

*Lesbian  
Jottings*  
1970-2010

by  
*Sharon Deevey*







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## Credits

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## Dedication

for Joan

on the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary  
of our first kiss

with thanks, as always,  
for being there when I was ready



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## Introduction

When I felt overwhelmed, I wrote.

When I felt thrilled, I wrote. At first I wrote in the laundromat, on scraps of paper bags, or on semi-blank pages from a magazine left lying by the dryers. I started to write in 1970, the year I came out as a lesbian. My life was full of shock, and at first, of secrets.

Until then I had been the most ordinary of girls, the oldest child in a middle class, Republican, New England family. Except for the frequent moves for my father's work-- and being the last in town to get television -- we were the most mainstream family imaginable. Mom was

at home. Dad wore a gray suit and a maroon-striped tie, and rode the train to work. We three girls were dropped off on Sundays at the nearest Protestant church. My parents saw religion as culture, not faith, and chose convenience over conviction.

As a child I read constantly, including at age eight, *The Diary of Anne Frank*, which I found among my grandmother's books. At age 14, I went to Northfield School for Girls, a boarding school in Massachusetts, where I reveled in daily chapel and, like every student in the school, took my turn sharing the domestic work of cooking, cleaning, and gardening. At age 17, I won a scholarship

as an exchange student for a year at Malvern Girls' College in England. At age 19, I went to Swarthmore College near Philadelphia.

At Northfield, I first saw the films of the Nazi concentration camps, and in England, I watched Jack Kennedy back the Russians out of Cuba. At Swarthmore, I painted run-down houses in nearby Chester, and marched on the mall in D.C. against the Vietnam War. The first year after college, I taught a one-room school in eastern Kentucky, and married my college sweetheart.

But nothing prepared me for 1970. That year, I volunteered in the Women's Liberation Office, a block from our

apartment, and taught part-time at Sidwell Friends School. My husband worked at the Institute for Policy Studies, and on Sundays we played softball with his colleagues, who were intellectuals and radicals all. The adults we admired had all been assassinated: Jack and Bobby Kennedy, Martin Luther King. In Ohio, at Kent State, the National Guard gunned down students just barely younger than we were.

On April 20, 1970, I first made love with a woman. At first that fact seemed no more life changing than anything that came before. But when I came down off the high of coming out, I no longer fit anywhere anymore.

The time of secrecy was brief. I was bubbling over with joy, amazement, and naiveté. Then so quickly, my parents were appalled, my employers eager to let me go, and the Furies Collective urgently purging those of us they labeled middle class. I wasn't sure who I was, where I lived, or how I would support myself. Within the culture of lesbian-feminist non-monogamy, I wasn't even sure which woman I loved most or who loved me. And so I wrote, in short lines I called poetry -- love poems, lust poems, and "who-the-hell-am-I?" poems.

By 1978, I had moved to Cleveland to go to nursing school. I took a course called "Management of Self", which

required keeping a journal. Beginning that year, I kept all my jottings: my notes from 1970, and commentaries on my jobs, learning, and lovers.

I got more organized and wrote consistently in little notebooks I carried in my purse or pocket. Then I stapled each set of small pages, jotted over tea or between home visits, into spiral bound notebooks, one per year. I wrote when I needed to cry, or cuss someone out.

In 2008, at age 63, I joined a Writing-as-Healing group led by Jeannetta Holliman at the Gillie Senior Center in Columbus, Ohio. Jeannetta recommended I read a 1999 book called *Harvesting Your Journals* by Deerheart and Strickland. On

my bed I laid out thirty spiral-bound colored-cover notebooks, stuffed with little pages. Most of the writing was narrative, letters I wrote to myself about how to manage life in its increasing complexity: not just lovers, lost lovers, and politics; not just a job or two, but a career, and career changes; not just the roller coaster of emotion, but the insistent malfunctions of the body.

From these journals, I have reached for the words in shortest format, the poems jotted at emotional peaks or valleys: the words about desire and hatred that no proper New England girl should ever feel, much less reveal. Growing up, I learned first and foremost what was proper. I

learned about courage, which my family called grace under pressure. I expected I would have five children and drive a station wagon with pseudo-wood paneling on the sides. I knew little of the variety of ways humans make love and families.

My coming out surprised me as much as it surprised those around me, as lesbian life in 1970 was usually hidden within the mainstream culture. I could find nothing in the public library to read about women who loved women. In the National Archives and the Library of Congress where I reviewed the historical papers of women who lived in pairs, I found no details, no maps, for how to live the



suddenly more complex life I had jumped into with such delight.

The void of information inspired me to keep writing, to save my jottings, and eventually to make plans to donate my notebooks to the Lesbian Herstory Archives after my death. I did not until recently consider sharing such personal experiences during my lifetime. Those of us who have been lesbian activists have worked hard to persuade the world that lesbian women are not sinners, not criminals, and not mentally ill. In the process, we sometimes hide our very ordinary pain and sadness, fearing our truths will contribute to homophobia, and be used against us, or against other queer

folk like us. But we too are only human, with our share of relationship problems and physical illness, as well as, if we are lucky, our portion of joy and delight. I am glad be aging now in an era of emerging LGBT pride, openness, and publication, where I have the option to tell the truth to anyone eager to listen.





