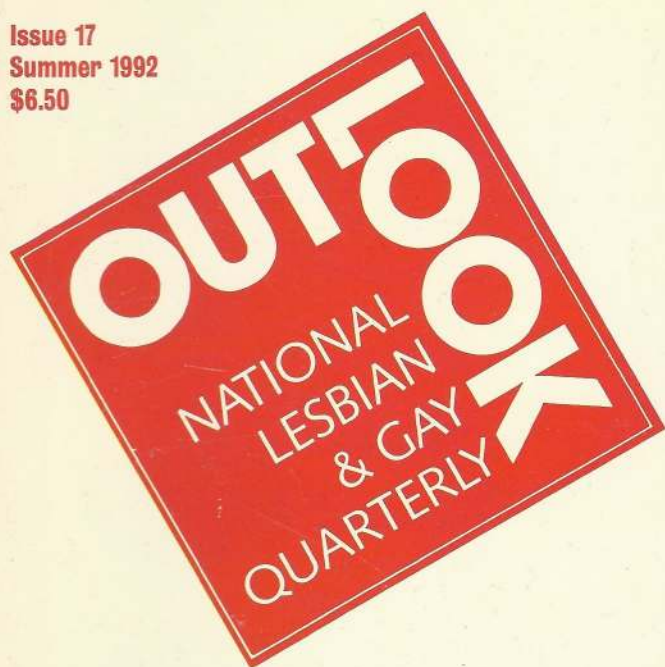
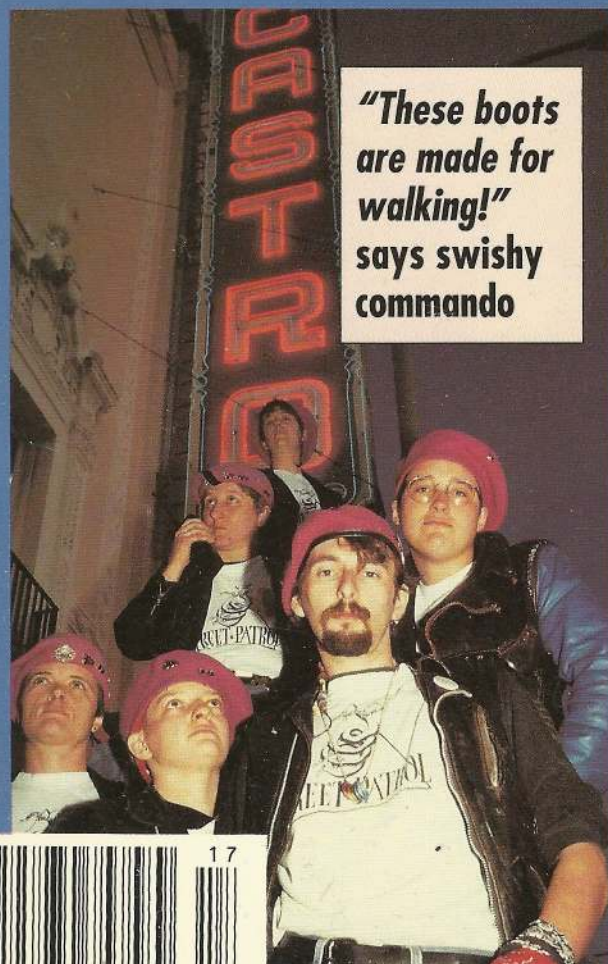


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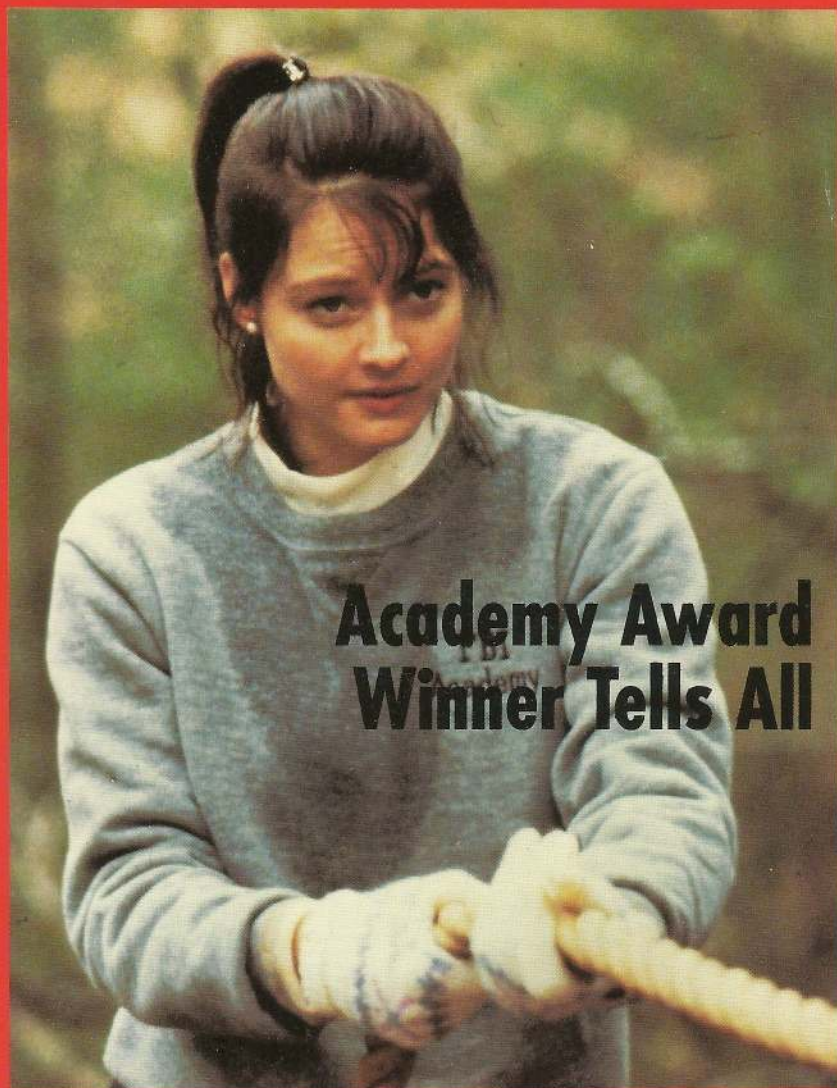


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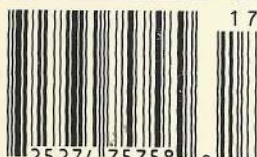


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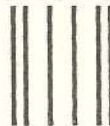
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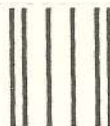
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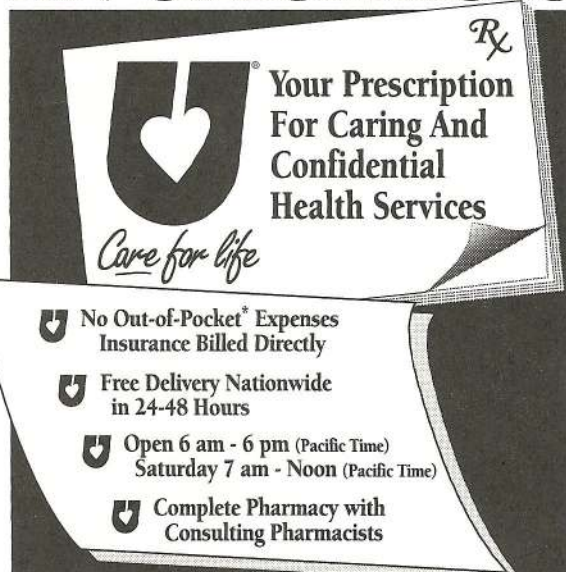
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IT HAS BEEN AN EXERCISE IN LIVING with contradiction to produce OUT/LOOK this spring.

It's a foggy Sunday morning in San Francisco's Castro district (where the magazine now makes its home) as I sit down to write this. Just weeks ago, and not very far from here, I ran down Market Street, away from charging lines of police officers. It was two days after the Rodney King verdict and, along with thousands of other San Franciscans, I wanted to express my anger and frustration with a justice system that protects the rights of far too few people. The police didn't leave us too many options. "When we move toward you, move away or we will use force," they broadcast at us over their loudspeakers. "We will arrest you."

That night, I drove warily home during the citywide curfew and sat down to edit. I read about Kristy McNichol's love life, Drew Barrymore's romantic trysts, and "Lesbianville, USA," for our piece on lesbians and gays in the tabloids. The stories didn't seem as funny as they had a few days before.

