the joy of playing, of using my body and being wildly exuberant with it. I tried to track her down but wasn't successful. What information I could find was that she had left teaching and coaching and was working in the family business in her hometown.

What a loss for girls and young women everywhere: someone who could speak our language and earn our respect, taken out of the profession because of her sexual orientation! I hope she knew we loved her as much as we respected her. I hope she eventually got back into coaching, if not teaching in a public school. I hope her gift has not atrophied. I doubt it has. Such a powerful woman could not stand to sit idle for long, a gift she taught us. We loved you Coach, and when we get together to talk, we still do. Thank you for giving us the strength and the courage to be ourselves, to come out and face the world with a solid stance and an unabashed eye. You made a difference in our lives. And surely, that's what it's all about.

tatiana de la tierra

Dreaming of Lesbos

I can enter the morning with traces of an eternal dream: to live on a planet of women. we sing in the fertile forest, caress on lavender hills, bathe beneath cascades of clear waters. and just like that, nude and wet, we mount each other's bodies. our desire is a whale that searches for calm in the depth of the sea.

I smell sex in my hair when I awaken.

the dream perfumes all of my days. I go to the post office and look for stamps with etchings of flowers and fruits so that I can send letters to the women who loved me in my sleep.

we are in a world that is not ours. what do we do with the dreams that touch our consciousness in the nude each night?

our planet of women is nothing more than a dream. who knows how many of us bathe in the woods or which ones of us have wings that let us fly with our flesh? it's not for anyone to know. fortunately, we always dream paradise, we make it ours. there, we find each other and live in our collective memory.

and so, I smell sex in my hair when I awaken.

tatiana de la tierra

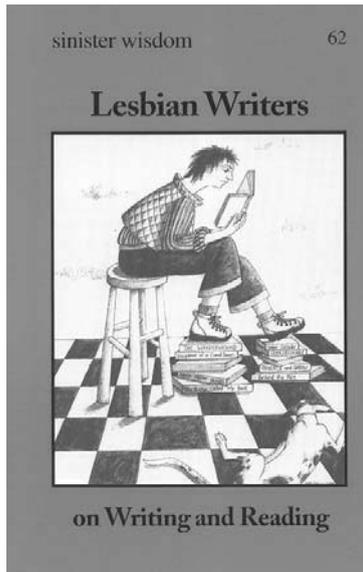
Pathway to Lesbianism

the path to lesbianism implies the renunciation of the path that was already written. everything that you should be and do is replaced with what strikes your fancy.

being a lesbian is a changing of the hands of power. it is true that the power is always ours but many times we allow others to manage it for us. a lesbian reclaims her power.

the ceremony of initiation is a wedding with oneself. walk toward the altar, alone and dressed with the gown of your skin. with each step you leave behind the destiny that was never your own and you get close to that which will be of your making. detain yourself at the entrance to the door of lesbianism. promise to be faithful to yourself, kiss and embrace your own body.

that is how you enter lesbianism: naked and in love.



Kathe Kirkbride

Colleen Regan (1949 – 2006)

Colleen Annette Regan was born July 18, 1949 in Detroit, Michigan and died August 9, 2006 in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Colleen never recovered from a near drowning accident in Mexico on April 8, 2006. Her last conscious act was to save a friend from drowning. Colleen epitomized the era of the 60s and loved the music of John Lennon, Jefferson Airplane, The



Photo by Kathe Kirkbride

Doors and others. She graduated as valedictorian of her high school class at McKenzie High School in 1967 then received a BA in English and MS in Education to start her professional career as a teacher, but that wasn't her niche. She went back to school to get a BS in Accounting and an MS in Taxation and became a dedicated CPA with a 20 year career; her tax clients more often than not became her friends. She loved to travel and visited several countries before her retirement in July 2003 at which time she began traveling fulltime in an RV mostly in Mexico and Central America.

Colleen was a highly competent CPA and a generous friend who sampled life like a hummingbird samples flowers. She was fearless, generous, loving, talented, hard working, impish and eccentric and will be missed by all who knew her. She knew there is more to learn than what we discover during our lifetime on this planet and now she is out there finding out what she always suspected was our inter-connectedness in the universe. She was ever hopeful that we humans would learn to take better care of this Earth and learn to live peacefully as one United World. We who loved Colleen will watch for her to show up in our lives when we most need her or least expect it. A memorial celebration of Colleen's life took place on September 10, 2006 in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

Janet Mason

A Reverie: To Alexandra Grilikhes (in memoriam)

My friendship with the poet and novelist Alexandra Grilikhes was one of the great pleasures of my life. The author of nine small press books of poetry and one novel, also from a small press, Alexandra was an accomplished writer who in many ways was also overlooked — especially by her own community. Her work has often been described as oblique and incandescent. She often reinvented myth and followed it to its mysterious core, evident in her poem “Mistress of the Animals” published in her book *The Reveries* from Insight To Riot Press:

*You will know her presence/ in the half-light/ fathoming her
power/ you cannot see her/// in the howl of animals/ who make
the quick/ slide through the grass, / her power in their blood/
noisily beating/ and echoing in the flesh of the hunter/ attempting
to silence his/ pounding breath, Mistress / of animals be/ kind,
give// succor in the dark/ be sun in the dark.*

Alexandra followed certain themes in her life and writing and the Mistress of the Animals was certainly one of them. Her novel *Yin Fire*, published by Harrington Park Press was nominated for a Lambda literary award. The narrator, Doris, paces the streets of the Village in Manhattan searching through her past for what she has always been looking for. “What she needs is to keep tracking her way West or East until after the right number of missteps and fumbblings, some magic will tell her who and what she is — a woman, lover of women, daughter of the Lady of the Beasts, the Mistress of the Animals, the bear-mother-hovering-figure, the one she is forever seeking and loving or longing to love.”

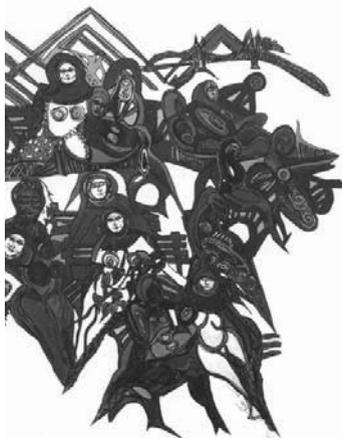
Yin Fire was Alexandra’s last published work before her death and in it is some of her most compelling writing, evident in such passages as “The affect of each of these women on Doris – Dreaming Awake. Speechlessness. Magnetized. Struck Dumb. Hot. Grabbed. Dazzled. Ablaze with longing. Obsession.” As the narrator retraces her footsteps that led her to this point in her life — where she has a lump in her breast and has come to visit a practitioner of Chinese medicine — she looks back at her own relationships with women lovers and her friendships with several gay men and her fascination with their world of anonymous sex where their “connection to a stranger was everything and anything.” Also, in this novel, the narrator —

Doris — takes a hard look at her childhood and her family, including incestuous relationships with her father and brother.

Alexandra died in 2003 at the age of 70. Her death — another statistic in the raging epidemic of breast cancer — was a profound loss for many, including those who gathered at her memorial service. Alexandra was the director of the University of Pennsylvania's Annenberg School for Communication Library in Philadelphia from the late 1960s until she retired in the early 1990s and was well known for her important work building the library's collection. But in the end, at her memorial service, it was the poets — many of them her former students and close friends such as myself — who turned out in force, remembering her with readings of her work. The memorial service was a sad goodbye but it was also a reminder of life in all of its beautiful fragility, best summed in her poem "Mangled," also from her collection *The Reveries*.

