

BLACK LESBIAN NEWSLETTER



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OUTLETS

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 4118 Telegraph Avenue
 Oakland, CA 94609
 (415) 653-4169

Amelia's
 647 Valencia
 San Francisco, CA 94110
 (415) 552-7788

Modern Times Bookstore
 968 Valencia
 San Francisco, CA 94110
 (415) 282-9246

Options for Women Over 40
 San Francisco Women's Building
 3543 18th Street/Valencia
 San Francisco, CA 94110
 (415) 431-6405

The Old Mole
 1942 University Avenue
 Berkeley, CA 94704
 (415) 540-6077

A Woman's Place
 4015 Broadway
 Oakland, CA 94609
 (415) 547-9920

Old Wives Tales
 1009 Valencia
 San Francisco, CA 94110
 (415) 821-4679

Submissions

We welcome any and all written and graphic work by local black lesbians. Our format includes news, reviews, personal perspectives, political commentaries, interviews, poetry, letters, ads, announcements, humor, and journal entries. Fictitious names or pseudonyms are standard literary practice and should

be used if the contributing artist fears "too much visibility."

The deadlines for the next two issues are November 3rd for the December issue and December 5th for the January issue.

Give us a call if you have an idea that you want to talk about.

COMING OUT IN '61

I am a 41 year old Black Lesbian Feminist who has been a dyke for 20 years. I was born, raised and lived in the New York City area for 37 years. I've lived in the Bay Area now for 4 years.

Coming out as a Dyke at the age of 21 was an agonizing process. Fear held me from revealing myself. Fear of losing family, friends, job and fear of possible legal prosecution. But the overwhelming need to "Be," to be whole and at one with myself won out and forced me to start living a Lesbian lifestyle.

What did it mean to live a Lesbian lifestyle in 1961? For me it meant "Gay" clubs, house parties and dances. It meant meeting others of my kind and feeling at home at last with my Lesbianism. It also meant constant harassment by the law with no recourse for protest. It did not mean wearing "I'm a Dyke and I'm Proud" T-shirts, having Lesbian publications, Lesbian support groups or all-women's concerts, where most of the artists are Lesbians. These options are the result of the Feminist movement, and Feminist Dykes have fought hard to enable us to have these options. I guess I appreciate these options so much today, because I remember vividly when these options did not exist. I have therefore made a commitment to maintain and improve the options that do exist and help to create new ones. There I go digressing again. Back to coming out in '61.

A straight male friend of mine introduced me to my first Lesbian friend, Terri. She was nothing like the stereotype "Bull-dagger." To my amazement, she was just like me, same background and everything. I can't help laughing now when I look back and remember how homophobic I was. I loved and wanted women with such an intensity, but it was so hard to admit it to myself.

Terri was beautiful, intelligent, had a great sense of humor and much patience. She took me under her wing and taught me the "Gay" jargon and etiquette. She had to start at the level of what "Gay" meant, so you know she had her work cut out for her. We cared for one another and wanted each other desperately, but she wouldn't push for a sexual relationship because she felt I wasn't ready. She was right; I was too afraid. Many was the night we would leave each other angry unable to resolve our frustration. She eventually became lovers with another woman and although she and

I had a sexual encounter and she brought me out sexually as well as culturally, by that time, she was committed to another relationship. I owe Terri a lot. She spent a lot of time, energy and love to help me come out.

Terri took me to my first Lesbian club. The club was located in Harlem and was named for, and run by, a Black Lesbian named Tubby. It was a two-story building, well-decorated, spacious and comfortable. When I entered Tubby's I felt safe from the hostile, outside world, at last I had found my haven. There were fine, strong, fascinating women, most of them Black, lounging around the room looking very sophisticated and worldly.

Tubby had women bouncers, who kept the place orderly and safe. They literally threw anybody out who caused trouble. The only trouble the club personnel couldn't handle was the law. They would come in at will, turn on all the lights, question people, ask for I.D.'s just to intimidate and humiliate us. Although after a raid, many would leave, and those of us who stayed were left feeling frustrated and angry, it also brought us closer together against a common enemy.

After my first visit, I went back to Tubby's often and met other women who invited me into their homes. I was invited to dinner parties, cocktail parties and just plain get-down parties. I met all different classes of Lesbians and enjoyed them all. Close friendships developed and my community grew. I entered into lover relationships (one at a time, that is; monogamy was the "norm" in 1961) and developed close ties with people I could depend on. After the process was complete, it was wonderful being out in 1961.

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Drawing by Alicia Stiles © 1982

BLACK LESBIAN THEATRE

Black Lesbian Theatre? Girl, are you kidding? Now, we all know about Black American theatre, sure. That goes all the way back to The African Company, established in 1820. An amateur group, it performed in a ramshackle building at the corner of Bleeker and Mercer Streets in New York's lower Manhattan. And there is lesbian theatre, its history shorter and more obscure, usually hidden behind the less provocative label of "Women's Theatre." But Black Lesbian Theatre? Come off it!