Lots of people were arrested in San Francisco over the next few days (most for exercising their constitutional rights to freedom of speech and assembly) and many more were simply scared away from demonstrations. "I can't risk going," one friend told me. "Who would pick my daughter up from day care if the police cornered and arrested me?"

Later that weekend we were fundraising for the magazine. Lesbian sexuality writer JoAnn Loulan planned an elegant fundraising party at her house to honor Debra Chasnoff, our founding editor, who had just won an Academy Award. Reports from Los Angeles crackled across the car radio on our way to Loulan's home in the hills south of



Brook Dillon

San Francisco. We geared up to celebrate Chasnoff's achievements, and to demonstrate to people that OUT/LOOK was the place they should put their money. The next issue was going to be fabulous, I would tell them later: A brilliant, poignant piece by Melvin Dixon about living with AIDS and longing to be remembered; a fun piece about Chasnoff's night at the Oscars; a look at the experiences and impact of journalists who come out in their newsrooms and in print. We would have a lively, accessible design, and a new section of short writing. And didn't it seem hopeful that OUT/LOOK has had a working, multicultural editorial board since its inception?

It was in the beginning of February that we first sounded the alarm about OUT/LOOK's financial status. In March, with the future by no means certain, we made our way to Boston's Park Plaza Hotel for OutWrite (the national writers' conference founded by OUT/LOOK). For the first time, the conference was held on

the East Coast and co-sponsored with *Gay Community News*. The change of venue generated the same dizzy appreciation of the underfunded community of lesbian and gay writers that had permeated the first conference three years earlier. It was there, I think, far away from home, and in the presence of so many deeply talented people, that we really believed that the future of the magazine and the conference were both worth the fight.

Since then we've raised \$40,000 and seem well on our way to raising double that (which we need to do, if we're going to rejuvenate and move on). In the last welcome, I reported that we were considering closing our doors. We're not thinking about that anymore. Instead we're thinking about how we can be commercially viable while putting out a magazine that makes a difference in difficult times. How we can be smart about the world, tell the truth about what's happening in it, and set a little space aside to have fun while we're thinking about it all.

—Robin Stevens

Letters

Petting Camille

Susie Bright and Camille Paglia must have more in common than Susie would like to think ("Undressing Camille," #16, Spring '92). Camille pats Susie and "On Our Backs" on the back for being so much more "minority culture" than dykes and other dyke publications, and Susie defines Camille's sexuality for her. How riveting—alternate back-patting and condescension between theorists. It's almost as earth-shattering as Camille's revelation that she wants to model her sexuality after men's. I liked what Susie said about the "intoxicating" nature of sex combined with intimacy, but fail to see how women so busy trying to figure how to label each other (butch rare, femme over easy) can have time to be intimate.

JENNY BLEIER
Venice, CA

A Rap for Camille

Paglia's clit got separated from her brain
and now she thinks she's so very sane
but her head's in her ass if she thinks she knows me
she don't know nothing 'bout my reality.
See one thing I got that Paglia don't
is my ability to know what it is I want
I am dyke, not bisexual like she wants to believe
I can have it all whenever I want, a strap-on dick or pussy,
I don't have to get on my knees and suck it
it doesn't go down when I really fuck it
I don't need a dick to explore dominance and submission
but a woman, a strap-on, and mutual permission.

Choosing this lifestyle keeps me free
from the institutions of religion and family
I don't want children, a god or some kind of man
in postmodern times, these dreams are a scam
to control my mind, my sexual desires
to make me submit to the government of liars.

YONA C. RIEL
San Francisco, CA

To My White Sister

You stood there arguing with me that we do not live in a police state, insulated in the luxury of your complexion and chic black clothes. "What are we doing if not venting against this police state?" I wanted to carry the discussion further but the police cut in to street sweep and arrest us all.

Do you realize how pathetic all of you white peaceniks look lecturing to Chicanos like me, and Black youth, on how to vent our rage? You have had it all all of your life—a healthy body, soft manicured hands—all of this going hand in hand with your preposterous pie-in-the-sky politics. Don't you realize that the problems that confront us as a nation are economic not political? Have you thought about the life of that fourteen-year-old-black woman-child who carted off a bag of potato chips and a 12 pack of Pepsi to her home in the projects? Do you decry the children of African America, Chicano America, Indian America, their heads full of televised images of white consumerist glamour, for wanting what they will never be able to afford with their minimum wage? Do you know the despair, bitterness, and rage involved in a life of poverty, the hatred that becomes a

part of our inner life?

The brutalization of Rodney King is the horror of our daily life in racist White America. Can't you see how ludicrous your cries to stop trashing the BMW's of Nob Hill, the windows of the Fairmont Hotel, fare with the likes of me? The system works only for White Men. For the rest of us there is no peace—only despair, poverty, and wage slavery. So if the sight of flying glass disturbs you, then I advise you to stand clear Sister. Save your lectures for your parents because I am here to tell you that you have nothing to tell me that I don't already know.

RONNIE BURK
San Francisco, CA

Literary Sin

It must have been serendipity for Arlene Stein to review "A Little Original Sin" (#16, Spring '92), the biography of Jane Bowles. It was the first book I read about lesbians as a coming-out dyke and, I must say, it left me miserable. I feared that like Jane, I would always be unfulfilled, never quite accomplishing the climax of any career or pursuit.

I also found that sneaking feeling creeping through Andrew Field's unauthorized biography of Djuna Barnes. Again the scene was 1920-1950s with another impoverished, drug addicted, alcoholic, lonely lesbian whose artistic career, although full of potential, was destroyed by her inner self-loathing.

I hope no one else has to come out with either of those homophobic pieces of biographical literature. Destructive presentation and misrepresentation of real women who faced difficult queer lives that are then shown to be unredeemable is what I believe to be a "sin."

SOPHIA CONSTANTINO
San Francisco, CA

Safer Lesbian Sex

Regarding Nancy Solomon's article ("Risky Business," # 16, Spring '92), I feel that the phenomenon being described—a necessary debate within the lesbian community about woman-to-woman transmission of HIV—is, unfortunately, being polarized.

Clearly, we share the anger that none of us knows the answer to this question. Yet our "position" on the question seems to depend upon whether or not we consider ourselves to be at risk, or at least know lesbians with HIV. In supporting this type of behavior, I believe we are missing the point: lesbians have HIV infection. The necessary question seems to be not what are we going to do to protect "ourselves" from "them," but what can we do now to protect "them" from dying of AIDS?

RISA DENENBERG
New York, NY

With Thanks

If I had \$1000, it would be yours, alas only \$10 is available. The money I am able to give is not representative of the value I have received from you. I have been continuously impressed by your attention to diversity and your resistance to bland political correctness.

I hope you weather this crisis. You are too important a resource

MARK GREENE
Seattle, WA

I just received your request for \$1000 to avoid financial crisis at OUT/LOOK. My reaction was ... something like joy. I have every issue you've produced. I've been admiring you from afar but