*I write you/ my tongue mangled on your/ flowers, flowers
that you brought me/ from the city, mangled too on / you,
your body a green/ stone washed ashore at high/ tide and
still glistening./ You are all I wish for in the clear light of this
early/ August day. The/flowers push upwards/ from the
brown bottle, wanting to/ live and I love their short fragile/
lives, their sweetness, their slight/ fragrance almost lost here
in / the high sea winds.
Yet their outline,/ sharp
against the light,
fiercely/ grips this room,
and continually, my/
looking at them.*

sinister wisdom 40



On Friendship

Janet Mason

Impulse to Fly: a Memory of Almitra David

Almitra David was a wonderful poet, translator, and teacher. Most of all she was a lovely human being.

The first time I heard Almitra read, she gave me a copy of a poem that I liked very much. It was called “Fig” and was about Pittsburgh where she had grown up, where as she wrote in her poem

“women still cut crosses/ in their bread still roll pasta/ to dry on the table still wait/ for the orange zucchini blossom/.../they know where they are/ they don’t expect to smell Mediterranean air/ don’t look under their pillows/ their houses are brick/ and if a rose blooms—basta/ I think of Etruria/ when grandmother mentions Rome/ and when she says God/ I remember the one/ of the Wild Fig Tree the one/ whose hands are like mine/ She in whose house there is/ sun enough for figs.

I told Almitra what the poem meant to me and she handed me the copy she had read from. That’s the kind of person she was. This reading was at Girlfriends Bookstore (a now defunct feminist bookstore that for a relatively short period of time inhabited a storefront on a run down block of South Street in Philadelphia). It was decades ago, before “Fig” was published in 1993 in her first collection of poetry, titled *Between the Sea and Home*, from Eighth Mountain Press.

Almitra and I were friendly rather than friends. Since we traveled in many of the same circles, I often ran into her and her partner, the artist Rocky Toner, at poetry readings, art shows, and events in the lesbian community. Once she was with her adult daughter who with her large deep set brown eyes and gentle smile resembled her mother. Almitra had three children from her early marriage, another daughter and a son as well.

As time goes by, memories are increasingly fleeting. I do remember that it was always a pleasure seeing Almitra. She had depth, perception and, perhaps above all, compassion. She once changed my entire perspective about my life with a single short sentence. “But, Janet, those are all *good* things.” Almitra was a dedicated Spanish teacher at Friends Select high school in Center City, Philadelphia. I remember that I envied her students.

As I look back on my early acquaintance with Almitra, it is almost as if I am remembering myself as a different person. Perhaps we are all less inno-

cent than we used to be. As a young lesbian feminist, I was imbued with the power of one who is intent on changing the world. I was optimistic and never lost hope. I thought people would always be there. In retrospect, I see I was naive.

Almitra's death, at age 62, caused by a reoccurrence of breast cancer is another one of life's cruel and sudden betrayals. Now she is everything she ever was and more. She is another statistic in a raging epidemic.

When Almitra's second book of poetry, *Impulse to Fly*, was published in 1998 by Perugia Press, I introduced her when she read at Giovanni's Room. I said that her work reflected the profoundness of ordinary life and that she also spoke in a poetically ancient voice.

When a writer dies, the work survives. Still, I cannot think about Almitra's work without remembering her as a person. Almitra was many things to many people. For me, she was a bridge to earlier writers who have also shaped my world. Once a student of Muriel Rukeyser, Almitra described this legendary woman in a poem to her:

*three flights you/ climb to this room/ where windows don't/ shut
out October wind you/ stand defying/ the doctor who said/ stay
home in this room/ women who come together to write/...*

and again you have come to the gates

this time you say to a

new power of women to

the woman as writer

you have

survived wars to say this

Nyla Dartt

The MotherLode Collective San Francisco, CA 1969-1974

“Deborah Gerson, who participated in the budding women’s movement and later wrote a doctoral thesis on it, recalls that nothing in the broadside *MotherLode* was news by journalism school standards: First-person articles on such topics as body image, family relations, women in prison, and lesbian mothers dominated its five issues. The news was our re-understanding and reflecting on our lives through consciousness-raising, understanding how women’s oppression worked,” Gerson says.

(As quoted by Marci Rein of Media Alliance on the explosion of alternative media in San Francisco.)

I have a photo of one of our collective members, Sandra, holding a copy of our newspaper, *The MotherLode* as she leans against a light pole and next to her, a man who was never identified, holding his newspaper called the *Effeminist*. They look alike, same hairstyle, same height. Sandra’s smile is wan, and she looks a bit tired. She had been hawking our paper all day and the duties of preparing a newspaper and caring for our two children on top of being politically involved plus selling the papers at the March against the war in Vietnam: all of it was wearing thin by 1972.

Though Sandra went to the rally that day, you do not see the waving signs of the anti-war protesters, you do not see the marchers themselves, and you do not see the others of our household. Though all of us participated in these events, someone had to stay at home to be with the children and I believe it was my turn to parent them that day. In order to produce the next issue we needed to sell as many as possible. We collected the nickels, dimes and quarters from individual sales and plowed the proceeds back into our common pot.

Years later I learned from my daughter Karina, that she and her “brother,” Tracey also found the *MotherLode* money can which we thought we had hidden away from their fingers. But we were too busy to notice many things. They busily came and went while we folded and stapled the paper, prepared meals and held meetings, endlessly, in our household which was not only a little yellow stucco house on Winfield Street in the Bernal Heights neighborhood in San Francisco but it was also a hub of activity for the women’s movement. The folks we bailed out of jail for spray painting political slo-

gans on walls, stayed with us. Women who were performing or speaking in local events bedded down on our floors, and meetings with the Women's Health Collective members were also held in our kitchen. And of course, meetings about our house and or the school we created, were also held in our living room.

We called ourselves the MotherLode because that is what we named the paper, after many hours of deliberation. We called our household a "collective" because we didn't know what else to call it. We were not a commune. In fact we wanted to distance ourselves from the hippie-commune movement.

We modeled our household on the Kibbutzim notion, as described by Bruno Bettelheim, who believed that children could be raised collectively, that they could and should learn that their mothers were not the only people who could care for them and love them. We believed that the nuclear family was destructive to women, in particular, and discussed this theory at length in one of our newspaper issues, entitled "It's All in the Family." We also discussed together how we wanted to handle the responsibilities of the children, given that in most nuclear families it is the woman who is totally responsible for all of their care. We did not want to replicate that in our household. We created a schedule where each of us was responsible for the children for two days in a row. All of us took on the job of being a parent to both children. We made decisions about the children as a group. And as one-parent we all went to PTA meetings, much to the surprise and chagrin of their teachers and fellow parents.

We came up with a plan, a format, a map, as it were, of how we wished to live together. Three of us were lesbians. One woman Joan, came with her man, as she put it; though she was a feminist and wanted to join in with our plan of raising children, she was in a long term relationship with Chuck who was along for the "ride."

Jeri Robertson and I met Sandra at Glide Memorial Church in San Francisco in 1969. Jeri and I were facilitating consciousness raising groups. The announcements of these groups were being spread by word of mouth and by the Feminist magazines and alternative media at the time. We left these consciousness raising groups exhilarated and inspired and volunteered our time and energy. As single welfare moms anxious to find other women and to get involved in the feminist movement, we were unprepared for the amazing transformation that this experience was creating. Neither Jeri nor I had done much about our budding feminist consciousness but we had been thinking about feminism in our readings of Simone de Beauvoir (*The Sec-*

ond Sex), Anias Nin (*The Diary's of...*) and Betty Friedan. But then we got our hands on the *BITCH Manifesto!* a radical feminist lesbian separatist manuscript, unpublished, but which was spreading around the country by “alternative” means. And wow.

It was in one of these groups where the members agreed to become an on-going, weekly and cohesive unit so we decided to close our doors to new comers and got down to business. Apparently, this is the same kind of group process that was going on in many other groups around the country.

As Jeri, Sandra, Joan and myself got closer in our group, we decided to live together. Eventually we found a house to fit us comfortably and after much discussion, we began our giant experiment. It was not long after this that we embarked upon the creation of a newspaper which published five issues.