**1970's**



thoughts on traveling  
while the bus broke down

suspended  
in between  
Boston and  
Hartford and nowhere  
memories mixed with fantasy  
where are we going?

sleeping and dreaming  
watching, awake  
where are you?  
who am I?  
to travel  
is to multiply life  
by itself

I think of you fragmented  
a part of your body  
a moment  
a word

I cannot hold your wholeness  
except in your name  
when I say it out loud

tell me, my sister in struggle, my love ---  
when even the greyhounds break down  
when I am not afraid of poems  
when you and I are not afraid to love  
can the revolution be far behind?

for Joan

sometimes when I am exhausted  
I half-wish for a serene and steady love  
without the pain  
without the struggle  
when I was ordinary  
I could love and be loved like that  
and be satisfied

but that was before  
women began to make a revolution  
before we saw we had to fight—  
to change, to love, even to survive

I have told myself that loving you  
is like living on top of a volcano  
but that is wrong  
it is like, and is  
living in the midst of the revolution  
raging, hurting, fighting fury

without the rage we cannot  
destroy the past  
without the joy we cannot  
build the future

you are the rage and the joy  
the anger and laughter  
you have freed me from  
an ordinary half-life  
of plastic Amerikan serenity



because of you  
because of us  
I am a revolutionary woman

magic quilt

magic quilt  
déjà vu  
we could have a women's center  
a bulletin  
why, if every woman  
paid one dollar  
we'd be rich  
and every month  
EK sends one dollar

we could share the work  
we could have  
another meeting  
pass around the yellow sheet  
“do people feel  
we could do that?”

and in the pause  
GB whispers  
“am I a lesbian?”  
hell, darling  
I don't know  
that's what I wonder  
about you

“so are you a lesbian?” you ask  
yes, I am, and so are you  
but still we're different  
if I knew how or why

we could sort out  
many things

it's interesting  
that here you would touch me  
and I wouldn't want it  
I'm not very comfortable  
here in this office  
once my home

how did I get  
from here-there  
to here-now?

the details of the office  
miss the essence  
how out of meetings  
did we learn to love?

how from a renewed conquest  
of the details  
can more of us learn to love?

what if you said  
out loud, proud and strong  
I am wondering  
if I am a lesbian  
could you please  
run an office  
and put out a bulletin  
to help me  
find the answer?

friends and strangers  
fourteen women  
my new life, sitting in the room  
of my old life

but maybe almost as much  
has happened in the lives  
of all these women  
once my sisters  
now mostly distant

information  
ennui  
communication  
“what really is  
the substance  
of D.C. Women’s Liberation?”

would each group  
please report  
OOB, Maryland, abortion  
the lesbians report  
we are learning to love

before Chincoteague

wrestling on the kitchen floor  
is crazy  
I want to go away  
with you

last night  
I let myself  
have fantasies  
and learned  
to touch myself

there was music rhythm  
I danced  
and saw myself  
small slim woman  
moving to the accent  
of your drum  
tall full-breasted woman  
I danced, you drummed  
until we ached  
with the dancing drumming  
drumming desire  
and fell together  
in the rhythm  
dancing drumming  
with our bodies  
against each other  
with each other  
together each other  
together

## revolution

what if we turn out to be  
just like the daffodils  
and the old communist party

awakening, blooming  
bursting forth

life force  
yellow spring vision  
red communist vision  
lavender gay vision  
joy, strength, struggle

fading from the effort  
dying inevitably

daffodils  
and the revolutionary element  
part of the seasons  
the cycles  
revolution really means  
round and round

our notion  
that we will win  
is illusion

spring will come again  
who will come after us?

one night

Annabelle  
so little I know of you

milk any time of day  
coffee, very sweet  
with lots of cream

skilled hands  
and a businesswoman's mind  
ex-lover of my ex-lover

you say  
a woman loved you  
with confidence  
and made you feel good

I reach for your body  
pretending confidence  
and find you beautiful





**1980's**



thanksgiving

my nurse  
is my cornucopia

when I am  
weary, or  
hurting,  
or frightened  
I turn to her

and from  
her bookshelves  
her file drawers  
her computer  
her own life  
she pours forth  
to help me

try this  
read this  
trust yourself

I hear you, I've been there

and suddenly  
through the exhaustion  
of my latest effort

I see, I celebrate  
the harvest of my life

an everyday shero

the self-doubting shero feels like a fraud  
she'll always tell you she's fine  
when in fact she's a mess

obsessed with lust, her dead cat  
and her lesbian cause  
she enters grantsmanship contests  
she'll never win  
instead of working for money  
then buys books and more books  
to console herself  
for failure after failure

she indulges her rescue fantasies  
wishing she alone  
could save nursing  
from its anti-feminist  
history, rigidity, and animal research

“mid-life irresponsibility”  
conclude two different counselors  
her numerous friendships  
seem tenuous at best

some days  
the everyday shero  
struggles against self-pity

to regain her vision

homosexual panic

I saw  
the lust light  
in your golden eyes

my sudden wet ache  
menaced  
all I had arranged  
so neatly

## public display

you did not flinch from me on High Street  
when I reached to take your hand

it seemed so easy, so natural  
I wondered even,  
had you reached for mine

you let me claim you, lesbian lover  
on the streets of Columbus, Ohio  
flaunting a kiss at the watchful eye  
of the security camera

such a thrill of pride

today I wonder, did I withdraw in bed  
from my long-term lovers  
in part, not on purpose  
when each withdrew from me in public

men, in contrast, allow themselves to pee  
in parking lot corners

tears of pent-up outrage, hurt, gratitude  
fall on the folded laundry

I had forgotten  
you joked of kissing in public  
in January  
outside the Red Door Tavern

paper napkin

give me  
a goddamn piece of paper

such a roller coaster  
of fear, despair, hope, and joy

if this  
is being in love  
it's no wonder I avoided it  
and married my friends

the last breakfast

I.