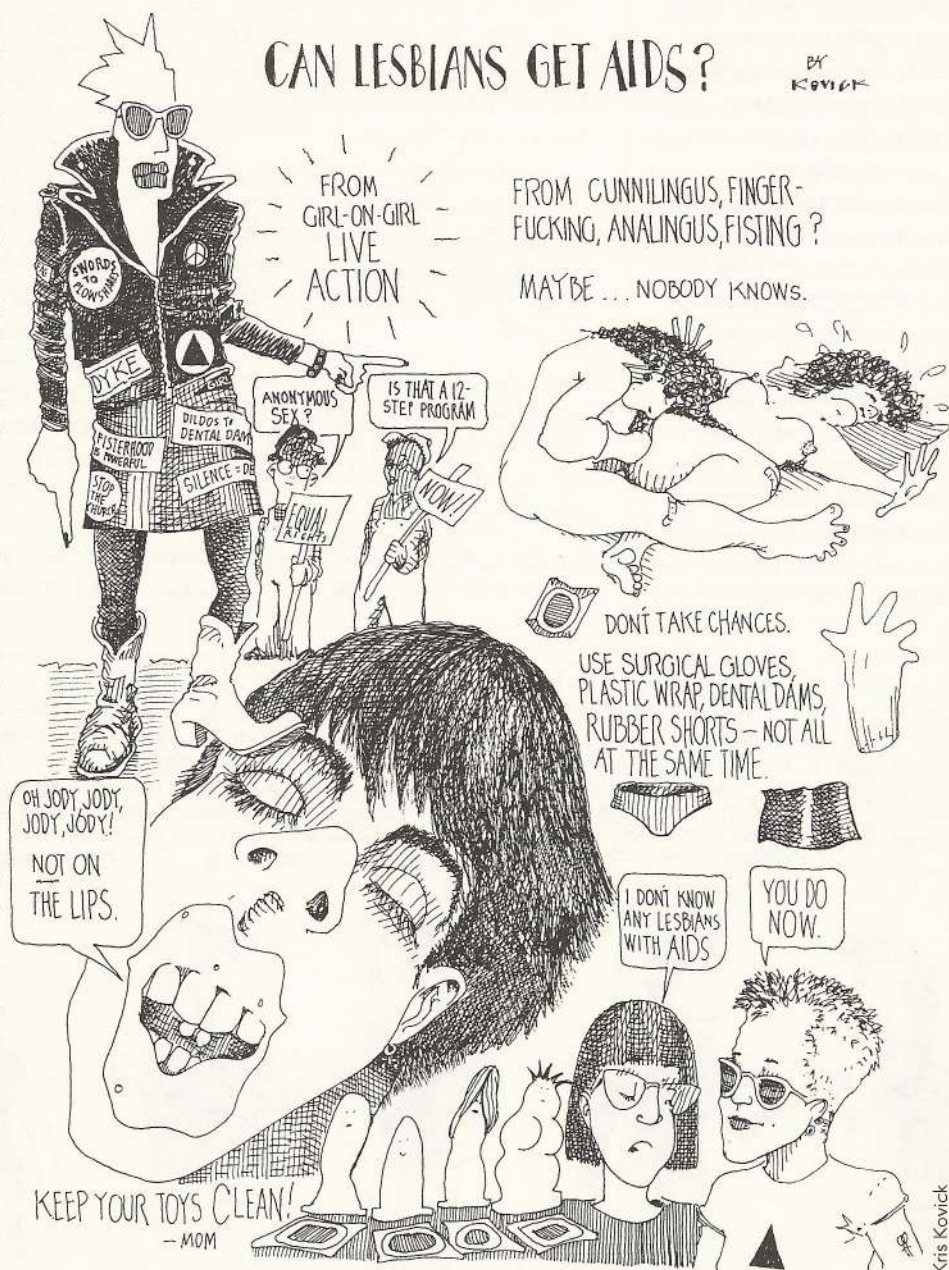
I've felt inadequate about the lopsidedness of our relationship. You give so much, and me so little!

My fantasy is that "I" could be the one to give you the financial foundation you deserve. This is clearly not realistic. So I'll give up the daydream that I alone realize how wonderful you are, and will hope that your request for money is met with the search for checkbook and stamps by many others.

CATHERINE L. HARRIS
Boston, MA

Enclosed, please find my donation of \$100. I thoroughly enjoy your magazine for its maintenance of diversity. Articles in OUT/LOOK are not only well-written, well-thought out, and well-researched, but present attitudes and opinions from many walks of life. Often, OUT/LOOK is the only place I am able to hear these voices. I hope this donation helps. I would be very sorry to lose OUT/LOOK.

KATE EATON
Columbus, OH



Letters II

Biphobia!

Why didn't you just call your "What Do Bisexuals Want?" issue, "Internalized Misogyny Among Women TOPS Common Sense?!" You led with "Bisexuality Debate," but there was NO dialogue between lesbians and gays and bisexuals in the issue. Ara Wilson didn't "search for the bisexual politic," she BEGAN with the assumption that bisexuals dilute the movement's purity and then arranged her "research" to defend such.

I am appalled at the destructive and petty biphobia you perpetuate with your issue, from cover to finish, especially because you would never, never, never consider a cover with the inflammatory, "What Do People of Color Want?" or "What Do Women Want?" Biphobia is rooted in homophobia and heterosexism and serves the disproportionate power of straight white men. Bisexuals, closeted

Bi Way of Response...

When *OUT/LOOK* asked "What Do Bisexuals Want?" in our last issue, we received a striking number of responses. Most were letters from bisexuals who felt uncomfortable with the constraints of a "debate" around bisexuality as we had posited it. Our articles also fueled a roundtable discussion between three writer/activists (Amanda Udis-Kessler, Elizabeth Reba Weise and Sarah Murray) which we've excerpted below, and inspired feminist comic artist Roberta Gregory to pen her strip, "Bialogue."

Curiously enough, the last time we received this much mail was in response to Jan Clausen's "My Interesting Condition" (Winter 1990), which our cover trumpeted as "When Lesbians Fall For Men." Tender spot?

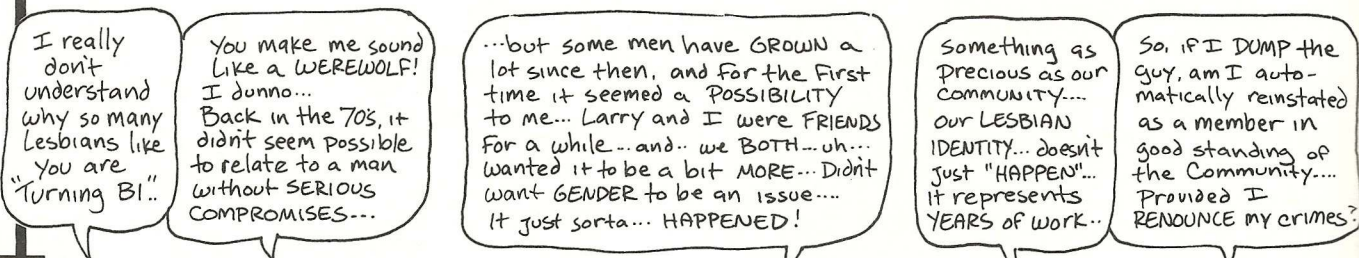
Amanda Udis-Kessler: First of all, if we're asking, along with *OUT/LOOK*, "What do bisexuals want?" we need to ask which bisexuals we're talking about.

Elizabeth Reba Weise: Each individual bisexual presumably wants some-

thing different. Each group has a different sense of where a movement—or where a community (god knows if there is a community) might be going. I want something specifically from the lesbian community. All I am asking for is an acknowledgement that this is the reality of my life, and that of many women I know. You can talk about what this means in theory, or you can talk about what that means in terms of politics, later, but you have to begin with the reality of people's experiences.

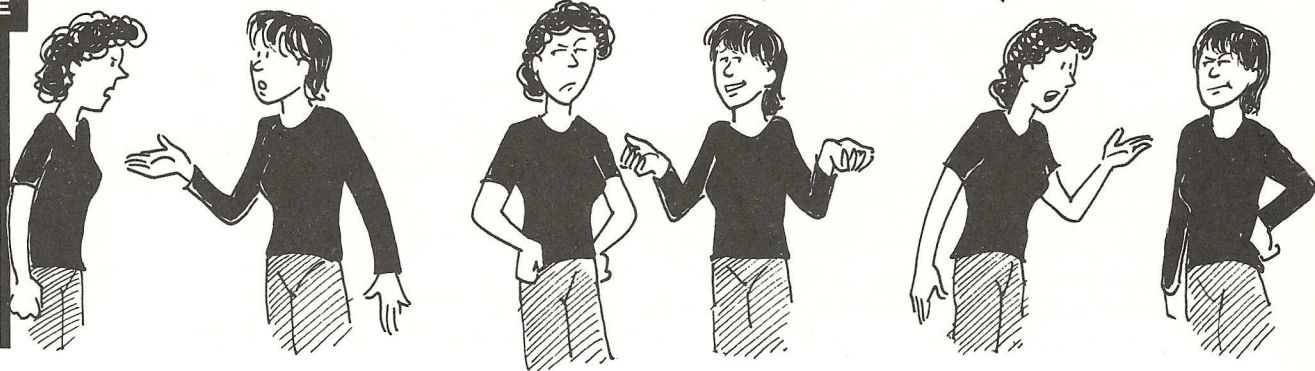
Sarah Murray: The question has resonance, of course, because it goes back to Freud asking, many years ago, "What does woman want?" Of course he was utterly incapable of answering that question because he didn't put himself in the position of being a woman—he merely imagined Woman, which is not really the same thing.

I resist the attempts of women who identify as lesbian-feminists to claim to



BIALOGUE

By Roberta Gregory



capture all lesbian experience, and who suggest that bisexual women threaten and endanger lesbians in some way. That has never been my experience.

Elizabeth: There's no monolithic bisexual *anything*. Maybe there will be in fifteen years, but maybe there won't. "Bisexual" embraces variant groups of people with such variant senses of who they are.