One of the first articles we printed in our newspaper was “Why I Want a Wife” by Judy Syfers, (1971). Because of our political beliefs about the meaning of “collective,” we did not copyright our material. Therefore, with our blessings, Judy was able to sell her poem to *MS Magazine* almost within months of the article’s appearance in our newspaper. I mention her article because I can “Google” the title today and get an archived copy of it, since *MS* was able to conserve it and place it into their archive. When I Google *Mother Lode*, I get a listing of Christian celebrations of motherhood and much about the wonders and beauties of childrearing. That is not the spirit of the paper we created. We critiqued motherhood. We felt we had a right to critique it; we were, after all, mothers ourselves and had been extremely disappointed by all of its attendant myths.

Sandra was the writer among us. It was she who led the way in fashioning the overall content; it was she who delegated the assignments, ushering the writing process until the end. Jeri was the artist who had created newspaper paste-ups previously and it was she who guided us in doing the art work and pasting up the document, readying it for the printers. We each had a hand in writing the articles after doing the research, and then directing the placement of the articles on the page. But we each had a task we were good at and so we encouraged its development. I had a hand in the development of the primary school and Joan performed much of the house duties, as she was a capable organizer and could negotiate with the outside world. Our children adored Joan and they would frequently seek her out when no one else could comfort them.

Jeri and I participated in the Women’s Health Collective, which started out at first in the Women’s Liberation Office, a store front on Cole Street;

then it moved to 24th St. and eventually it moved to SF General, where it exists today. At first we were just a referral service but we quickly developed skills to demonstrate the use of speculums to an audience of women interested in learning the tools suggested in the book *Our Bodies, Our Selves*. We eventually learned how to perform menstrual extractions, and were able to advocate for the needs of women as regards abortions. An entire issue of *MotherLode* was therefore devoted to women's health care. Jeri and I spear-headed the research into the subject based upon our experiential process.

Our Collective spent hours in late night discussions, while we sewed the hand-puppets we sold on the streets of Union Square, while we created the lunches for the kids to take to school, while we made placards to use in the anti war demonstrations. In our spare time we helped a poet friend hand print her poetry manuscript into a chapbook. The printing press was located in the basement apartment of her home and required that the handle be turned manually. Though her pages were exquisite, she knew no publisher would produce it because one of her titles was "Edward the Dyke," a piece which would eventually become famous but at the time, we were amazed that she could so boldly say the work DYKE.

We talked and talked until our ideals began to take shape into a livable politic. When the Women's Bookstore opened in Oakland at the corner of 51st and Broadway, we were thrilled. Even better was the opening of Old Wives Tales Bookstore in San Francisco. In both these venues we could display our paper, find other women's literature and have a space to hear poetry and other writers read their material. Sandra and other writer friends converged upon the *SF Chronicle* (a daily newspaper in San Francisco) and staged a sit-in to protest the fact that there were no women editors on the paper. Every week it seemed new women's newspapers and or events were inaugurated. I recall a meeting held at Glide Church to meet with Robin Morgan. The church was so crowded that women were spilling out into the streets. Information about all of these events was spread by word of mouth and "alternative" media. There was no internet. There were few radio stations willing to make announcements about women's events.

Our MotherLode household became a magnet for misplaced and or neglected families in the neighborhood and we became a neighborhood "safe house" for abused animals, children and adult women abused by their husbands. One of the many amazing events that we did together stands out for me, in fact. We stood guard in a home of a woman who was being stalked by her estranged husband with a gun. He eventually gave up and went away, giving her just enough time to disappear off the face of the earth. In 1971-1973 women did

not receive protection by restraining orders due to domestic violence; as far as the police were concerned then, it was a private, family matter.

We came to realize in our discussions and readings how women enacted their second class citizenship. It happens when one woman fails to take seriously what another woman has to say, about any topic of importance. An example is when a woman provides information or makes a suggestion to another woman, how often she will not take seriously what she had been told by a woman and how often the very same question is asked of a man. Because men have the answers. They are smart. Women are dumb.

And finally we discussed how gossip was a controlling tactic of the patriarchy, especially since we learned that gossip only works if secrets have to be kept. It only works if women can be shamed by the gossip. Once the so called sordid information is revealed by the person themselves, they cease being vulnerable to being a target of the gossip. All of these topics were touched upon in our consciousness raising groups, and these topics made their way into our discussions vis-à-vis the *MotherLode Newspaper*.

Though we were feminists we had a boy child AND a man, in our household, something that set us apart from the culture of feminist separatists. We couldn't be separatists. When we went to women's events, we had to leave the boy child home. At the time, Lesbians did not have children. And the lesbians we knew did not want to deal with children. Child care was usually not provided at lesbian events. We learned that "straight" women with children were far more supportive of us. And it was they that offered us a hand. The lesbians didn't. As much as we were learning to love women, learning to love ourselves, we were getting a message that children were not welcomed. This aspect of lesbian life has changed drastically in the past fifteen years.

The divisions dividing us as women were beginning to have an impact right in our household. Out of the four of us, three of us were lesbians. One woman was straight. The straight woman wanted to have children and was uncomfortable with our critique of motherhood. One of the lesbians knew that she would never have children of her own, but made a decision to give living with children a try. The man in our household rejected our children as they were not his; he saw himself as only being in the household in order to relate to his girlfriend. She, in fact, was always feeling torn between the feminist spirit and excitement and her loyalty to her man.

At some point, we all decided to take a vacation. Together. To take a break from our busy lives. And we journeyed to Arizona, the Grand Canyon was the place, Havasu Indian Reservation, the destination. We packed our-

selves up in a “Grapes of Wrath” station wagon with a trunk on top, and we ventured forth. First stop were the grandparents in Arizona who were demanding their grandson. Patriarchy satisfied, we went onward, finding solace in the thirteen mile journey down to the bottom of the gorge, where we found Native People living in trailers. For two weeks we lived on liquid food cooked over sterno. My daughter learned to read by putting together the pancake dough. While we traveled we processed our household. It was there that Joan and Chuck decided to tell us that they were moving out. Devastating news. We were disappointed yet convinced that we could and would continue.

We did continue; however it was not for long. Nyla fell in love with a woman who was on a one year fellowship and was intending to return to Ohio to complete her PhD studies. The newspaper edition maintained for one additional issue but disappeared altogether when Sandra and Jeri separated. The collective had served its purpose, providing support and encouragement and love in the midst of great historical changes which have followed us throughout our subsequent lives.

Today Tracey and Karina are both adults with interesting lives of their own. Jeri is a practicing therapist in the SF bay area and a grandmother of three, Sandra continues to live and write in the Bay Area, and Nyla’s daughter has moved to Boston where she enjoys a lesbian community. Joan has disappeared from the “airways.” Any information as to her whereabouts would be greatly appreciated. Nyla has been with her lesbian partner for 19 years; they divide their time between the SF bay area and the Seattle area.

Books Reviews

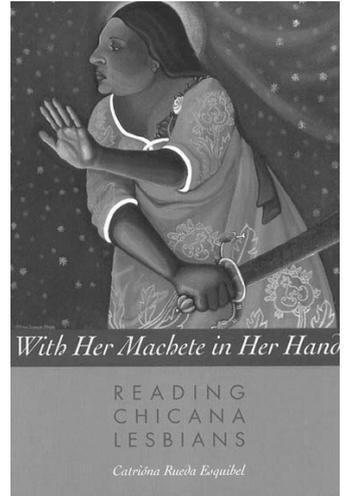
With Her Machete in Her Hand: Reading Chicana Lesbians by Catrióna Rueda Esquibel. University of Texas Press (2006) ISBN 0292712758
Reviewed by Patricia Cardozo, Xiaoxin Zeng, and Esther Rothblum

Catrióna Rueda Esquibel's book, *With Her Machete in Her Hand: Reading Chicana Lesbians*, opens with a quote from Sheila Ortiz Taylor that suggests her reader is a "detective" who goes "in search of clues" regarding the existence of Chicana lesbian fiction (xiii). Esquibel's project is to investigate the presence of lesbians in traditional and contemporary Chicana/o texts, myths, and literature for her readers. She observes: "I get to be the reader who recognizes the allusions to Aztec Princesses, to corridos, to lesbian bookstores and coffee shops. I get to be the reader to whom the author doesn't have to prove she is queer enough, Chicana enough, lesbian enough, Mexican enough, feminist enough. (Enough is enough)" (xv). This lays the foundation for the journey she takes with her reader.