of the 20 knives  
I picked one  
that looked vaguely more familiar  
maybe it lived in my drawer  
while I lived with a previous love

oh, no, she says, that's mine  
and offers instead

canned kidney beans  
and the Tender Vittles  
of our dead cat

I feel pissed and hopeless  
trying to divide possessions  
I always ignored anyway  
yet see each utensil, each can  
as coins I could save  
for a new computer

we chatter, and weep  
without confrontation  
and eat too many sausages

I think I have no right  
to offer comfort  
then can stand it no longer  
I hold her  
and ask permission to tell her



it was my best season so far  
she loved me better  
than the others before  
we were companions and equals  
and I did hope for forever  
we gave away the duplicates

she is clear now  
she wants a forever woman  
to share her home  
and we both acknowledge  
this happened now  
only rather than later  
that I would have balked  
on the threshold of buying a house

I know no explanation  
my heart wandered  
I crave, depend on change

my dread of crime  
and chronic illness  
now in abeyance  
I am eager for time  
and living alone

I imagine, aging  
renting an acre, building an A-frame  
on the land of my new lover  
a place to return  
after traveling  
to the ample bosoms  
of women who love me

to the one I love now  
who never will ask  
that I love her exclusively  
way too late it is for me  
to love anyone exclusively

## II.

we make progress  
packing together  
our old side-by-side  
friendship habits  
remind us, we still care

suddenly, off the phone  
she is sobbing  
I'm sure my punishment  
has happened  
someone important is dead

no, no it is only that  
she told her mother that I'm leaving  
and her mother, who supposedly doesn't  
know  
is for once appropriate  
supportive without prying  
offering to visit

## III.

she says she will miss my parents

who gave her  
lesbian validation  
as their daughter's lover

eventually she asks to help me  
carry all the stuff  
to my new place  
and offers three of the knives  
we plan how  
to lend each other camping equipment

my friend, now my ex  
I need your friendship  
and my lover, new lover  
when they put the knife to you tomorrow  
let it be a healing skillful knife

in my own way  
I will love you both  
for my forever

driving to Logan

leaving the city  
I watch the seasons change  
along the road  
that takes me to you

the blue eyes of chickory  
among the tow-headed grasses  
in the June morning light

the shimmering green intensity  
of full summer  
with tall purple accents  
whose name I do not know

the emergent gold  
and startling ruby sumac  
of early autumn

I greet the rogue tree  
solitary on the high horizon  
as I turn off the highway

eager for you  
I take in the energy  
of sun and wind  
and roadside weeds

I feel the healing rhythms  
of country guitars  
the seasons, and your touch

graphic arts

I try to tell you  
how it feels  
when you make love to me

I tell you  
I see post-orgasmic images

rose buds opening  
time-lapsed  
under your fingertips

Japanese gardens  
delicate and tough  
pale silks and water-flowing paintings  
of flowers and branching

the Smithsonian merry-go-round  
colors of childhood summer  
a slow motion musical whirl  
of riding up and down  
on a ceramic horse

what do I feel?  
ache and ecstasy  
reaching and release  
tumbling urgent wanting

as I move into a rhythm  
focusing  
under your mouth  
against your hand

pressing against  
the pressure of your body

do this to me, woman  
keep this building  
aching joy  
going

let me hear  
the intake of your breath

let me feel the sure  
soft hard eager touch  
of your strong fingers

let me taste and smell  
the scent of our dripping lust  
damp on the nipple of your full breast  
in my mouth

more, baby, more  
god, oh, god, don't stop

til, yes, now, I spill over  
the liquid slide  
of coming,  
weeping, weeping

I reach to find your face,  
your eyes,  
to connect again  
returning from the crashing somewhere  
else

of orgasm  
to hear you say, in words,  
I love you

I lie across your abdomen  
and whimper with the wonder  
of continuing aftershocks

I savor the exhaustion  
the re-quickening of desire  
wanting  
to plunge my mouth  
into your wetness

now, woman, I want  
your turn

## Mexico

while you are gone  
I see that the threads  
of our separate lives  
are not tightly interwoven

I manage very well  
for even without you  
the fabric of my life is rich and varied

a textured pattern of  
women  
creative work  
and the slow  
healing pattering  
of spring break

we are not  
two halves of a whole cloth  
torn asunder

rather, you are a missing thread  
a single strand  
in my life's complexity

but  
like a stocking  
with a run in it

your glaring absence  
distracts me from the rest



hanging in

the sparkling enjoyment  
of our early romance  
has ended

we meet for lunch  
in public places  
we speak as awkwardly  
as estranged family  
avoiding the pain between us  
hesitant to acknowledge  
what we have lost  
confused about  
the how and why it happened