I've certainly had a strong sense of myself as bisexual in a political context over the years. It comes out of a very specific reaction to the gay and lesbian community, *not* to the heterosexual community, which is what we're all kind of immersed in and fighting against. For women especially, it comes in opposition to a political lesbian identity that does not allow the ambiguity of desire that bisexuality is, at least in part, about. That's changing though. The emergence of Queer Nation, and the whole notion of "queer" throws a lot of that out the window because it embraces this totality of queerness, everything from transgender folks to straight people who are pagans and everything in between. You have a bunch of 23-year olds who say, "We're here, we're queer," and they're not

talking about being bi or gay or lesbian.

Sarah: Bisexuality is not problematic for most of the generation under twenty five with whom I've come into contact. I met over 100 young activists when I worked as a reporter for the San Francisco *Sentinel*. Their attitudes recall the early post-Stonewall days, when there were many people who assumed bisexuality to be a natural thing rather than problematic. It really is a particular historical moment, and a rather narrowly framed one, of the seventies and early eighties, when bisexuality was marked as deviant and destructive and bisexuals were labeled spoilers of the lesbian and gay community.

Amanda: And that's exactly when the identity became so important to so many people who identity as bisexual now. It's exactly when the movement, to the extent that it is a movement, took off.

Elizabeth: When I read Wilson's essay, several things frustrated me, though I immediately recognized her point of view. It was the same point of view we ran into a few years ago at the Northwest Lesbian Conference. It took literally years to organize, and there were

or otherwise, have always been a part of the lesbian/gay movement.

LORRAINE HUTCHINS
Washington, DC

This is your first issue on bisexuality?!?!?

LANI KAAHUMANU
San Francisco, CA

Maybe middle age is making me too demanding intellectually, but calling your "What Do Bisexuals Want?" a debate seemed to be stretching things. I had my misgivings when I saw the cover of your Spring, 1992 issue. Its mix of Archie comics and Enquirer ambiances tipped me off that I may be expecting too much in the way of informed, deep debate around such a complicated issue.

The way the section was designed automatically slanted and presented bisexuals as "outsiders." We're frivolous, socially aberrant, spoilers of the march to revolution.

From what I've learned from the dykes I've known, racism, classism, anti-semitism, domestic violence, child-cus-



tody etc. are seen as a lot more threatening than the presence of bisexual women.

GANAPATI S. DURGADAS
Albany, New York

The reason why bisexuals continue to point to the oppression we face from some lesbians and gays is simple. As Carol Queen states in the same issue of *OUT/LOOK*, "We expected more of others who have faced homophobia."

BRETT BEEMYN
Iowa City, Iowa

What do bisexuals want? We want not to be trashed in gay and lesbian magazines by self-proclaimed proud biphobes.

MARCY SHEINER
Oakland, CA

I was glad to see the "Bisexuality Debate" in your Spring '92 issue. The articles and the cover art made a connection for me that, as a Kinsey scale 5-1/2, I'd never considered. The fears embedded in biphobia—that "some lesbians" are *really* straight, or might be contaminating lesbian space with *heterosexual* values—are

meetings every week, meetings which I and women from the Seattle Bisexual Women's Network attended. Here was this conference being organized to discuss lesbian issues, and here were a bunch of women who identified as bisexual who were involved in organizing the conference. Some of us wrote up a proposal for a workshop on a lesbian-bisexual dialogue. It wasn't a big deal until it got to the group as a whole. People freaked out that bisexual women wanted to invade a lesbian space, though all we wanted to do was give one workshop and, in fact, many of us were indistinguishable from the lesbians in that group in our politics and lives. In the end, we were called up by the organizing committee of the conference and told that we would be allowed to give our workshop if we could find a lesbian who would sit on the panel, presumably to act as a kind of chaperone to make sure that we didn't do anything untoward. So we had to get a lesbian, a known lesbian. What was so funny was that some of the lesbians who were willing to be our tokens turned out to have been with men much more recently than had most of us who were going to be on the panel. Clearly the divisions were a little murky.

The argument it always comes down

to at parties is: Is being a lesbian about being attracted to or falling in love with women, or is it about not being attracted to and falling in love with, or at least getting involved with, men?

Amanda: Or at least not sleeping with them.

Elizabeth: It's hard to get wrought up over this after so many years, but the reality is that it's not the outside coming in, it's the inside letting down some of the barriers. You've got Rita Mae Brown, Jan Clausen, Jill Johnston, Holly Near, June Jordan, pillars of the lesbian community, who all turned out to be bisexual, however they choose to define themselves.

Sarah: Imagine my surprise.

Elizabeth: It comes down to this notion of the politics of scarcity. We're not taking bread out of the mouths of lesbians. Women who ten years ago would have been lesbian are now showing a little more of the reality of their lives. It's not that there is this citadel of free space for women who chose only to women to live within, but it's all these women who are out there in the world, whose reality covers myriad different lives. I came out at work through the book *Closer to Home*, which was pretty difficult to do

SEE why this BOTHERS me so much? ALL you people want to DO is be DIVISIVE... to UNDERMINE our hard-won Lesbian identity!

Hey... I worked just as hard as YOU did to establish that identity!

That's why I don't understand why you want to throw it all AWAY just because of... some MAN!

I'm not trying to throw ANYTHING away... People like you want to yank it out from UNDER me...

I've worked for change ALL my LIFE... I've IMPOVERISHED myself trying to do the right thing... and NOW you treat me like I've MUTATED just 'cause I'm lovers with someone with the "wrong" body parts... I'm STILL "ME"... HAVEN'T YOU LEARNED A THING?



because no one knows what it means when you come out as bisexual.

Amanda: Is this a zero-sum game? Do lesbians lose if bisexuals win? What does it mean for us to say we're not taking bread from the mouths of lesbians. I think there are two reasons why the game looks like it's zero sum. On a historical level there certainly are changes in politically popular thinking. Lesbians are more invisible now, at least certain lesbians within lesbian-feminist mono-culture. There have been real cultural shifts away from seventies values. Women who were really active then are tired now. That kind of purity is hard to live out. Jan Clausen makes some really good points in her article "My Interesting Condition." She says, "The truth is that the lesbian-feminist way of life I knew was very hard on women, yet we were not supposed to notice or complain about that fact. We were supposed to content ourselves with our elect status and the glory of our exhausting service." She mentions a number of our examples. "Of course, all of this happened in a context of oppression. I'm not saying we simply did it to ourselves. Yet I wish we could have been gentler with each other and more honest about how hard and sometimes disillusioning it was." That point has really haunted

me for a long time.

Sarah: There are places where it's appropriate and reasonable to have lesbian-only space. It's important that there be spaces where women who identify as lesbians feel they can work together and do what they need to do, and feel that they don't have to deal with issues arising from heterosexual relationships, if they don't want to. I don't think that there are very many bisexuals active in formulating bisexual politics who would oppose that. So many of them were, or still are, members of "lesbian" communities. Not only are bis not taking bread out of the mouths of lesbians, but many bi women are women who actively create and support lesbian communities.

But it's disingenuous for any lesbian to discount bisexuals' feelings of disenfranchisement and suppression from lesbians by pointing to the lack of lesbian power in large-scale institutions. The reality is that lesbians *do* have the power, as do *all* people, to make others feel uncomfortable and controlled in group interactions. It certainly is a power of a different order if you're not connected to large scale institutions, but it's not an insignificant power, and to feel that power being exercised is not an insignificant experience. ♦

some of the same accusations and fears that have been directed at me as a femme for twenty years.

LYNDALL MACGOWAN
San Francisco, CA

What Do You Think Bisexuals Want?

Love.
Respect.
Companionship.
Commitment.
Freedom.
Equality.
Acceptance.
Hot Sex.
Romance.
Friendship.
Families.
Community.
Trust.
Fun.
Challenge.
Security.
Adventure.
Peace of mind.
Peace on earth.
And, oh yeah—
women and men.

AUDRYN ELIZABETH WEBB
San Francisco, CA

We want it ALL!!!

A. BILLY S. JONES
Washington, DC



Quick & Dirty

STOLEN THOUGHTS

After the Verdict

For those unfamiliar with the receiving end, the events in L.A. offered the chance to know what racism feels like. Art tries to make *another's* point of view our own (and succeeds from time to time), but nothing in recent history has done this as dramatically as the Rodney King tape and the Simi Valley 12's audacious denial of its reality. His reality, our reality.

As an outraged François Mitterrand said, We've all seen it. We know what we saw (and some of us who watch Court TV know what the jury saw as well). With those acquittals, for one shocking moment we all knew what it meant to feel something, to know it like the back of your hand, the bruise on your jaw, and then to have it denied. No, what you saw, experienced, suffered was really something other than what you saw, experienced, etc. This is one of the great tactics of racism (sexism, homophobia, classism). After a while, it's enough to make you crazy. It's enough to make

Letter from Portland



Bigot-Busting in Oregon

The Pacific Northwest continues to amaze me. The weather has been gorgeous. I've even begun calling the rain "liquid sunshine." It's hard not to love this piece of the world.