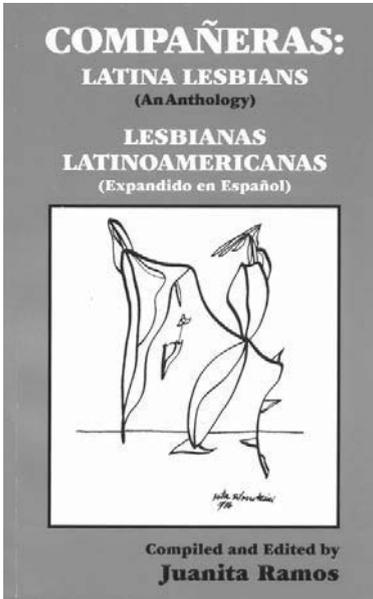
Throughout this literary and historic voyage, she documents the important roles of Chicana lesbian characters and writers struggling for new identities and subjectivities (in)forming Chicana/o culture and U.S. history. Esquibel suggests, "The Chicana lesbian characters, and the writers behind them, have chosen to fight, each with her *pluma*, with her pen in her hand, for her place in Chicano/a culture and U.S. history" (6). This corresponds with the title "With Her Machete in Her Hand" and reemphasizes the necessity of incorporating lesbian perspectives into interpretations of Chicana/o texts.

For instance, the famous painting "Amor Indio" by Jesus Helguera depicts two heterosexual lovers, Ixta and Popo, as hypermasculine and feminine. Esquibel shows how the gay and lesbian community have appropriated this image into queer art; thus using Mexican historical folk in a more contemporary — and political — manner.

Finally, Esquibel's methodology uses Hayden White's theory of metahistory and emplotment that relies on the narrative form; she hopes to



avoid a linear, chronological timeline which would suggest an evolution of Chicana lesbian fictional writing (18). Esquibel takes her reader on a journey of lesbian perspectives to read the characters of “La Llorona, the Aztec Princess and Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz” and the literary representations of “girlhood friendships, rural communities, and Chicana activism” (5), as an investigator who realizes the case is not closed.



Compañeras: Latina Lesbians (An Anthology) / Lesbianas Latinoamericanas (Expandido en Español) compiled and edited by Juanita Ramos. (Latina Lesbian History Project, 1987, 1994, 2004)

Excerpts from reviews by Tania Ramalho and Vanessa Nemeth. Excerpt from the Introduction to the book by Juanita Ramos.

Juanita Ramos’ anthology of writings by Latina lesbians represents an act of affirmation in today’s conservative political climate. The narratives, portraying complex personal and social realities, fill a void in Latin American, lesbian and women’s studies literature. This book will become a friend of many

Latinas who wish to learn more about their sisters in struggle and their own heritage.

The idea for the book originated in Ramos’ search for identity, inspired by the successful example of Black lesbian activism. Juanita decided to contact other Latina lesbians to share stories and create their collective memory. For the next seven years there were inter-ethnic volunteer brigades, fund-raising concerts, and dances, coalitions ... Finally the Latina Lesbian History Project (LLHP) was founded to publish and distribute the book when presses failed to show commitment to the project.

Excerpt from a review by Tania Ramalho “La Lucha Continua” in Belles Lettres (Winter 1989, p. 2)

The lesbians represented [in this book] – Puertorriqueñas, Chicanas, Cubans, Chilenas, Hondureñas, Brasileñas, Colombianas, Argentinas, Peruanas, and Nicaragüenses – all the people I wish I had met when I was trying to come out. They are the friends I wish I had, the women I fantasized about. All together they give me a sense of what a real home would feel like which is the main thing I'm striving for in my life and why I relate to this book so much. Compañeras is really all about making that home, a place where we can take off our shoes and sit under the tree.

In addition to the oral histories, this collection includes poems, essays, interviews, short stories, and art. Most of the pieces are in English, some are in Spanish, others are in Spanglish.

Excerpt from a review by Vanessa Nemeth "Latina Lesbians: Making Room for Ourselves" in Gay Community News (October 23-29, 1988.

Since *Compañeras* was first published in 1987, significant economic, political and social changes have taken place within the contexts in which Latina lesbians live. Despite numerous personal and political setbacks, there have been countless victories. Most importantly, Latina lesbians all over the world continue to struggle to end all forms of oppressions. Today we are more visible than we have ever been.

Between 1980s and 2004, Latina lesbians in the U. S. and Latin America increasingly formed their own lesbian organizations and became active participants in local, national, and international lesbian and gay rights movements. In Latin America, lesbians also participated in the organizing of the nine feminist encuentros and the five lesbian feminist encuentros held in the region between 1980 and 2001. Most recently, they have become visible in the growing Afro-Latin American and Afro-Caribbean women's movements. Additionally, while some Latina lesbians joined revolutionary movements, others participated as open lesbians in political elections, joined coalitions to eliminate anti-lesbian and gay laws, helped create women's studies programs, research centers and NGOs. Still others published their own newsletters, journals and books, and wrote and performed their own music and theater pieces. They have formed and participated in the creation of communications networks of various sorts. The contributions of Latina lesbians are as varied as their personalities. All have contributed, not only toward increasing our visibility, but also to our knowledge of each other's struggles and the ways in which we can support one another across national boundaries to change oppressive conditions. These actions have taken place at the same time that we have been coming out of the closet to ourselves, our families, our friends, and our co-workers.

This third edition of *Compañeras* continues to document the political and personal struggles of Latina lesbians in Latin America and the U. S. I hope that each person that reads this book, which has been prepared with a deep sense of love, respect, and solidarity, will get from it the same strength and determination to continue growing emotionally and spiritually that I have gotten from working on it.

The added last section of this edition, “Forging Identities, Building Movements and Feminisms in Latin America,” all in Spanish, was taken from video-taped interviews conducted by myself, Mariana Romo-Carmona, and Rosie Muñoz. Combined with the entries included in the first two editions, their inclusion allows for the publication of the words of 63 women born in 15 different countries.

This third edition is dedicated to the memory of those contributors whom I know have passed away since the publication of the first edition: Rota Silverstrini, Aida Santiago (Esther), Cenen Moreno, and Gloria E. Anzaldúa.

Excerpt from the Introduction to the Third Edition by Juanita Ramos.

Warrior Poet: A Biography of Audre Lorde. Alexis de Veaux. New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 2004

Directed by Desire: The Collected Poems of June Jordan. June Jordan. Port Townsend, WA: Copper Canyon Press, 2005.

Where the Apple Falls. Samiya Bashir. Washington, DC: Red Bone Press, 2005.

Armor and Flesh. Mendi Lewis Obadike. Detroit, MI: Lotus Press, 2004.

Chinese Blackbird. Sherry Quan Lee. St. Paul, MN: Asian American Renaissance, 2002.

Once and Future Warriors by Julie R. Enszer

Warrior Poet, released twelve years after Audre Lorde’s death, is the authorized biography of Audre Lorde and an important contribution to feminist scholarship. With *Warrior Poet*, Alexis de Veaux has brought forth a thorough narrative of Lorde’s life that begins to explore many critical aspects of her life and work and provides a strong foundation for future feminist literary scholarship about Lorde.