Well, at least nine women, black lesbians, every one, don't intend to come off it, but rather, as Aretha says, "Jump to it!" Really, why not? What's the big deal? Each of us sitting in that circle on Thursday, 30 September at the Berkeley Women's Center, was an unmistakable, inescapable picture of survival. We are black, we are women and we are lesbians. To have made it to that circle, we each "performed," in some way, every day of our lives. We knew our lines, knew when to come in, knew when to stay out. We knew if we went up on our lines, if we weren't quick studies, we'd be taken on out, not called back.

But that's no news. Most black women anywhere, lesbian, straight, whatever, perform major and minor miracles to make it through 'til the next day. We all know survival. But we also know that just surviving doesn't necessarily make good theatre. That takes other skills--acting, set design, lighting, sound, writing, producing, directing.

It quickly became clear that the women in the circle that night are after quality.

"I want it to be good," said one sister. "I don't want to do shit theatre."

So, what do we have to make good theatre happen? We went around the room and talked about why we'd come, what we wanted a black lesbian theatre to do, to be, and we put out what we were about, what we each could bring. What we have is pretty amazing. We are actors and writers and technical women. There is a little directing and producing experience. Our knowledge and skills range from novice to professional. One woman's last appearance on stage was in the sixth grade: "I still remember the standing ovation I got!" For another, "I knew when I was in my Mama's belly I was going to act." And she's been doing that almost ever since.

We have former street and children's theatre performers, a woman who was with the Theatre of the Deaf in Minneapolis, one from the Avanti Dance Theatre in

Philadelphia, another who worked with Yolanda King's Drama Theatre in New York. We have a poet who has read in California, Colorado and New York. One of us has written a one-act play about women in prison, another is writing her first novel--the main character is a black lesbian playwright. Two of us are journalists with backgrounds in radio, television and newspaper reporting and production.

As we talked, we discovered how alike our lives have been, and how different. Two of us grew up dancers, training in classical ballet, dreaming of professional careers. Our parents, cautious for and protective of their very young black daughters, pointed us in other directions, towards the supposedly more economically stable worlds of education and sociology ("With a degree in that and 50¢, might buy you a bus ride," one sister quipped. And we all knew what that was about). Some of us knew, almost from day one, that we were dykes. Others took 30 or more years to figure it out. We are out to some of our families and that is about both pain and joy. One of our mothers dances with her daughter at The Jube. For other mothers, and fathers, it's more than they can do to even say the word "lesbian," much less know that that's part of who their daughter is. If we only looked to ourselves, fewer than ten women, where we've been, who we are, we would have material enough for years of work.

We don't yet know what kind of theatre we want or will be able to do. We could concentrate on developing a full-fledged company, complete with permanent stage, performing full-length plays. Or we could start on a smaller scale, doing readers' theatre, with a minimum of props and staging. There is also a wide country between those two alternatives which we can explore. As BLN goes to press, we've held two meetings. We've talked a little bit about some of the issues we'd like to look at theatrically, among them, women in South Africa; coming out; being a black lesbian in the black community; personal experiences with racism; racism in the media.

There was something very special about that first night we came together, black lesbians interested in the theatre. We all expressed an urgent need to make real, enduring connections with other black women, unafraid of being who we are. We all, in one way or another, expressed dissatisfaction with the Bay Area's women's community, for all its talk of political consciousness and political progressiveness: It's still a

(Cont'd on p.8)

Announcements

Deadlines for Announcements

Nov. 9 for Dec. issue
Dec. 10 for Jan. issue
(415) 548-6661

October 24

Jan Faulkner's exhibit on racist art, "Ethnic Notions," opens and will run until December 24 - Berkeley Arts Center, 1275 Walnut, Berkeley

October 31

Casselberry-Dupree, Freida Payne, James Brown - Berkeley Community Theatre - 2171 McKinley Ave. - 644-6863 - 7pm
\$10.00

November 6

Conscious of your body size? Tired of feeling that fat is bad? Let's talk about changing old values and learning new ways of supporting ourselves. - Joyce 893-1341 - 11am-6pm

November 12

Avotcja, Casselberry-Dupree, Maria Cora and others - Valencia Rose, 766 Valencia, San Francisco - 9pm - \$5.00

Midgett's Place Fridays:

November 12

Adrian Fuzée, guitarist, doing her original work

November 19

Fundi - vocalist, flutist

November 20

Benefit for A Woman's Place workers - Casselberry-Dupree and others - Unitarian Church, 1924 Cedar, Berkeley - 8pm - \$5-10 sliding scale

November 20

Lesbian Mothers of Color Intensive - One-day exploration of issues that concern us as lesbian mothers - child-care, call in advance - Lunch - 10am-4pm - \$10-20 sliding scale; no one turned away - Deadline for reservations Thur., Nov. 18 - call Marge Green 782-3054, 2pm-10pm or Shahara Godfrey 641-5321, 9am-5pm

ATTENTION: Creative Black Women. If you are interested in participating in a Holiday Bazaar in early December to sell goods which you have made (art-work, poetry, foodstuffs, weaving, pottery, etc.), please call Reatha, 452-2544.