I wish that the political climate was as friendly. The Oregon Citizen's Alliance continues their hate crusade. They're taking it from the pulpit to the shopping mall. Last night we stopped at the grocery store and we were accosted by the OCA's "No Special Rights" petition-gatherers. A young woman and her husband and

their five children stood in the rain gathering signatures. Their sign said, "Should homosexuals have special rights?" The petition was, of course, the initiative that would declare lesbians, gay men and bisexual people abnormal and perverse through an amendment to the Oregon Constitution. A lot of folks stopped to sign the petition. Many didn't even bother to read it.

The other day, we were able to do a little Bigot-Busting. We stopped people and asked them to consider what

they were signing. Most would-be signers didn't like to be questioned about their choices and just walked away when we approached them. There were a lot of good people who voiced their opposition to the OCA's campaign. Finally, after about 45 minutes, the OCA people got tired of us and packed up their kids and their table and their signs and went home.

I continue to be amazed at the passion and the zeal that these OCA people have. This couple dragged their small children out into the rain to gather signatures. One little girl, maybe seven or eight, told me that she hated homosexuals because they have AIDS. Her father told her all about those people, she said. I am also astonished when I hear their rhetoric. They talk about a well-financed homosexual plot to control politics and garner votes and affirmative action for queers. They discuss, in the most graphic language, sexual practices that I've never heard of. They have created, from stereotypes and misconceptions, a grotesque caricature of who gay and lesbian people are. And then they put

it out as fact.

We are working really hard to stop this campaign of hate. And, we are terrified. Should this initiative pass, lesbians and gay men will become outlaws: blatantly and legally expendable people.

I'm hoping that we can get more help from our friends and allies around the country. Either we stop them in Oregon or we fight them state by state and election by election. Next year you could be confronted by these zealots at your neighborhood grocery store. Perhaps folks will consider taking their holidays in Oregon. We'll guarantee an exciting and memorable vacation

—Donna Red Wing

P.S. Just after I finished this letter, I was served with court papers by US marshals. The OCA is charging me, other activists, and even the city of Portland with obstruction of an election and with conspiracy under RICO, the federal racketeering law. I'll probably spend the next two years in court. ♦

WANDERING EYE



After the Verdict, San Francisco.

STOLEN THOUGHTS

you angry.

Here's a newly minted joke. The Rodney King jurors have reconsidered the Zapruder film and concluded that JFK's wounds were self-inflicted.

From "Verdict on America: Blow By Blow,"

by Lisa Kennedy,
Village Voice, 5/12/92

After the Verdict, II

Yes, it was about race, and it was about injustice, but it was also about class. It was a reaction to 12 years of being told we don't count. Of being told that Kennedys can rape, but Tysons can't. Neil Bush can rob savings and loans, but if black girls shoplift bread, they can be shot in the back and it's OK. John Sununu can fly all over the world in government planes, but we have to pay more and wait longer to take the bus.

From "A Fine Display of Anarchy," by Justin Bond,
Bay Area Reporter, 5/7/92

Keep 'Em in the Closet

CONGRESSMAN BARNEY

FRANK: For some time, as you know, and the Secretary [of Defense] has acknowledged, there have been gay men and lesbians in the military. Is there any evidence of behavior problems?



GENERAL

FRANK

COLIN POWELL: No, because as a matter of fact they have kept, so-called, in the closet. It is quite a different thing when

Brook Dillon

STOLEN THOUGHTS

it is openly practiced or openly known throughout the force and within the units. I think it makes very difficult management problems.

If I have heterosexual young men and women who choose not to have to be in close proximity because of different sexual preferences, am I then forced to face the problem of different accommodations for homosexuals and heterosexuals, and then by sex within the homosexual community?

I think the burden of proof is not on us to say that that wouldn't be prejudicial to good order and discipline, and the courts have consistently upheld that.

From Congressional Record,
2/5/92

Teenage Confusion

You pull out an Erik Erikson and the first page you open it up to says:

BISEXUAL

You freak and slam the book shut. Your heart is racing. You're no fool, you know what the word means. Your worst fears, you're actually what you felt like you were! Someone walks by and you pull the book to your chest so they can't see the title. You sandwich the two books between your books on mining towns in Colorado and find the most secluded reading carrell in the library, and start reading looking up every ten words or so. You start reading about *natural homosexual periods*, during which young boys play at sex with other boys. Okay, fine. You read on about the phase of *bisexual confusion* which is a period between the end of the *natural homosexual*

Quick & Dirty

Coming Out to William F. Buckley



Marvin Liebman continues to influence the shape of the American conservative movement after causing a stir in both the conservative and gay communities when he publicly came out several years ago. The following is an excerpt from "Coming Out Conservative," his forthcoming autobiography.

For almost four decades, I was a mover and shaker in the American anti-communist and conservative communities. During most of those years, I worked in close coordination with my friend, William F. Buckley, Jr., the editor of *National Review* and the man whom I consider to be the founder of the modern American conservative movement and the prime articulator of its philosophy. A little more than a month before my 67th birthday—on June 7, 1990—I sent him a letter.

My letter to Bill said in part:

"We've known each other for almost 35 years now, and ten years ago you served as my godfather/sponsor when I entered the Catholic Church. Though the subject never arose, you and Pat, among my oldest friends, must have known that I'm gay. It never seemed to matter....

"But it does matter to many 'movement' conservatives—this question of who is, and who is not gay. They wonder whether homosexuals are a menace to society. Just as, too often, there has been an undercurrent of anti-semitism among even some mainstream conservatives, there has always been an element of homophobia among us....

"Too many of our friends have recently used homophobia to sell their newsletters, or to raise money through direct

mail for their causes and themselves. This letter isn't designed to settle scores, but rather to give warning to the movement from someone who's been a part of it for three and a half decades.

"I worry about those allegedly Christian televangelists preaching hatred and fear of gays. These are men who would deny to more than twenty million Americans even the joy of peaceful union with their own families."

My letter put Buckley on the spot and I'm certain he suffered in preparing his reply. He is a devout and doctrinaire Roman Catholic bound by the theological strictures with which he grew up and, in spite of the realities of life, to which he still holds fast.

"I hope you will believe me," his letter began, "when I say that I understand the pain you have felt. Certainly I honor your decision to raise publicly the points you raise...."

"But you too must realize what are the implications of what you ask. Namely, that the Judeo-Christian tradition, which is aligned with, no less, one way of life, become indifferent to another way of life.... You are absolutely correct in saying that gays should be welcome as partners in efforts to mint sound public policies; not correct, in my judgment, in concluding that such a partnership presupposes the repeal of convictions that are more, much more, than mere accretions of bigotry. You remain, always, my dear friend, and my brother in combat."

For over half my life, I had been a professional activist in the anti-communist/conservative movement in America. I had organized activities that have given the movement focus, credibility and viability. In the 1950s and 1960s I developed the fund raising techniques that fueled the committees and campaigns—including the Young Americans for Freedom, the New York conservative party and the American Conservative Union that fostered the strong, consistent, anti-communist

core of the American rights.

My sense of political theater and my ability to dramatize the issues provided some of the cement that carried the right-wing in America from a fringe status into an historic force in our time. Without these efforts at Communism, the Reagan revolution might never have happened.

For all those years and many more, I was a homosexual. It was the grace of God—and the loving support of my friends—that enabled me to cease being afraid and finally stand up and come out.

I now have two families: gays and lesbians, both in and out of their "communities," "conservatives," both the believers and even those that use the label to further their own anything-but-conservative aims.

To my gay and lesbian brothers and sisters who are "out," I say that I am proud to finally be with you. I am grateful to have been embraced as warmly as I have been.

And to my conservative friends, I say build on the efforts of the men and women of years past who have defined a new philosophy. Be vigilant to the direct-mail and TV preaching of the religious hypocrites who subvert and lessen the word of God for their own venal and personal ends; the professional bigots who would save the American "family" from anything and anyone who is different; the politicians who deal in sanctimonious slogans, interested only in being elected. Disengage yourselves from all of them: the political hucksters, the red-necked know-nothings, the purveyors of hate and fear. They have nothing to do with conservatism. Hold fast to the basic concept of individual liberty over the state. Accept all the different men and women who live in our unique nation with its precious constitution.