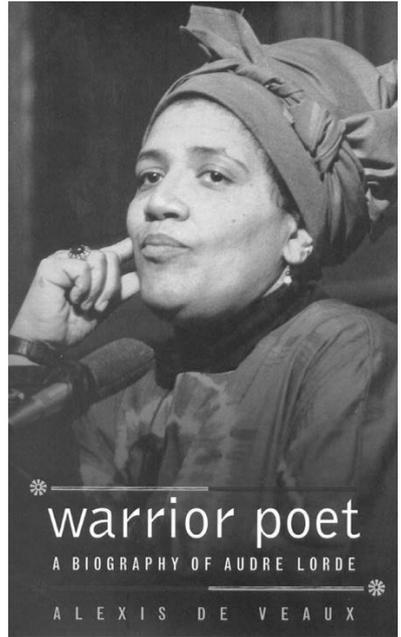
De Veaux organizes *Warrior Poet* into two parts that she calls “The First Life” and “The Second Life.” “The First Life” covers Lorde’s childhood through her delivery of the seminal lecture, “The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action” on December 28, 1977 at the Modern Lan-

guage Association meeting in Chicago. It includes Lorde's initial diagnosis with cancer. About "The Second Life" de Veaux writes, "Though she continued to evolve as a writer, activist, and woman, fear of cancer seeded Lorde's second life." De Veaux concludes the book in 1986, six years before Lorde's death, because she "did not want to overemphasize the cancer...I had no wish to chronicle the prognostics of a terminal disease." It was a wise choice because the autobiography brings into sharp focus the life of Lorde and her work without pain or regret.

Through the text, de Veaux provides a thorough narrative of Lorde's life including a thoughtful analysis of the formation and evolution of her identities. Lorde is iconic in her description of herself as "black, lesbian, feminist, mother, poet warrior;" in *Warrior Poet*, de Veaux teases out each aspect of Lorde's identity including how it develops over her lifetime and how it shapes her life and work. In addition to her iconic description of herself, Lorde's oeuvre also provides a very particular and stylized presentation of herself. De Veaux examines that presentation throughout *Warrior Poet* sometimes exploring the interstices and dissonance between Lorde's self-depiction and her actual life and sometimes demonstrating their unity and integrity.

There are some limitations to this book that are necessary to all autobiography and single book projects. These limitations are not those of de Veaux but suggest important places for future scholarship. In *Warrior Poet*, de Veaux provides basic details about the beginnings of Kitchen Table Press and Lorde's involvement in it, but I believe that there is an important story to be told about that significant press, and I missed not having more about it in this work. Similarly, I read with fascination the conflict between Lorde and *Chrysalis*, a feminist magazine; that story is one that will benefit from feminist historical scholarship and analysis in the future.

There are two significant relationships with women in Lorde's adult life: one with a white woman with whom she spent eighteen years and one with an African-American woman with whom she partnered until she died. De Veaux



includes much about the relationships from a narrative perspective, but a lengthy and in-depth exploration of both of these relationships would be illuminating for both Lorde's work and our broader understandings of lesbian identity and creativity. Finally, the publisher of *Warrior Poet* missed an important opportunity to include a full bibliography of Lorde's work in the book. That oversight is a sorely missed opportunity for scholars and readers alike.

Warrior Poet is an important step for scholarship about Audre Lorde and the constellations of literary, theoretical, and political studies that surround her, including, but not limited to African-American studies, Afro-Caribbean studies, feminist studies, and lesbian studies. Still, there remains much to be done for Lorde's legacy. From this biography, it is clear that there is a substantial corpus of personal and professional correspondence that would be fascinating to feminists and scholars. Private exchanges between Lorde and her publisher at Norton, while recounted in the biography would be excellent reading. Private exchanges that became public such as Lorde's open letter to Mary Daly would also be informative not only for feminist scholars and historians, but also to people continuing the political work of Audre Lorde. *Warrior Poet* in its release begs for future volumes of Lorde's letters. In addition, *Warrior Poet* draws on the journals of Lorde which certainly tantalizes readers and scholars. The compilation and release of Audre Lorde's journals would be welcome insight into her writings and her life.

Outside of these academic points, however, *Warrior Poet* is a great read for lovers of biography and fans of Audre Lorde. It is certain to be cherished by many for years to come.

Another important contribution to feminist scholarship is the release of *Directed by Desire, The Collected Poems of June Jordan* by Copper Canyon Press. Weighing in at 629 pages, this is a compendium of Jordan's work since 1969. As is typical of Jordan, *Directed by Desire* is a diptych: it is not only the story of the development of a poet as her voice evolves and distills in its power and craft but also the story of progressive political struggles that are both thematic and textual elements of Jordan's work.

Reading through *Directed by Desire* is to see the connections that exist across a lifetime of the issues that Jordan cared about. From "The New Pieta: for the Mothers and Children of Detroit," including "On the Murder of Two Human Being Black Men, Denver A. Smith and His Unidentified Brother, at Southern University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, 1972" and "Poem about Police Violence," to the poems of her unpublished collection which appear as the final section of this book, Jordan cares about people and people's lives. Her work as a poet is as central to her identity as her work as an activist.

Jordan wrote many people that have become anthems for progressive movements and that work continued until her death. One of the poems from her final unpublished manuscript is titled, "Poem of Commitment." In it, she writes,

I commit my body and my language
to the sheltering of any Antonio/Tyrone/Valerie/Yunjong
just about to choose his
or her own
name
for the family and the strangers
still not listening
to the great good news
of his or her
own voice

Jordan always has the voice of the people in her work. She captures stories and diction and language to document and bring hope to our lives.

She also uses contemporary voices to critique the world and further her political agenda. Two other poems in the unpublished manuscript are homages to Eminem, turning his racism and homophobia upside down as poet Jordan calls herself the Slim Lady in one and writes for Wen Ho Lee in another.

Jordan's work is substantial and having it all collected in a single volume creates great possibilities for discovery of both her poetic voice and also the history and stories she committed to telling. The final poem of the book could be seen as Jordan's message to the living. Titled, "Poem for Siddhartha Guatama of the Shakyas: the Original Buddha," it is two lines:

You say, "Close your eye to the butterfly!"
I say, "Don't blink!"

Reviewing the weighty books on Lorde and Jordan and reflecting on their importance to me as a poet and writer, I wondered who is writing now that will be the Lorde or Jordan of our future? Lorde's first book, *The First Cities*, came out in 1968 and Jordan's first book, *Who Look at Me*, was in 1969. Those years of the black arts movement were very different than the most recent few years. Moreover, it would be impossible at any time to prognosticate who will be revered and recognized as the caliber of Lorde or Jordan, but three first books by women of color caught my interest in this search for the powerful voices of this moment and our future.

Samiya Bashir is one of those voices.

Where the Apple Falls is her first collection, although she has edited two anthologies and two chapbooks of her work have previously been published. Each poem of *Where the Apple Falls* is strong; in the collection, Bashir demonstrates not only her power with language, but also her ability to write from a variety of vantage points. In the title poem of the collection, Bashir writes as the apple tree,

The first fruit is promised before birth, its branches
tied with sweet butter ribbon. The rest hang heavy
on her chest, growing plump, syrup and pulp pulling
taut skin against the cooling night. In turn harvest
moon leaks gold in the swirling flush of dance aflame.

She needs this feeding, trepid, wanton lust. Each fruit
must be released. She pushes her story, note by note,
pitches crescendo to a rustling backbeat of wizened
harmonies.

If Bashir is comfortable with this traditional poetic diction and conceit, she is just as comfortable writing poems like “Blue Light Basement,” which begins,

when i grow up
i wanna be like traci

wanna huff and puffa like her
wanna move and writhe
be tiny and throw-around-able
bike her yeah like her always

The book transforms itself poem by poem with mastery and control that few poets demonstrate in a first book. *Where the Apple Falls* is large in its scope and content and language. Bashir does not recoil from the conventional poetic tradition, but she does conform it to her vision integrating African myths and contemporary references into her work. *Where the Apple Falls* is an exciting and ample book. As a reader, I am overjoyed about Red Bone Press publishing this book. Small presses have always been essential for lesbian poets. Hopefully, Red Bone Press and Bashir both will have long and vibrant careers.