I cling to joy  
to sweet appreciation  
of our time together

I fear most  
the pollution of our memories  
as we fight our way  
toward redefinition

you will always be

the one  
I wanted and pursued  
the first one I loved  
in mutual recovery

the one who took my hand  
and helped me  
storm from the confines  
of my closet

the one who eased me  
into fullest pleasure  
the one for whom  
I wrote a million words—  
in all, a process  
that delighted me

you taught me  
showed me  
more than any other  
how to hear each other  
how to comfort, how to care

but now there is no comfort

I wait, at your request  
with fading patience

I feel the cold cloud  
of distance, irritation  
and distrust between us

the irony is  
I learned from you  
not to take avoidance  
and unhappiness  
for granted

another August

these days  
I think of love  
as light

an energy force in nature

a gift  
given differently  
over time  
to us all

energy that varies  
in amount and kind

the coziness of glowing coals  
the fierce fiery power of the sun

steady or explosive  
flickering unpredictably  
fading out only  
when rigidly boxed

reappearing  
without warning  
wherever there is life



**1990's**



top dog

the woman in charge  
reminds me  
of a costly steak knife

with a sleek handle  
tawny and smooth  
and a glinting blade  
sharpened long ago  
on an unknown steel

when she is on your side  
she is quick, accurate  
powerful in a few strokes

and you think  
thank god, I have this resource

when you disagree  
(as many do)

her strength  
becomes a weapon  
sheathed from sight  
as though in the hands  
of a street punk  
menacing the unaware  
who stroll in the urban eve

those she has mugged  
stay angry

hypervigilant, uneasy

it is not clear  
if such is just the cost  
of urban life

or if, perhaps,  
there is an alternative



shaggy dog stories

after I see you  
it takes all my energy  
to shake you off  
and get back  
to my own life journey

like a shaggy dog  
soaked to the skin  
caught in a sudden thunderstorm  
startled by the lightning  
heart-pounding  
from the crashing  
cloud-collision pourings  
of our contact

I have to plant my feet  
throw my force  
into the shaking  
fling the droplets  
in every direction  
again and again

until suddenly I am free  
free to do  
whatever I'd been doing  
whatever else I'd been enjoying

until the next time  
when I'm drenched  
by wanting you

sacred paths

if you miss me  
when I'm gone  
look for me in Sharon Woods

I'll be striding near you  
on the trails  
sitting on the benches  
watching birds  
pausing mid-step  
as we come upon the deer

look for me  
especially  
in the snow  
on Martin Luther King Day  
remember I, like he  
fought for justice

seek me not  
below the ground  
release my body  
into fire

and feel my spirit  
among the trees  
that bear my name

my kind of  
urban woods these are  
within the sound of traffic

close to fabric stores  
and libraries  
and places to dance  
near the busy communion  
of multi-cultures  
and neighborhoods of queers

I told my counselor today  
for years I was sad and scared  
feeling the heavy burden  
of lesbian stigma

trying to settle in  
mid-western suburbs  
where two-girl couples  
sought their closet safety

for a long time  
I lost track  
of my vision  
of my needs

lately, I feel loved  
and find my place  
reclaiming an identity  
of radical  
loved by others  
finally  
who respect me as I am

what made me weep today  
was claiming right out loud  
my own courage

without apology

what made me smile, later,  
was walking in the snow  
in Sharon Woods  
thankful for finding my own way

knowing my spirit  
has found peace  
once again in struggle

knowing you will be here  
when I am gone  
through some eternity

knowing we will  
find each other  
seeking justice  
caring for each other  
through all the days and nights  
of our forever

## Sunday brunch in Trivialand

four two's gather:  
thin with thin  
tall with tall  
tight with tight  
fear with fear

they greet each other  
take their sit-here-by-me seats  
nod approval to each other

congratulations to the cook  
the breakfast is superb

congratulations to each two  
so proudly pair-secure

never mind  
the car-caged en route quarreling  
now smoothed over

never mind  
the seething sexless, restless sleep  
now denied

in the prolonged lull, one says  
in silky mock concern  
I wonder if you've heard the news

in unison  
they turn and snarl

enraged at signs of life  
or lust or love  
within their view

enraged at difference  
boldness, strength

they feel self-satisfied disdain  
superior in their shunning  
of the newest Other

the subject changes quickly  
too disturbing  
pass the pasta  
please my dear  
let's talk instead  
in pleasantries

I see them patterning  
lesbian-couple-closet lives  
in echoes  
of their hated mothers

tight with tight  
fear with fear

how did I escape?

fling

Radclyffe Hall reminds us  
the simple solutions  
like marrying in June  
aren't always the answer

a pleasure to laugh  
at regained perspective  
as once we did before  
listening to Meatloaf

you continue  
to bring me joy  
unexpected delight

even though I hate  
not touching you  
and hate windows  
that open and close too quickly

I'm glad  
you're in the neighborhood

I'm glad  
you put your bike  
and your wooden dick  
in my face

I just wish  
you would again

vanilla

I.

you ask me to define  
what it is  
to be emotionally present  
during sex

it's when we let our souls touch  
briefly, shyly, hungrily  
watching each other's eyes

it's when two hot streams of lava  
melt between us  
from the mutual eruption  
of volcanic coming together

it's when we call each other by name  
not just fuck me, baby  
but fuck me and then speak my name

in my mind I hear you sigh in answer  
Sharon oh my Sharon  
because just at the moment  
no one else will do

it's when the flowers of our bodies  
open eagerly toward each other's light  
and we are one together  
and one with the universe

it's when the images



of work and others  
and bills and should-haves  
fade to nothing  
because you know  
you're safe, and home  
in the electric focus  
of my love for you

it's when we cling together  
after coming  
weeping for no reason  
except that just for now  
the loneliness is less

II.  
the exquisite joy  
of emotionally present sex  
I know only as vanilla

but it could surely be  
a top and bottom gift

roles make clear who starts  
then blur in the blending bond

technique and toys contribute  
unless they are distraction

fantasy intensifies fun  
unless you're lost in it

pain adds acuity  
unless it hurts too much

laughter sustains it  
smile after chuckle after grin

latex adds respect  
an anchor's grounding safety

fixed resentment kills it  
and thoughtless repetition lets it die

III.  
being present is not a prison  
nor even a promise

you can let your mind wander  
and be less present, as soon as you must

it's just a few moments  
of real connection  
that you never regret  
and don't forget  
whatever the future brings