Excerpted by arrangement with the author from "Coming Out Conservative," to be published by Chronicle Books in September 1992. ♦

STOLEN THOUGHTS

period and the onset of puberty wherein an early teen is attracted to both sexes and this is confusing. Then it goes on to talk about how this is all natural and when puberty kicks in you'll be totally and happily heterosexual.

Well this is wonderful! You are thrilled! What friends and religion couldn't take care of in several years of confusion, the wonder science of **PSYCHOLOGY** took care of in less than a page. Psychology becomes your new best friend. You pledge your life to this new savior of yours. You read Rollo May and both Freuds and Jung and the rest. They turn you on to Nietzsche and Locke and Hume and Descartes. And you read and read and read, checking every day for that first pimple, surely the sign to the end of this damned period of bisexual confusion.

From "So You Wanna Be a Rural Midwestern Bisexual Teen!" by J. LeRoy, BVI Central, Issue 11-2

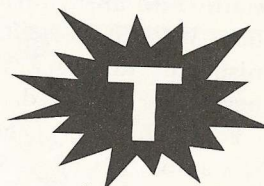
10 Things Men in Hollywood Say About Women in Hollywood

1. She's having her period.
2. She's a bitch.
3. She slept her way to the top.
4. She's sleeping her way to the top.
5. She's sleeping with the director.
6. She's not fuckable.
7. She needs to get fucked.
8. I fucked her.
9. She's fucked up.
10. She's a dyke.

From Movieline, May, 1992

STRANGE TOWN WHERE MEN AREN'T WANTED

...and other tabloid SHOCKERS!



HE TABLOIDS. Grace Jones coming out, Travolta being kicked out, Liberace sued post-mortem by a small collection of gay lovers. Lily Tomlin's wardrobe, a New York sports figure caught by cops having sex in a car with a guy, Richard Chamberlain hiding from the world, "depressed because his closest friend, Martin Rabbett, has left the home the two built together." And "a bizarre plan to turn cockroaches gay," accompanied by a sketch of two queeny cockroaches. One says to the other "let's move to San Francisco."

The best-selling US newspaper is not the refined *New York Times*, but the colorful, adjective-ridden *National Enquirer*. If you want



COMMITTED: Karen Bellavance (left) and Beth Grace recently announced their "engagement" in the town's local newspaper.

LESBIANVILLE, U.S.A. — that's what they're calling Northampton, Mass., population 30,000. Some 10,000 gay women live in the area.

Welcome to Lesbianville, U.S.A. — a bizarre town where so many women love women you can even find them cuddling and kissing on Main Street!

The place is listed on maps as Northampton, Mass., but here are just some of the reasons why it got its nickname:

- Some 10,000 gay women live in the town or nearby.

- The newspaper publishes announcements of same-sex engagements and "commitment" ceremonies on the same page as weddings.

- A popular lingerie shop hosts an annual lesbian night.

- One book shop sells "Just Say No to Men" buttons. It also has a lesbian fiction section and a sign telling men to browse elsewhere.

- In bars and restaurants, women hold hands across cozy tables and dance cheek-to-cheek.

- A monthly newspaper lists events such as a lesbian town meeting, plus get-togethers for older lesbians and "Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays."

10,000 cuddling, kissing lesbians call it home sweet home



GAY OL' TIME: Even the graffiti is homosexual. On this railroad overpass, two ladies declare their devotion like love-struck teens.

the center of town someone painted: "Fern & Lisa 4-ever."

Northampton (population

think it's kind of nice," said Beth Grace, whose "engagement" to fellow gay Karen Bellavance was recently an-

Enquiring minds want to know . . .

What happened last week

LAST WEEK the number of unmarried American couples living together went 3.4 million new golf balls — enough to fill 100 pickup trucks or blanket an entire

to see how lesbians and gays are portrayed to mainstream America, monitor the tabloids. Target them and you've only got five or six newspapers to read each week. Target US dailies, and you've got a lot of reading to do every single day—a lot of it very depressing.

The *Times* has less color and goes light on the adjectives. It sticks the rare queer-positive story in its features section. The very nature of the newspaper business makes daily papers a negative news source. *USA Today* doesn't count.

In the dailies, it's only first section news if it explodes. From the middle of March through the middle of April, the *Times* printed one story with gay content in its front section (about Bill Clinton's run-in with ACT-UP)—and it was nowhere near the front page. That was too crowded with news from war zones for queers to get an inch.

The tabloids aren't interested in coups and wars around the world. They don't fill the front page with Yugoslavia unless a two-headed baby was born there. Front

**AN OUT/LOOK
EXCLUSIVE!**

**BY VICTORIA
STAGG
ELLIOTT**

Gay terrorists plot to destroy Oscars

Stars terrified of being exposed as homosexuals

Hollywood celebrities are scared out of their wits because a gay terrorist group is plotting to destroy the Academy Awards by exposing stars they claim are secret homosexuals and lesbians!

Radical members of an organization called Queer Nation are so fed up with the negative way gays are portrayed on film that during the March 30 live Oscar broadcast they plan to:

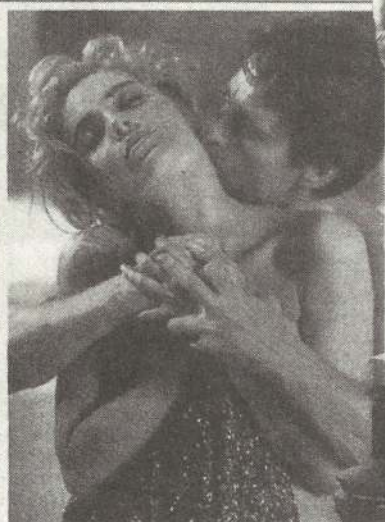
- Raise "I'm Queer" signs near stars they say are gay.
- Distribute phony Oscar tickets picturing "gay" stars.
- Trigger monster traffic jams on all streets leading to the auditorium.
- Disrupt the ceremony with screaming hecklers.
- Pass out maps to "gay" celebrities' homes.

And that's only the beginning! The group vows it's going to wage full-scale war in the film capital.

"We're going to drag every gay star out of the closet and into reality," Dean Tate, a Queer Nation activist, told *THE ENQUIRER*.

Added a leader of the gay group, "People at home watching the Oscars will be shocked when they see some of the celebrities we'll 'out' that night. At least 10 people who've accepted Oscars in the past five years have been gay."

Some former nominees who've already been identified as gays are Danny Kaye, Sal Mineo, James Dean, Laurence Olivier and legendary director George Cukor.



TARGETS: Homosexual group is red-hot over the way movies portray gays. The films "The Silence of the Lambs," starring Jodie Foster (above left), and "Basic Instinct," Michael Douglas' new movie, both feature homosexual villains.



QUEER NATION: Radical protesters plan to expose gay actors on Oscar night.

Few remember last year's Oscar winners — Page 35

ord mogul David Geffen. All of them have been labeled by the group as closet gays. The organization plans to "out" other celebrities and even gay relatives of celebrities.

The activists are also furi-

vinced them to begin their war, say insiders, was the Oscar-nominated "The Silence of the Lambs."

sider, "We have over 100 people infiltrated into the staff of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. Several who are set to appear on-camera have promised to make statements supporting our protests.

large number who'll be protesting outside.

"A queer caravan is coming from all over the country by car to stage a traffic jam so people can't get to the Oscars. We'll have every street near the auditorium jammed up.

"We're going to hand out maps to the gay stars' homes. We'll also stand next to gay celebrities who are in the closet and hold a sign over their heads saying, 'I'm Queer.'

"And we'll have protesters interrupting the broadcast."

The group is also printing fake Oscar tickets, each picturing a celebrity they claim is secretly gay, revealed another insider.

And the result is pure terror.

Even more shocking, at a meeting to plan protests, the gay group's Hollywood Homophobia Committee distributed fliers urging gays with AIDS to fight for their cause by infecting others!

Said the inside source, "One of the most popular

It's also nice to know who's queer.

The queen of the bunch is the *National Enquirer*. You won't find

Typical of its news is a story about "Empty Nest" star Kristy McNichol. Apparently, she's sharing a house with Martha "Marty" Allen. Yay! They like to snuggle in front of the fire. They've bought a house together, and they're planning for a small "marriage" ceremony. Their families have accepted them and so has the cast of "Empty Nest." She's a good role model for anybody. I think I might write her a fan letter.

Shocked cronies say Fidel wants to marry

In the same issue the *Enquirer* runs a more traditional human interest story: "Strange Town Where Men Aren't Wanted." In Northampton, Mass. (they dateline the story "LESBIANVILLE, U.S.A.") "10,000 cuddling, kissing lesbians call it home sweet home.... A popular lingerie shop hosts an annual lesbian night.... Even the graffiti is gay! On a railroad overpass near the center of town someone painted: 'Fern & Lisa 4-ever.'" When can I move in?