Mendi Lewis Obadike’s first book, *Armor and Flesh*, was the winner of the 2004 Naomi Long Madgett Poetry Award sponsored by Lotus Press.

What captured my imagination in this book is the unusual diction employed in nearly every poem. Obadike was raised outside of Nashville, Tennessee and the poems echo with southern diction, including some explicit mentions as in the poem, "A Far Cry," where she notes, "A smile,/a shuffle, a voice I lace with *please* and a twang." Yet, that southern sensibility is only a part of the diction that packs the power of these poems.

In the poem, "Don't Get It Twisted," Obadike writes, "She loves hardness./The slick shell/of things. The sex/of bravado, especially on girls." In a later poem, "Tell Me This Is Because We Remember Long," Obadike concludes the poem,

I have a foot-washing Baptist's mouth. Her speak is a seed in it.

Tell me our foremothers chose this way, this humbling
of self before sister. Tell me no relic shackles our tongues
and this rite is older than chains.

Obadike captures language and distills it to its essence revealing itself new and interesting. That is, of course, what all good poets should do, but her language pulls and compresses in new ways that I haven't read prior to *Armor and Flesh*.

Obadike's poems also tell stories that I cherish. In talking with a white woman in the poem, "Across the Table from a Hole," she writes,

I tell her I'm thinking
of growing mine back.
But at that length it doesn't lay right. . . .
The words morph into gestures.
She turns to expose the grin
devouring her body:
What? Is it too black?

It's cute how she says
black
Like a white girl.

The poem continues until Obadike delivers the final gotcha line. You'll have to read it to understand.

Sherry Quan Lee's book, *Chinese Blackbird*, is a fascinating narration of how race is lived in the United States today. Born to a Black mother and a

Chinese father, much of Sherry Quan Lee's life was spent understanding race as she lived it in the United States. In the opening poem of the collection, she writes, "I am pregnant with myself/gestation: fifty years." She comes to poetry later in life, but with the emotional power and language of a convert.

Quan Lee describes her life, "Like a magnolia/—whose sepals never fuse—/my life is disparate/here a Black/community,//there an Asian/com-munity,//everywhere, white." *Chinese Blackbird* is the narrative of Quan Lee's life and her exploration of race, gender, love, and marriage. It is fierce and tender, angry and understanding, hurt and honest.

Some might call the book, not a poetry collection, but a textual gathering of one woman's life. Indeed, the poems are accented by photographs of Quan Lee and her family and her birth certificate. They are important visual moves in the collection, adding connection for the reader to these poems. Many of the poems are written in the style of prose poems, such as "Magnolia Café," "Mother's and Mine," and "I Ask My Husband if He Thought I was a Lesbian and He Said Yes." This density of language and narrative builds throughout the book to Quan Lee's final assertion of herself as an autonomous Chinese/Black/Woman in "I Am the Snake I Feared," she writes,

Sometimes I think I'm whispering
when you complain I'm hissing.

I'm sorry if my wounds are noisy, but

I haven't left. I'm not leaving.
Only my thoughts wander

I am home, for the first time
in fifty-four years, venomless.

Quan Lee's poems and this book, *Chinese Blackbird*, are the examples of the space and legacy that Jordan and Lorde dreamed when they wrote their truth on the page. Sherry Quan Lee, Mendi Lewis Obadike and Samiya Bashir are three new voices weaving their stories, their words, their ideas into the poetic fabric continued by June Jordan and Audre Lorde from all of the foremothers who have written and spoken the truth before them.

Contributors' Notes

Sandia Belgrade: Sandia has published poems and translations for 30 years herself. Her poetry book *The Running Shape of Wisdom* will be published late Fall 2006, and she's hoping to find a composer for her libretto on Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz.

JEB (Joan E. Biren): When I began documenting the lesbian community, I had no idea what it would feel like over 30 years later when so many of the people I portrayed can no longer be photographed because they have passed on. Looking at the images, I think about how these vibrant, powerful, beautiful women changed my life and the course of our society. I am honored to have known them and I am glad that they agreed to be photographed, so that I can give these images to you. If you want to see more of my work, you can find it in my two volumes of photography: *EYE TO EYE: PORTRAITS OF LESBIANS* (1979) and *MAKING A WAY: LESBIANS OUT FRONT* (1987) and in a number of films distributed by Frameline.org. My work also appears in many books and films by others and my photographs are in the permanent collections of the Library of Congress, the Schleisinger Library at Harvard University, the Academy of Arts in Berlin, Germany, and the National Civil Rights Museum, Memphis.

Cathy Cade has been photographing women at work, union women, lesbian mothering, and lesbian feminists in the San Francisco Bay Area since the early 1970s. She has a business helping people tell their stories using their photographs. She lives in Oakland and is working on an East Bay Lesbian Herstory project. Visit www.CathyCade

Patricia R. Cardozo is a MA candidate in Women's Studies at San Diego State University. She is finishing a thesis titled "*Representations of Vietnamese Women in Film During a Time of War.*" She currently teaches English at Grossmont College in El Cajon, California and Women's Studies as a Graduate Teaching Associate at San Diego State University.

Chrystos, writer and Native Rights activist, won the Audre Lorde International Poetry competition in 1994 and the Sappho Award of Distinction from the Astraea National Action Foundation in 1995.

Tee A. Corinne (1943 – 2006): A regular contributor to *Sinister Wisdom*, Tee Corinne's artwork has been identified with the journal since her

cover and poster for issue #3 in 1977. She was the author of one novel, three collections of short stories, and several poetry chapbooks. Her most recent book of art, *Intimacies: Photos by Tee A. Corinne*, published by Last Gasp of San Francisco, was a Lambda Literary Award finalist. A gifted and versatile artist, Tee worked with photography, line drawing, paint, sculpture, ceramics and printing, and she also published erotic fiction and poetry and reviews. Favorite cover artist for lesbian publisher Naiad, Corinne's work is found on bookshelves across the Lesbian Nation.

Nyla Dartt was born in Berkeley, California and was raised in Oakland at 30th Street and Telegraph. Attending San Francisco State University during the Black Student Strike she belonged to the SDS movement which propelled her into feminism (how many mimeographed newsletters were run off during each SDS meeting by the women in the back of the room??), she participated in the Glide Church consciousness raising group trainings, she helped with the development of the Women's Health Collective, which went on to become the Women's clinic at SF General Hospital. Over the years she has worked in the field of mental health, and has written many professional articles, leading groups for women whose sons have died of AIDS. Nyla has been watching the diminishment of the ethics and principals of the women's movement fade away.

Billie Dee served as the 2000-2001 Poet Laureate of the National Library Service. She completed her doctorate at the University of California at Irvine, with post-graduate studies at UCLA. Her work has appeared in *Squaw Valley Writers' Review*, *Spillway*, *Weber Studies*, *Echo 681*, *Poetry Southeast*, and other journals. She has published four chapbooks, the last, *Hooves of the Wild White Mare*, through Burning House Press, 2005, and is presently shopping her first full-length book.