IV.  
that's my definition for you

I know it may never happen between us  
but I hope when you are old  
you'll know what I mean  
and remember such connections  
in the thousands

**2000-2007**



vanity

the woman  
you let love you  
will want to know  
your scars

she won't be seeking  
adolescent boobs  
in B-cups

when she is looking  
for protrusions  
to suck on  
she will slowly unclip  
the back of  
your left earring  
and take your earlobe  
in her mouth

she will want to feel  
the story of your skin  
as complex as  
your thirty years of dancing

you will take her hand  
and press it to your chest  
with the lights on

you will show her  
ridges, and the skin flap  
of less than perfect surgery

she will watch you  
guide her hand  
over the gift of your openness

she will feel  
under her fingers  
the bumpy road to joy

barking up the wrong tree

no sex, no photos, no circuses  
I fully consented to your limitations

amidst laughter and walking  
waltzing, and swing

I thrilled to the touch  
of your affectionate hands  
the lilt of your answering voice  
on the phone  
you seemed so happy with me

I clung to hope, and to my shock  
I wanted to marry you

proud in public  
to be your valued companion  
or content in private  
raking leaves

but you do not want me  
as you remind me  
every six months  
when foolishly I ask again

you claim not to see  
your own erotic exuberance

so I will try one last time  
to believe you

I will rip Cupid's arrow  
from my anguished back  
cleanse the wound  
and move on without you

if I succeed,  
we might truly be friends



nursing home

I laugh in the bathtub  
trying to let her go

I picture myself at eighty  
wandering room to room  
down institutional halls

looking for scars  
so hard to see  
through the bathrobes  
of white-haired crones

did anyone here survive a mastectomy?  
would you let me touch your scars?

I cannot forget  
my scar-chested dancer

I loved her  
in what I thought was my old age  
decades ago

we claimed to be friends

the soft full chests  
of other eager lovers  
failed to distract me

I should have run an ad  
while still I had the time

lusty aging femme  
seeks cancer survivor  
must lead in dancing  
must want a collie dog

## last dance

you always hated  
dandelions and squirrels  
you seemed to see me also  
as vermin  
in your would-be perfect world

I could not be the slinky model  
that you craved  
but nor was I the menace  
that you pushed away

in happy times  
we laughed and wept  
savoring what was left  
of simple life  
bogged down in aging illness

our strongest bond  
was rock and roll  
which pulled us both  
up from despair

four years  
I followed you on the dance floor  
grinning ear to ear  
body whirling body  
joy to joy

from the first day we danced  
I wanted to follow you home

now you're done  
and ask me not to call  
so you can fight your demons  
by yourself

now, at last  
I dance alone  
amidst the dandelions  
celebrating squirrels  
and the reminders  
of our imperfect connection

## ode to my recliner

out in the world  
I smile and look normal

but in private  
I must plug myself into my recliner  
like an electric car  
with a run-down battery

carefully I drag myself home  
unsafe with exhaustion  
after just an ordinary day  
collapsing into my chair  
in grateful silence  
at last escaped from the glare  
and the over-stimulating crowd

my spirit is still revving  
dreaming and hoping

but my energy is drained  
slowed to molasses  
leaving me weeping  
and filled with despair

I must sit and sleep  
and snack and sit  
and sleep and sit

until the energy juice  
begins to flow again

it is a mistake  
to get up too soon  
the stairs call me to tumble down  
the trees pull my car toward a crash  
and inside I scream at everyone I love

I must wait  
I must wait  
I must wait

til the thin trickle of energy  
becomes a bead or two  
even a chip

most people get 45 chips of energy a day  
I am lucky to have seven in a day,  
thirty in a week

I sit in my chair  
trying to remember  
this used-up, hate-all, hurt-everywhere  
brain fog  
will lift, briefly but reliably

if I can be patient

I will again laugh and love  
sew and dance  
if only for a third of a day at a time

I will never have evenings  
if I have mornings  
always I have to choose

I can have part of a quality life  
(certainly better than none)  
but only if I recline  
more than half of everyone else's day

yes, I perceive that people want  
more from me  
than I have to give  
because I myself want more from me  
than I have to give

only sheer stubbornness  
and the lack of easy exits  
prevent my giving up

so I plug in  
put my feet up  
take it half a day at a time  
too tired to read  
too frazzled for TV  
too weak to knit

do you know...  
I hope that you know:  
between my re-chargings,  
I so much delight  
in your company

friends like these

I'm tired too  
I wish you'd be more positive

I'm tired too  
you are lucky you can sit all day in your  
recliner

I'm tired too  
you're lucky you aren't working

I'm tired too  
you're lucky you lost your house  
and got money you should share with me

I'm tired too  
I think I'll kill myself, unless you have  
the energy to talk me out of it

I'm tired too  
we're both just getting old

I'm tired too  
stop whining  
stop scaring me

I'm tired too  
start being the woman you used to be  
the one who loved me  
the one who listened to me  
the one I relied on



to feed me, to make me laugh  
whenever I was tired

I'm tired too  
and I don't want to hear another word  
about your FATIGUE!