Subscriptions

I have enclosed \$5 for a one year subscription (12 issues) to the Black Lesbian Newsletter.

Name _____

Address _____

Telephone _____
(optional)

Yes, please put me on the mailing list.

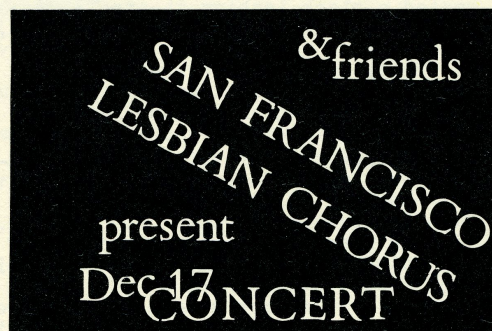
Please send subscriptions, ads, correspondence, or donations to:

Black Lesbian Newsletter
1442 Walnut St., #307
Berkeley, CA 94709
(415) 548-6661

theme issue

The Black Lesbian Newsletter is soliciting articles, poems, pieces for our February, 1983 issue. The theme is Wimmin and Power (i.e., economic and political power, power in relationships, power of survival, etc.). What feelings attitudes and thoughts do you have about Wimmin and Power and what do you see as its effect upon you?

The deadline is January 5, 1983.



For more information,
call Priscilla 552-4559.

Classified Ads

Deadlines for Classified Ads
Nov. 9 for Dec. issue
Dec. 10 for Jan. issue
(415) 548-6661

S.F. Lesbian Chorus is welcoming new members. Come share your voice with other lesbians. No auditions. Mondays, 7:30 Women's Building. For more information, call Priscilla 552-4559.

ARTICLES FOR SALE

The Laughing Goddess Grotto, 4118 Telegraph Ave. Oakland 653-4169 - candles, oils, incenses, gifts, books, asungi cards - art gallery. 4pm-9pm.

PERSONALS

Articulate, warm, easy-going, over-achiever woman seeks another woman who is particular about whom she calls "friend." Let's share growth and an inner glow of love. Call Ann 547-0158

WANTED

Ride needed to CCSF - Call Anita 543-5124

Power weights and other body-building equipment - Call Joyce 893-1341

HELP WANTED

Would you like to make money selling ads for the Black Lesbian Newsletter? If so, give us a call at 524-5969 or 548-6661.

Make money hawking the Black Lesbian Newsletter at the bars or women's events - Call 524-5969 or 548-6661.

For classified ads, enclose \$1 per line (\$2 minimum per ad). There are 22 characters per line. Each letter, punctuation mark or space between words counts as a character. We reserve the right to use our discretion in the selection of advertisements.

Name _____ Telephone _____

Address _____

(Cont'd from p. 5)

lonely, isolated world if you're black. Some of us still choose to move through that world, giving to it what it chooses to accept, taking from it what we can use. But we all know that when it comes down to it, it's only with each other that the exchange becomes an equal one.

Our lives, as black women, as black lesbians, are particularly and uniquely our own. We must speak out loudly and proudly about them. Theatre is one vehicle for doing that. For not only can WE not live without our lives,* but the black community, of which we are a part, cannot survive without us either.

*"We cannot live without our lives" from a poem by Barbara Deming; also, the final refrain of Audre Lorde's poem "Need: A CHORAL of BLACK WOMEN'S VOICES:"

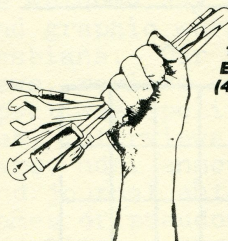
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(For more information, call Paula 848-4850 or call Lindsay 533-8153.)

Donations

We now have non-profit status through the sponsorship of the San Francisco Women's Centers. Therefore all donations are tax deductible. Checks should be made out to the San Francisco Women's Centers/Black Lesbian Newsletter in order to benefit from this status.

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Posters
Brochures • Books

Observation

Self doubt has come again
The world is sneaking in
And southern is the only comfort.

The dragon's in its flight
As stars begin to cry
Reality's lost when the cork pops.

Your beautiful woman
if you'd only see
Your beautiful woman
just let yourself be

Shattered glass in tiny peices
Tired arm from never reaching
That golden dawn of you.

Painted walls, cracked and peeling
With weather beaten feelings
Restoration starts from within.

Your beautiful woman

Your beautiful woman
if you'd believe it
Your beautiful woman
some day you'll see it, too.

© 1982 Ka'ni

Help Name the Newsletter — Contest



As you may have already noticed, we have given birth to a hefty 8-page newsletter. Although it gets bigger and brighter every month, we haven't yet come up with a name. So we are asking you, the interested reader, concerned community member and serious black lesbian to help us with this dilemma. Send us your suggestions for a name, with your name, address and telephone number to:

Black Lesbian Newsletter
1442 Walnut St. # 307 Berkeley, CA 94709.
The deadline is January 1, 1983. The submitter of the name that is finally chosen will WIN:

* 1 year free subscription to
BLN

Please hurry!!! It's almost a year old, starting to walk, and we don't know what to call it!!!