tatiana de la tierra (Villavicencio, Colombia, 1961): Born in Villavicencio, Colombia and raised in Miami, Florida, tatiana de la tierra is a bilingual bicultural writer whose work focuses on identity, sexuality, lesbian phenomenology, and South American memory and reality. de la tierra has a Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing from the University of Texas at El Paso and a Master of Library Science from the University at Buffalo. She is the 2002 co-winner of the New California Media Award for International Affairs and the 2001 creative non-fiction winner of the Just Buffalo Literary Awards. She is the author of a bilingual book of lesbian poetic prose, *For the Hard Ones: A Lesbian Phenomenology / Para las duras: Una fenomenología*

lesbiana (Calaca/Chibcha Press, 2002). She has a chapbook of prose dedicated to pleasure, *Porcupine Love and Other Tales from My Papaya* (Chibcha Press, 2003) and a Spanish-language poetry and song chapbook, *Pintame una mujer peligrosa* (*Paint Me a Dangerous Woman*, Chibcha Press, 2005). De la tierra has done readings in Cuba, Canada, Puerto Rico, Mexico, Colombia, Argentina, and throughout the United States. Her writings have been published in anthologies such as *Bend, Don't Shatter: Poets on the Beginning of Desire* (2004), *Without a Net: The Female Experience of Growing Up Working Class* (2004), *This Bridge We Call Home* (2002), *The Power of Language/El poder de la palabra* (2001), *Gynomite: Fearless Feminist Porn* (2000), *Pillowtalk Two* (2000), *Latino Heretics* (1999), *Women on the Verge* (1999), *Chasing the American Dyke Dream* (1998), and *The Femme Mystique* (1995), and in periodicals such as *Aztlán*, *El Andar*, *Criticas*, *La Calaca Review*, *Mid-American Review*, *Flyway Literary Review*, *Cimarron Review*, *The Calaca Review*, *Perra!*, *Outlines*, *Tropic Miami Herald Sunday Magazine*, *New Times*, and *Curve*. She was co-founder and editor of the Latina lesbian magazines *esto no tiene nombre* (1991-1994) and *conmoción* (1995-1996). She is co-founder of El Salón de Belleza/The Beauty Salon, a creative writing collective based in Buffalo, Nueva York. She is currently a librarian at the University at Buffalo.

Julie R. Enszer is a writer and lesbian activist living in Maryland. She has previously been published in *Iris: A Journal About Women*, *Room of One's Own*, *Long Shot*, the *Web Del Sol Review*, and the *Jewish Women's Literary Annual*. You can learn more about her work at www.JulieREnszer.com.

Roxanna N. Fiamma: I was born in Denver, Colorado in 1943; Italian American (Olive Race), grew up working class. I came out as a Lesbian in the late 60s and as a Separatist in the mid 70s. I taught Physical Education in Denver until I retired in 1993. I live in northern California where I enjoy life with my Dear Companion Dog, Phaedra and Land-Mate, Fran.

Robin Fre: I am a 53 year old lesbian feminist having come out at a time when that label was new. I've been lesbian since age 19 and it always was just who I am. I am also writer, witch, tarot card reader, quilt-maker, fabric artist, now disabled with Multiple Sclerosis. My play was "Quest of Blue Elf" which I wrote, produced, and directed at the Stonington Opera House in Maine where I lived for over twenty years. I have writings published in *Hot Wire*, *Womanspirit*, and *Lesbian Connection* and now *Sinister Wisdom*.

Pat Gargaetas: I am PGar, photographing since 1967, working nearly exclusively in black and white until 1990, doing portraiture, landscapes, urbanscapes, shapescapes, bodyscapes. Using color, I photographed lesbians' home altars, the subject of a Masters thesis in Anthropology completed in 1993. In 1996, I escaped urban environs with my life, if not my health, and for the next nine years photographed my cat, the birds, my garden/shrine, the ever-changing daily views from the Ledge on the Edge, 1600 feet up on Kaluna Cliff, Lost Coast, Turtle Island. In 2001, I began learning PhotoShop which gave me back photography, lost to chemical sensitivities in the 90s. I came down from the Ledge last year and am Loose on Turtle Island, gleefully mining images from my files of numerous negatives, scanning projects including the Altar Project, creating CafePress image and commentary shops, practicing new tech skills with a digital camera, and generally trying to fulfill a mission to remain a practicing social irritant.

Jae Haggard: 25 years ago when I left my first Homestead I looked for a name I could grow into—Haggard, she who is strong, independent and makes her life with wimmin. Our Lesbian community and the Earth have provided the opportunities to do that and more. I've also learned about Connection. I am a blessed woman.

Kirsten Hearn is a 50 year old blind lesbian feminist activist from London in the UK. She has been involved in women's, lesbian and gay and disability politics for twenty-five years. She is the founder of a number of radical UK-based community organisations including Sisters Against Disablement, Lesbians and Gays Unite in Disability and Feminist Audio Books. These days, she is a non-executive for boards that run London's Police and Transport Services and is a coach, trainer and author. Read some of her writings on her web site at www.wholeworldldesign.co.uk.

Denise M. Hise continues to live and learn in Maryland.

Alison J. Laurie is a New Zealander of mixed European and Maori heritage. She has been active in lesbian, gay and feminist politics since the 1960s, and has published on lesbian history and politics, including as co-author, with Julie Glamuzina, of *Parker and Hulme, a lesbian view*, on the 1954 teenage murder case, later the subject of the film *Heavenly Creatures*. She is editor of *Lesbian Studies in Aotearoa/New Zealand*, and with her long-term partner Linda Evans, co-editor of *Outlines, lesbian and gay histories of Aotearoa*. A founder of new Zealand's first lesbian organisation SHE, and of the first lesbian maga-

zine Circle, which she discusses in her article, she and Linda Evans were also the founders of New Zealand's first lesbian radio programme, which they hosted for over 16 years. A late academic, she is now Programme Director of Gender and Women's Studies at Victoria University of Wellington, where she teaches queer and lesbian studies and courses on oral history.

Jacqueline Elizabeth Letalien: After living in the urbaness of Oakland and San Francisco for twenty years, she now resides with the cat Fur in the wilderness of Humboldt County California. She writes a monthly column for the L-Word, an Arcata lesbian publication. (L-Word website: www.lword.mamajudy.com/index.htm)

Lauren Levey, having had a variety of careers due to fundamental unfitness for office life, is currently self employed and living in New York's Hudson Valley, where she rides motorcycles as much and as fast as possible; and tries to make trouble for patriarchy and community for lesbian feminists as and when opportunity presents. She has now slightly outlived her grandmother Fanny, and is in excellent health.

Bea Loud: I'm a 66 year old dyke activist of WASP and US American privilege who misses her Loud sisters and is re-learning to scream.

Ona Marae is a forty something year old disabled lesbian who lives in Denver, Colorado. She has worked with battered women and children for the past ten years and is writing her second novel. She is a LGBT and disability rights activist. She has written non-fiction for years, including writing for LIC (Lesbians in Colorado) in the early 90s and editing a newsletter for a battered women's shelter. She writes to express herself and to celebrate the magnificence and power she finds in the women in her life.

Janet Mason is the author of three chapbooks of poetry, including *When I Was Straight* from Insight To Riot Press. Her poetry and prose have been published in more than sixty anthologies and journals, including previous issues of *Sinister Wisdom*; the *Exquisite Corpse*, the *Brooklyn Review*, *The Advocate*, and the *Harrington Lesbian Fiction Quarterly*. She teaches creative writing at Temple University in Philadelphia. Visit her author site and lit-zine at www.amusejanetmason.com.

Pat Meller is a senior technical writer, now free-lancing, and **Chris Roerden**, a long-time book editor, is the author of *Don't Murder Your Mystery*.

Ruth Mountaingrove: I lived one third of 30 years in Oregon and two thirds in California. In Oregon there was *WomanSpirit*, *The Blatant Image*, the Ovulars (photography workshops) traveling, and separatism. In California there was “Through the Eyes of Women,” a weekly radio program and two masters from Humboldt State University and little separatism.

Merril Mushroom: I am an old-timey dyke and have been a frequent contributor to early lesbian periodicals. An excerpt from my sci-fi novel *Daughters of Khaton* (Lace Publications, 1987) appears in the first issue of *Sinister Wisdom*.

Marilyn Murphy (1932 – 2004), a radical Lesbian feminist activist, helped found Califa, a Lesbian feminist camp that was known for its workshops on race and class. She also helped found the San Fernando Valley Rape Crisis Services Center. She was the author of *Are You Girls Traveling Alone?* a collection of some of the columns she wrote for *Lesbian News* published in Los Angeles.