**2008**



imagine a life pain-free

the pain from  
my torn asshole  
lacks the glamour of pain  
from an old football injury

when I was sixty  
one doctor looked  
and said she saw several scars  
confirming that I'd had repeated tears  
she assumed from constipation

but no, I am the diarrhea queen  
and have rarely known hard stool

I'm just small there  
I have too narrow a passage  
for significant bulk  
constricted probably by the chocolate cysts  
of endometriosis on the bowel

when I was twenty-six  
my doctor told me:  
sit in the bathtub and stretch your anus  
with your fingers  
or else, he said,  
you will have trouble as you age

he was kind in his own way  
so I couldn't be too angry  
when he greeted me always,

“hello, my little homo patient”

how many asshole tears does it take  
to leave indelible tracts of pain?

pain I ignore  
pain I never medicate  
each pain pill I tried  
sickened me worse than pain

so rectal pain is just the usual  
body scream  
I carry with me  
packed in with menstrual agony  
sore and fragile feet  
blazing headaches  
limping joints  
world-weary fatigue

pain? what pain?

I am a femme dyke  
internalizing “don’t ask, don’t tell”

I am brave eldest daughter  
of stoics from New England

like generations before me  
I know how to smile  
with a stiff upper lip  
and a positive attitude

I can carry on  
without complaint  
without a visible flinch  
without an audible moan

I have preferred my silence  
and my privacy  
rather than admit to pain

in part because I learned  
physicians can't help  
loved ones feel burdened

so I keep my sanity, my self-esteem  
by refusing to complain

I follow my mother's dictum  
(at least about pain):  
if you can't say something nice,  
don't say anything at all

how can I imagine a pain-free life  
until I learn to stop denying pain?

when still I suspect  
my denial is in fact  
my salvation

years later

still I dream of you  
with mild emotion  
two people  
lying among many in a crowded space  
like an emergency shelter  
I dream the effort I make  
not to wake you  
not to disturb you  
as you sleep

in the morning I feel only  
quiet surprise  
that still you haunt my nights

in daylight  
I am finally more clear

you are gone  
the person who was  
so happily my companion  
is gone, finito, no more

the fact that you live and breathe  
and work still on this planet  
confused me at first

allowed me to hope that  
chance meetings  
careful patience  
divine intervention



pure good luck  
might bring you back

my hope for your return  
was hard to kill  
reluctant to die

most days now  
I can remember  
with less anguish

the dancing innocence  
that was our time of joy

ode to my too-recent ex

sweet foxy woman  
so capable  
and lovely to look at

sadly I saw you pay attention  
only to your own agenda

you intend to be  
the most loving  
the most generous  
person in the entire world  
as long as you get your way

you have a rare ability  
to ignore everything  
but your own version  
of yourself

you see nothing  
hear nothing  
happening around you

you say the most insulting things  
with sweetest affection

you have a glib answer  
to every asked and unasked question

for so long I was compelled by  
your contradictions

I still half wish  
I had been strong enough  
or wise enough  
to weather your storm

break-up: my side

at first she let me glimpse  
the sweet woman-child  
hiding behind  
the high walls of her harried life

between eager kisses  
when we were both  
more than surprised  
by mid-life touching, holding  
our friendship blooming  
unexpectedly into romance

she told me briefly  
such sad truths

parents full of secrets  
constantly enraged  
until her mother broke  
when she was fifteen

still a child herself  
she then stepped in  
to manage home and family

lonely at school  
hiding home life  
hiding homosexuality  
silent mostly, she says  
she was silent  
until she found success

(if not happiness)  
in athletics

now she shuts out feelings  
with the constant din  
of TV sports

now she works  
endlessly relentlessly  
trying to buy freedom  
from pain

at home alone  
her tightly stacked cupboards  
hold food to feed a hundred  
her piles of papers are all neatly sorted  
her lawn is mowed  
her brand new porch is perfect

no time for idle chat  
work and objects so much safer  
more controllable  
than the inevitable conflict  
of only-human romance

I kept fighting to reach  
the woman-child I touched  
but she had vanished

guarded fiercely  
by an intensely capable  
and sullen adolescent

a stern and silent princess  
who makes assumptions  
jumps to conclusions  
refuses adult conversation

so she can work and work  
every day all day

reinforcing the walls  
of her sad isolation

break-up: her side

she was fun at first  
and helped me

she walked the dog  
made my breakfast  
went with me to church  
waited at my house  
for the carpet cleaner  
when I had to be at work

she wanted me to talk to her  
but she never liked  
what I had to say

she was tired all the time  
overreacted to everything  
so easily injured  
by my playful jabs

I wasn't getting much out of it

I called it off  
because I knew  
she'd leave me

## crash day episodes

head pain, severe  
exhaustion, wipe-out  
hunger, constant  
scared, again  
sadness, familiar

usually following  
a stretch day  
a fun day  
a connected day

I have made my life  
as small as possible

the job is let go  
the house is sold  
the romance is ended

in my small apartment  
I can rest now  
without interruption

but I do not feel better

I still have  
that awful feeling  
sick, hungry, hurting, done  
more than half the time



on my good days  
I have creativity  
in short sequence

I still impact the world  
volunteering for AARP

but some days, finally  
I am depressed  
and have no energy to telephone  
the many friends I barely care to see

I step outside onto  
my flower-filled bird-feeding balcony  
and know I have  
many reasons to be happy

and happy I am  
between episodes, all too frequent episodes

meds make me worse  
physicians are hostile  
reflexology helps some  
day after tomorrow

I tried Western Medicine  
they are confident I am crazy

I tried psychology  
they admire my excellent mental health  
coping with a tough situation