The story is accompanied by a photo of two women smiling and holding hands, and a photo of the graffiti. Two homophobes are also quoted, but the nasty quotes are at the end of the article.

Compare this to the *Times* story about Walt Whitman, and you'll notice who gets put at the end. The *Times* leaves it to the last paragraph to mention Whitman's homosexuality. Writing about Walt Whitman without discussing sexuality is like trying to write a romance novel without sex. The *Enquirer* also tells us about the gay rumor scandal surrounding Oprah and her fiancé Graham Steadman. The photo accompanying the story, of course, features Oprah with her mouth wide open. Elsewhere in the same issue, drag queens are pictured with Jackee at New York's Limelight Disco.

The *Globe* gets nastier—at least the National *Enquirer* occasionally likes what people are wearing. But who could resist the *Globe*'s exposé on everyone's favorite child, Drew Barrymore? "Drew dumps boyfriend and shacks up with gay galpal." Ahh, another old friend comes out. Drew's cropped her

hair and shackled up with Lisa Reade. A friend is quoted in the article as saying "they're like little lovebirds." A "close pal" adds "Drew is very open with her affection for Lisa." Another unnamed friend says Drew told her, "it's more fun to be with a woman than a man, because men are such pains in the butt."

Even Drew gets her two cents in: "I love men but I think I'm even more fascinated by women because

I'll never fully understand a man." She also goes on about her "male mentality." Maybe she's butch?

In the same issue, the band Right Said Fred is featured in an article titled, "I'm too sexy ... for my wife!" Richard Mansoli, one of the band members, says he's "too sexy just for girls ... Being bisexual is no big deal these days, is it? I can't imagine anyone getting funny about it," and "I enjoy both men and women ... Basically, I sleep with

Friends Predict...
Barbara Walters to Divorce
NATIONAL ENQUIRER
 July 31, 1990 85¢ / 89¢ CANADA LARGEST CIRCULATION OF ANY PAPER IN AMERICA
 Probe Reveals: **NEW GAY SEX SCANDAL ROCKS TENNIS**
 Lesbian Stars Stalk Young Players in Showers • Teens Lured to All-Girl Hot-Tub Parties
 Kenny R...
 'Cheers' Star Eating Himself to Death — Packs On 60 Pounds

anyone I'm in love with."

The *Globe* also reports that Cybil Shepherd's personal body builder is a "he who used to be a she!" and that Patrick Swayze banned his sister-in-law from his home because she filmed a raunchy lesbian love scene in a sleazy new movie.

The *Globe* allows readers to earn a little money by revealing their secrets in a column called, "Candid Confessions." Usually there are repeated confessions about cross-dressing or accidentally falling for the same sex. This time a couple of cheerleaders tried to get back at a peeping Tom by spraying paint through the peep hole. But their ink stained the school nurse—a peeping Jane!

The *National Examiner* is a cheap version of the *Enquirer* with contests to find people who look just like

their moms. When it comes to queer stuff, we almost don't exist, but they did report that Madonna finds k.d. Lang hot. "K.d.'s absolutely gorgeous," Madonna "gushes." And, the *Globe* says, "the singer admits she's had gay sexual experiences and hints that she and comedienne Sandra Bernhard are more than friends."

The *Sun* tends to be more "freaks on parade" than news. Last year they were sued for their use of a picture of a 96-year-old "pregnant newscarer from Australia," and admitted in court that many stories were fiction. Incidentally, one recent issue featured a story on the two-year-old child who used to be the two-headed baby. One head was removed. The child is fine, and the head is being kept alive on machines. Apparently, the medical

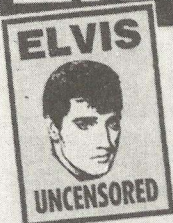
staff has bought it a VCR to watch movies.

The *Sun* is also weak on queer stories, but they did have a story headlined, "I love my gay killer says girl who wants to marry convicted slayer of homo lover." She says it doesn't matter that he's had homosexual experiences, nor that he's in jail for killing his last lover "I've discovered I'm not truly a homosexual," he says. "Patricia has uncovered the real desires that I had kept hidden deep inside." Hmm.

The *Star*, out of Tarrytown, NY, has the best hometown name of the lot and just one small article of queer interest in Dear Meg, "every week the column with a heart." It's a letter from a wife whose husband wants to divorce her because of youthful lesbian flings. She says she's still in love after all these years

Another shocker from the sizzling new book — by his own stepmom

Elvis' secret gay life



Young girls infatuated him, but he slept with men, too

Elvis bedded hundreds of women — and even some men, his stepmother Dee Presley discloses in her blockbuster new book, "The Intimate Life and Death of Elvis." In the following exclusive ENQUIRER installment from the book, Dee — who was married to Elvis' father Vernon for 17 years — also reveals how the superstar's kinky sex life forced him into paying blackmail.

By DEE PRESLEY

Elvis had gay lovers. In the early days, at least, he didn't care whether he slept with girls — or boys.

That was the shocking secret his father Vernon revealed one day when he was upset over the whole sick sexual scene at Graceland.

"Hell, Dee, I knew all about his sexual parties and orgies with all those young girls that were slipped into the house in Germany and Graceland. Hell, I even know about all those boys he used to sleep with," Vernon told me.

"In the early days, it was either boys or girls. Elvis didn't care which. Didn't matter to him if it was one of his Hollywood actor friends like Nick Adams or a guy the world had never heard of. I was ashamed. Still am.

"I saw all those damn pictures too, the X-rated junk he was always having someone make of his sex parties.

"He really got his kicks from that kind of stuff.

"Colonel Parker (Elvis' manager) got hold of some of the worst ones. He kept

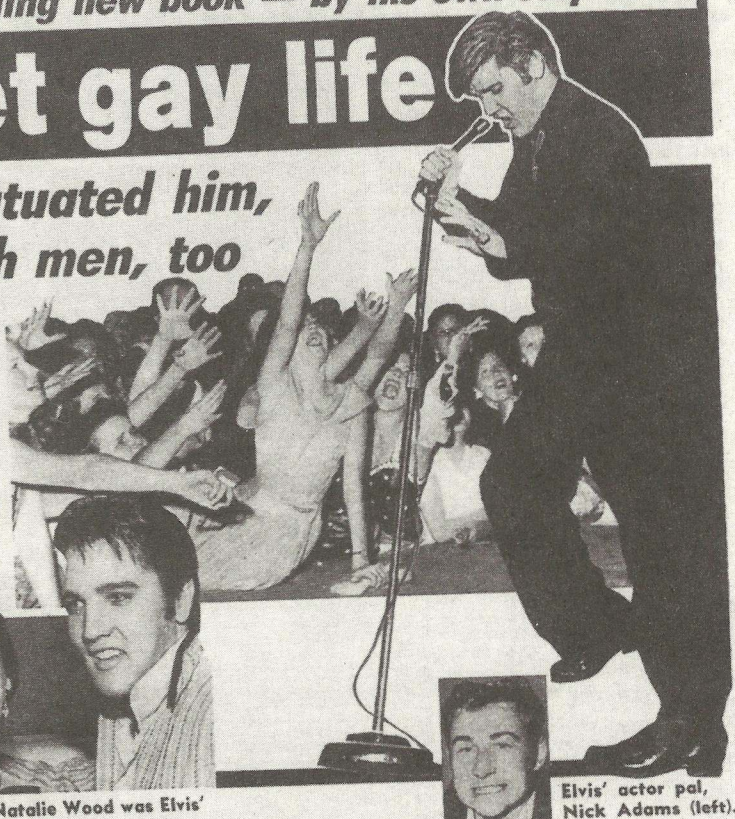
them and threatened Elvis with exposure every time he got out of line. He kept Elvis' neck in a noose because of those pictures."

"Those pictures" undoubtedly involved Elvis' bizarre infatuation with young girls. It was often said by his inner circle that Elvis could only get real sexual enjoyment

being aroused by the

ed the same thing to me. He might not have been a good lover — but he certainly was a busy one. After his mother's death, he literally turned Graceland into

take a bath. Sometimes he purely stank, but he just splashed on more cologne. "I figured all those young girls were either too young or too ignorant to be



ACTRESS Natalie Wood was Elvis' houseguest in Memphis.

Elvis' actor pal, Nick Adams (left).

'He might not have been a good lover — but he certainly was a busy one'

summoned the bodyguards, who threw the doctor out of the house.