Chase Nascent: i am a 21 year old pagan dyke who discovered the joys of feminism & the lesbian community in my teens... i would prowl about used book stores in search of back issues of sinister wisdom, inspired by these woman who came before me. i revel in the feminist & lesbian literature of the 1970s and sometimes believe i was born in the wrong decade. slam poetry has been my passion ever since i discovered such a medium existed - i live in a community rich with lesbian poets and am grateful everyday for the support & freedom to slam my words outta me.

Marge Nelson is a seventy-five year old radical feminist dyke who lives in San Francisco. She’s active in OLOC – Old Lesbians Organizing for Change, the History Committee of the Women’s Building and a Women’s Committee of the GLBT Historical Society.

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

Kit Quan is a Chinese American immigrant from Hong Kong who lives and works in San Francisco. When she is not hard at work at the Asian Women's Shelter, you can find her doing tai chi, biking, reading loner novels, making Vietnamese yogurt, seeing indie films, and hiding out in a nature spot not far from the city.

Tania Ramalho is a feminist teacher and scholar who lives in Columbus, Ohio.

Juanita Ramos is the pseudonym for Juanita Diaz-Cotto, Ph.D She describes herself as a Black Puerto Rican, lesbian feminist socialist. She is author of *CHICANA LIVES AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE: Voices from El Barrio* (2006), *GENDER, ETHNICITY, AND THE STATE: Latina and Latino Prison Politics* (1996), and editor of *COMPAÑERAS: Latina Lesbians (An Anthology)*, *Lesbianas latinoamericanas* (3rd ed., 2004). She is a co-founder of Las "Buenas Amigas," New York City's Latina lesbian group and currently an associate professor of sociology, women's studies, and Latin American and Caribbean Studies at SUNY-Binghamton, New York.

Ida VSW Red is celebrating thirty years in our amazing, beautiful, artistic San Francisco Bay Area lesbian feminist community.

Lilith Rogers is a longtime writer, gardener, and lover of women—especially the latter. She has recently published a CD-Rom, paper-free book of her poems and photographs (taken by herself and Sun Bell) called *Persimmons and Other Lesbian Erotica*. To order, contact her at Lilithrogers1@juno.com. She is currently performing a one-woman show about Rachel Carson. Website: www.Rachelcarsonshow.com

Esther D. Rothblum is Professor of Women's Studies at San Diego State University and editor of the *Journal of Lesbian Studies*. Her research and writing have focused on lesbian relationships and mental health.

Jean Sirius: In New York City, in 1981, Jean Sirius and Cara Vaughn, her lover, turned down Tee Corinne's proposal that they pose for her, nude. Corinne immediately determined to return to the west coast, where women were more accommodating. The southern Oregon women's community therefore owes Sirius a debt of gratitude. Vaughn died in 1997, and Sirius is an artist, writer, photographer, and storyteller who lives in Oakland, Cali-

fornia. She maintained a weblog during Corinne's last months, which can be found at http://jeansirius.com/TeeACorinne/tee_update.html.

Renate Stendhal, Ph.D. is a German born, Paris educated writer, writing coach and counselor with a private practice in San Francisco and Pt. Reyes Station. Among her publications are *True Secrets of Lesbian Desire: Keeping Sex Alive in Long-Term Relationships* and the Lambda Award-winning photobiography *Gertrude Stein in Words and Pictures*. She is working on a Paris memoir.

Jean Taylor loves and lives as a radical lesbian feminist in Melbourne, Australia. She is eternally grateful that the WLM happened along when it did and reckons that coming out as a lesbian was one of the best things she ever did.

rainbow williams, a found objects artist, lived at pagoda community for twenty years, edited a monthly newsletter in orlando for eight years, participated in the Peace Walk gainseville to key west in 1984, taught art and worked as architectural designer until retirement. now runs Riverview, a non-commercial gallery and salon in st. Augustine.

Xiaoxin Zeng received her BA in English Language and Literature from Beijing Second Foreign Language University. She is now a first-year graduate student in Women's Studies at San Diego State University. Her research interests include gender, family structures, marriage and divorce, culture, women and work, social change, love and power.

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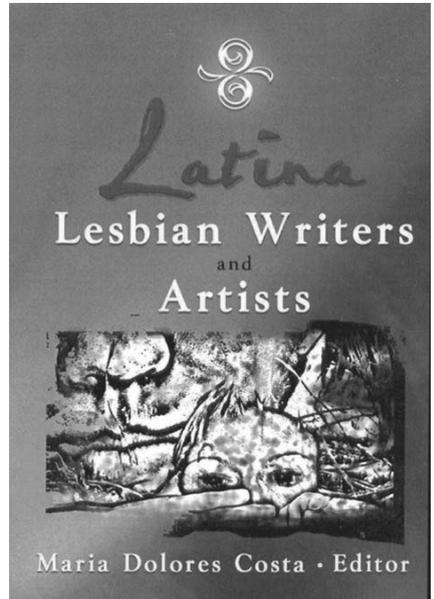
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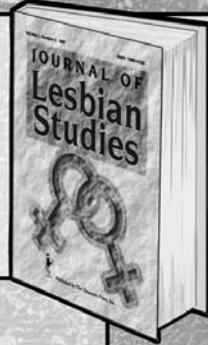
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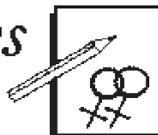
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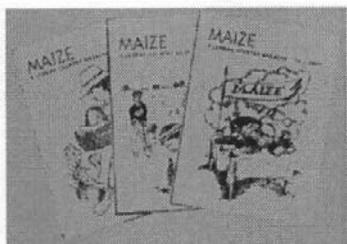
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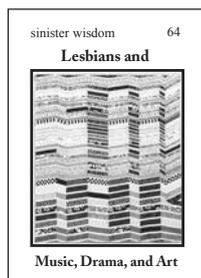
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#71 Open Issue: Forthcoming

#72 Two Spirit Women of First Nations Deadline: March 1, 2007
Guest Editors: Chrystos (Menominee) and Sunny Birdstone (Ktunaxa)

Colonialization has marginalized Indigenous women (as well as men), making Native Dykes almost completely invisible. We celebrate the survival of Two Spirit women of First Nations in this issue. Submissions may be in any format - taped interviews, dialogues, as well as fiction, poetry, etc. Please respect certain definitions, which have often been violated – ie, we ask for work from lesbians who are Native in this lifetime only, recognized by their tribes or communities (although a BIA number is not required) and willing to use their name rather than a pseudonym (this is to help prevent submissions of non-authentic work). We define Indigenous Dykes as coming from the Americas, as well as the Pacific (Hawaii, New Zealand, Australia), with a land base (ie. reservation, rancho, etc.) and a tribal affiliation (Maori, Koori, Cree, etc.). Government recognition of tribal status is not necessary (ie. we recognize the Duwamish). We are particularly interested in stories from dykes who were in residential schools, Elders, incarcerated, & in honor of those who have passed on (Barbara Cameron NationShield, Smiley Hillaire). Megwetch.

Send submissions for #72 only to: sbirdstone@hotmail.com or to Chrystos & S. Birdstone, 3250 S 77th #8, Tacoma, WA 98409

#73 Utopia Deadline: July 1, 2007
Editor: Fran Day

Hopes for a Utopian Lesbian Universe. Dreams of an ideal world. Yearnings for something “beyond what is now called possible” (Audre Lorde).

Send submissions for #73 only to fran@sonic.net or Fran Day, P. O. Box 1180, Sebastopol, CA 95473.

#74 Activism Latina Lesbian Style! Deadline: October 1, 2007
Guest Editor: Juanita Ramos

Chicana/Latina/Latin American lesbians living all over the world are invited to submit material. We want to know how our sisters define what lesbian activism means to them in whatever way they see fit. Details at www.sinisterwisdom.org.

Send submissions for #74 only to: Juanita Ramos, P. O. Box 678 W.V.S., Binghamton, NY 13905-0678. Email: companeras1994@yahoo.com