I tried alternative healing  
they recommend to Pollyanna me  
developing a more positive attitude

why not anger?  
it seems wasteful to be angry

anger takes energy  
exactly what I lack

I still have an amazing life  
fascinating characters  
skills to write and sew  
databases to search  
objects of beauty  
and nature, my true companion

but the crash days  
demand grace and resilience  
that return only

as the blazing headache clears  
as my energy trickles back

with solitude  
with time  
with rest

hear me speak

find your many voices  
says my teacher  
identify your internal characters

finding different voices helps you  
create fiction  
teaches you to stretch, describe, imagine

I, defensive, claim at first  
I have only ONE voice  
as present and authentic as I want to be

and yet I know that  
on the phone  
others hear my many moods

some will comment on  
my puny whispers of exhaustion,  
or my eager planning when I'm well  
some can hear my tight non-telling  
of the truth

so I step outside myself to look  
to listen for my different voices

there is little Sherry Driver  
always pushing  
such a responsible oldest girl  
firstborn from New England  
get it done

get it right  
get approval  
get yet another college degree

and there's the Stranger-loving Diner dyke  
feeding all who come  
caring and insightful  
seeking others' stories

but very soon both little Sher  
and Diner dyke  
are all worn out  
all that's left is Sit-all-Day,  
dead battery drifting  
too ill, too low-energy to care  
about anyone or anything

Sit-all-Day morphs  
(unless I pay attention)  
into Self-pity Diva:  
if only I had concentrated  
I would have been a winner  
I demanded solitude  
I preferred to read, to rest, to write  
I drove them all away  
where are they now?

Shopping Demon  
pulls me from my chair  
thank goodness  
drags me to the thrift store  
where finally

Seeker Designer saves the day  
curious, creative, what can I sew?  
sense of wonder, joy in nature  
again I see a future

once again I am  
the Scholar Diplomat:  
well-traveled and well schooled  
selectively silent, observing

or laughing, irreverent  
Silly Devil  
easily amused by puns and errors

Solomon Asch's\* Daughter has returned  
and finally I remember:  
the emperor has no clothes  
I can disagree with the crowd  
I can speak the truth, or not,  
in many voices

but, a post script for you:  
be alert for Sullen Doormat  
she will growl  
or vanish  
if she feels  
you step on her!

\*Solomon Asch did social psychology research on  
group pressure and conformity at Swarthmore  
College

rectal pain

my body wakes me, 5 AM  
determined to discard its stool  
NOW! RIGHT NOW!

the tissue of my anus  
telescopes out  
shooting razor blades  
into the bowl

I lose my breath

see a light show in my mind

grip the rails that prop me up

easy, easy,  
I hear myself say aloud

easy, easy  
panting, whispering

stretch, let go  
stretch, let go

through my shrinking hole  
past the chocolate cysts of endometriosis

today, for once  
there is no blood

only the toilet full:  
remains of Tuesday's lunch  
gouged on one side  
by the exacto knife  
of bulging hemorrhoids

weak with fatigue  
in pain up to my bra-line

I pull my body up  
to face the day

no blood today:  
I will skip the sitz  
save the costly Analpram,  
bypass the Tylenol  
I fear and hate

soon I will drink  
cold toxic gallons  
to prepare my aging tubes  
for one more scope

I expect that I will be  
declared again perfectly normal

and, no doubt,  
"preoccupied with my bowels"  
the code words for  
"help is not available"  
short of surgery and a pouch

out to lunch

I take my gaggle of voices out to dine  
and listen to them argue  
when the server kindly  
brings the list of choices

So-long Deprived  
breathes sighs of joy  
just to be out eating in a restaurant  
recovered from an Illness Decade  
eating only bland at home --  
she'll have one of everything

Save-a-Dollar  
barges in  
ruling out the all but cheap  
cheap, cheap, cheap!  
says I can pick among  
only three that cost the least

Spreading Dumpling  
sticks up her hand  
points out that  
cheap is full of carbs and fat  
she's requesting salad,  
protein, fruit

Sensuous Desirer  
whispers quickly in my ear:



try that foreign, curried one  
the one that makes you think  
of scarves and bangles  
mysterious caravans  
approaching in the night

Speed-seeking Drinker  
begs for coffee  
promising its false and eager energy  
even knowing how it grabs your bowels

Slowly Dying,  
(aren't we all, but  
just not soon enough)  
urges me to make my choice:

who wins?  
who wins?



**2009**



sing in the new year

I emerge at times  
like an old cuckoo bird  
from the hidden recesses of my clock

briefly chipper  
conversational

a mechanical copy  
of the spirit in flight  
I used to be

my performance  
entertains the moment

convincing no one

no longer on time  
no longer reliable

the winding weights  
drift onto the floor

the little door creaks shut  
as again I hide  
broken and sad

ready to exchange  
this wooden box  
for another

rural casino

the auctioneer invites you to his trance  
and captures you with sing song  
as your hope for bargains leaps

his penetrating eyes  
flicker to you  
sensing your desire to win  
at any cost

his eyes then flicker to the other  
blocking what you want

flicker, lock on you  
flicker, lock on him  
the rhythm quickens

I win he wins I win he wins  
wait, another tries to grab it now

heart rates up  
hypnotic warbling  
holds all in its grip

temptation, desire  
temptation, desire

until, to your great surprise

you empty your pockets  
for junk

wounds

37, graduated, RN license,  
childhood dream, Cherry Ames  
accomplished

the door of each home opens, welcomes  
strangers tell their secrets  
always something new to learn  
sports-free, I now relish being on a team

thread a rectal thermometer  
through bouquets of hemorrhoids  
patient screaming

wash testicles swollen to grapefruits  
patient moaning

side-step skin flakes  
rising from the floor vent  
as the heat turns on  
patient scratching

rinse maggots from her throat  
not yet dead  
patient staring

despite the delights  
perhaps I am too delicate a flower  
to be a nurse

energy envelope attack

such a lovely day with you  
as we talk and laugh  
and understand each other

but suddenly I am exhausted  
overwhelmed, uncomfortable  
with sensory stimulation

the heat is melting me  
the light glares harsh  
the sound pounds loud  
your welcome touch burns my skin

I need to leave now  
I need to flee

regretfully, so regretfully,  
I abruptly depart  
tearful and tense

shaking, I drive myself home  
to the cool silent safety  
of my austere and lonely solitude

where I can do nothing  
nothing, nothing, nothing  
but sleep



## evolution

friendship is fragile  
evolving with time and age  
once close, then gone

baffled by your denial  
entrenched in pursuit  
I failed to see the change

you despise me now  
but still crave my admiration  
you seem livid if ignored

let go and let god  
I can't guess your reasons  
I will accept and move on

it takes a long time  
to feel the relief of  
losing angry friends

## selfish

a person with self-centered self-hate  
thinks only about what she fancies  
others think of her

deeply attached  
to persistent insecurity  
she imagines the world  
always watching her

she thinks anyone who loves her  
judges her less-than-perfect sewing skills  
or sees only what she calls  
her fat and ugly arms

no reasoned argument  
can free her from her self-obsession  
with her so-called flaws

listen to her when she says  
(with something like delight)

I-I-I  
I'm a failure, and I'm fat

I-I-I  
can't hear you, won't hear you

I-I-I  
can't think, won't think  
about anything but myself

I-I-I  
can't grow, won't grow

I-I-I  
am quite comfortable here  
staring at myself  
wrapped so tightly  
in my familiar failure  
and my fat

nothing you can do or say  
will budge me

I-I-I  
refuse to listen

in fact I hate you  
even more than I hate myself  
so it is useless  
trying to love me

I-I-I  
will never let you  
even like me

go away  
leave me alone

why you have abandoned me?

## Sunday stroll

under the cover of looking old  
we walk arm in arm in the park  
propping each other up  
along the woodland path

we admire Lenten roses  
early tulips  
and the bright Easter garb  
of squeaky children

I feel my hip  
pressed against your hip  
as it was in the night

after you came so quickly  
when finally I touched you

such sweet sounds  
seared into my soul

I bet no one suspects  
you are caressing my breast  
with your elbow

giving thanks

on a Saturday  
we went shopping for shoes

two old women  
glad to be friends  
looking for comfort  
and bargains

when we stopped for a snack  
of walleye and coleslaw  
I saw you watching behind me

look, you said,  
we forgot to say grace

I turned and saw  
over my left shoulder

a man and a woman  
arms stretched to each other  
heads bowed, lips murmuring

they were both Diane Arbus odd  
wounded  
each much more likely  
to have been there alone

you could see reasons  
for gratitude

I want to be like them  
remembering grace  
day by day  
meal by meal

I want to say:  
for our time together  
for this food we are able to eat  
I, yes, we, are truly grateful

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## Archival Resources

Sharon Deevey's multidisciplinary lesbian health library (including 200 monographs and 600 articles) was donated in 2004 to the Lesbian Health Research Center @UCSF, Laurel Heights Campus, Institute for Health & Aging, Suite 340, Box 0646, San Francisco, CA 94143.

Documents from the Cleveland and Columbus, Ohio chapters of Cassandra: Radical Feminist Nurses Network were donated in 2004 to the Medical History Library at Pryor Health Sciences Library at The Ohio State University.

Sharon's journals and photograph albums will come to rest at the Lesbian Herstory Archives in New York, New York.

## Acknowledgments

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In my lesbian life, friendship with other lesbian women has cushioned the up's and down's of romance. For me these friends include Amy Jordan's Women's Ballroom Dance Group in Westerville OH, the Emancipation Party Group in Logan, Ohio, Dolores Bargowski in Detroit, Barbara Herbert in Boston, Carla Randall and her partner Dara Reimers in Auburn, Maine, Suzanne Brunner in Bangor, Maine, Tami Askren in Oregon, Tami Pyles in Washington, DC, and Mary Search in New Mexico. I was lucky, finally to meet lesbian women my own age and older in the central Ohio chapter of OLOC (Old Lesbians Organizing for

Change), where together we taught ourselves to celebrate aging.

As I outgrew separatism, I learned to appreciate that neither gender nor sexual orientation predict kindness. I remembered fondly HE and MW, made friends with Tim McClung and Myron Beasley, and sorely missed the late Christopher Ohm. I valued inspired leaders in the places where I worked, including Lois Goodrich at Trailblazer Camps, Deborah Cloud at University Hospitals of Cleveland, Aaron Riley at the Columbus AIDS Task Force, and Kelley Neal, who supervised my volunteer work at AARP Ohio.

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Finally I would like to name my spirit mentors. In place of traditional religion, I chat frequently with the lingering spirits of historical souls I admire: public health nurse Lavinia Dock, lesbian author Radclyffe Hall, anthropologist Shelley Rosaldo, and artist Georgia O'Keefe.

My gratitude, one day at a time, to all.

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