Later, Vernon told me the doctor had made sexual advances toward Elvis.

The doctor had also threatened to reveal that Elvis was having an affair with a 14-year-old girl (Priscilla). This was too much for Elvis because he had seen what happened to Jerry Lee Lewis

of marriage and two children. Meg tells her 30 to 60 percent of heterosexuals experiment before settling down to raise a family. Wow. 60 percent.

The black-and-white *Weekly World News* is the most vicious of all the tabloids, with at least one article every six months about curing gay people. Their focus is not on star gossip but on babies born with angel wings, and finding Amelia Earhart and Jimmy Hoffa alive. In between absurd articles they run pictures of pretty women for no apparent reason.

The rag has two main columnists, both of whom are nasty but in different ways. Ed Anger is exactly that. He writes venomous opinion columns.

Dotti, wonderful Dotti, I could fall in love with her. She's "America's most outspoken advice columnist." One guy wrote her a letter that his girlfriend had fallen head over heels for his boss's wife. She responds in her typical bullheaded style, "if your pinhead girlfriend hasn't got sense enough to keep her fantasies to herself there's not a whole hell of a lot you can do about it." She's quite unlike the *Star's* Meg, who always says "go to a counselor."

You've got to give them a little credit, though. While the other tabloids were pondering over Fergie and Andy's marriage, only the *Weekly World News* knew the truth—"Andy is gay." And Fergie once said to a friend, "my husband is more of a woman than I am." Queen Elizabeth is terrified Fergie will blow the lid off some of her family's carefully guarded secrets.

At the end of March, the story that really captured the tabloids' imagination was Queer Nation's threat of massive Oscar protests. The *Enquirer* called the group "gay terrorists" and painted the stars as pathetic and "scared out of their wits." They outline the "terrorist"

Disgruntled elf tells all!

'SANTA CLAUS IS GAY!'



... says wacko professor, who claims he worked for St. Nick 7 years!

By JOE BERGER
Staff writer

Crackpot college professor Lars Farn-dahl has written a mind-boggling new book claiming he once worked side by side with Santa Claus — and charging that jolly old St. Nick is a flaming fairy!

"I was one of Santa's 'elves' for more than seven years, and I can say from personal experience that this so-called hero is a dirty old man, a dyed-in-the-wool homosexual," the pea-brained prof claims in his unpublished Christmas: *The Devil In*

of Santa's elves from 1979 to the spring of 1986, when a ticked-off St. Nick fired him for resisting his sexual advances.
"The kindly old Santa" tolled in legend.

plan and end with a quote from a sticker, "I'm your worst fear. I'm fed up and I'm queer."

The *Globe* wrote a two-by-six-inch article about the queers at the Oscars, gave a few details of the plan, and titled it, "What a Drag! Gay guerillas target Oscars." The *Star* blared, "Angry gays threaten to out 60 stars at Oscars." The article promised 5,000 ACT-UPers from all over the country. Too bad it didn't happen. I was looking forward to that.

I love the tabloids for exactly what they are and what they can do. I take tabloid absurdity seriously. Yes, they're not perfect. Yes, there's some hatred. But we can work with it.

Besides, think of it this way. Some positive queer information is getting to every single corner of the country. Everybody reads the tabloids whether they buy them or not. The tabloids go everywhere. Towns that don't bother with the

New York Times—let alone the gay press—are getting the *National Enquirer* and good stories about Kristy McNichol and Drew Barrymore.

Well, I'm all done with my reading for this week. I think I'll just sit down and write a love letter to Dottie. A couple weeks ago, she printed a letter from a guy who asked if he should get a sex change so he could get together again with his ex-wife who is now a lesbian. She said that he should try a brain change and called him a pinhead. Maybe I should write the following to her. "Dear Dottie, I love you. Are you queer or should I get a sex change?"

Naah, she'd just call me a pinhead.

So give me gossip—enquiring queers want to know. ♦

... the pic-
nim escorted
Germany.

NEXT WEEK

Elvis nearly kills a teenage fan in a drug orgy, leaving her with permanent brain damage.

From the forthcoming book, THE INTI-
TH OF ELVIS by

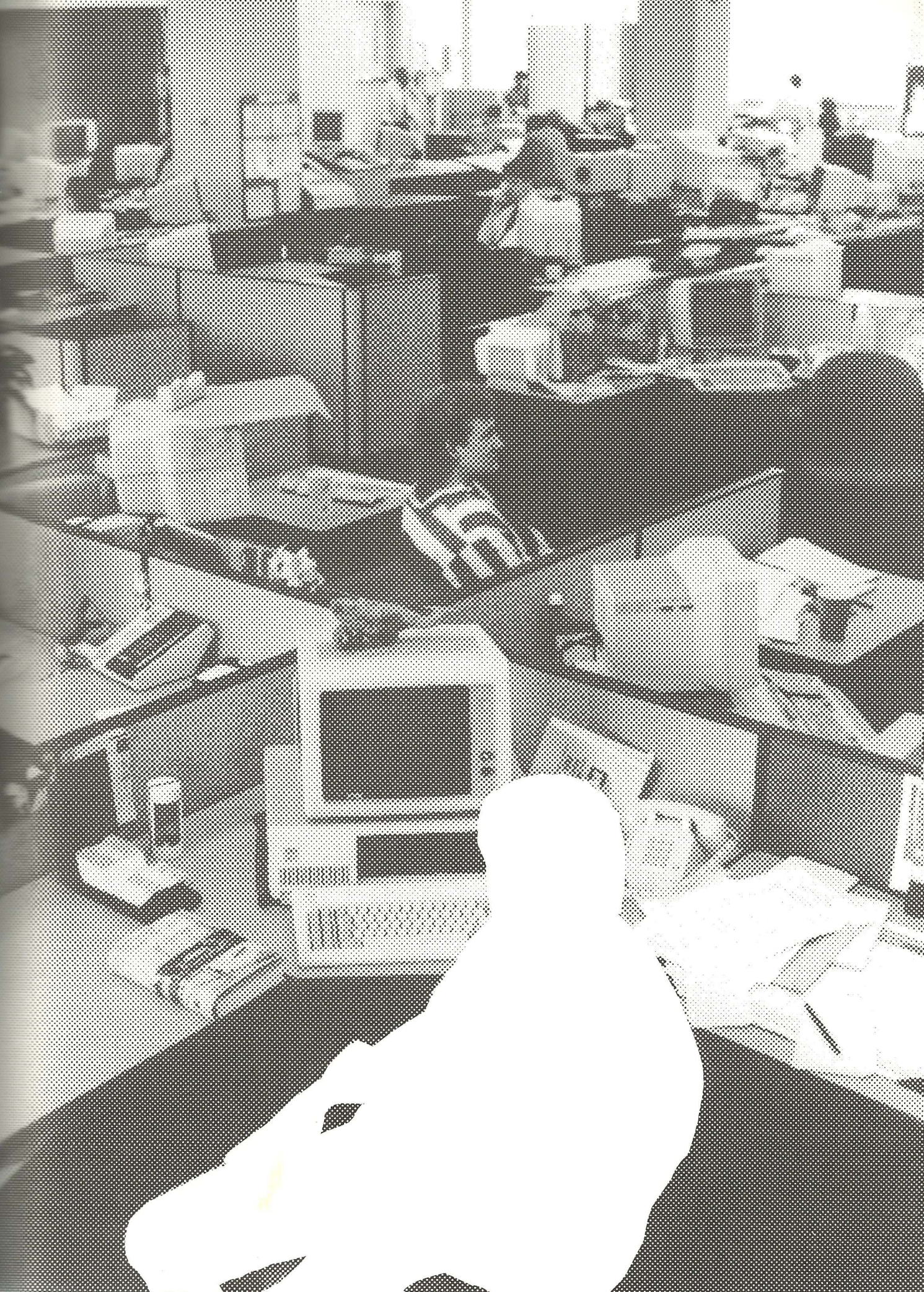
{ AS GAY ISSUES ENTER
THE MAINSTREAM,
JOURNALISTS WILL SERVE
AS THE GATEKEEPERS. }

When mainstream journalists come out to their editors, their co-workers, or their readers, they face a host of professional dilemmas. Can they be objective? Are they advocates? How should they react when they see unfair coverage?

Since Leroy Aaronson (the former executive editor of the *Oakland Tribune*) founded the National Lesbian and Gay Journalists Association a couple of years ago, these have been often-asked questions. What impact this will have on the news we read, see, and hear remains to be seen, but recently the managing editors of the *New York Times* and *Wall Street Journal* appeared on a panel at a New York chapter meeting. They made it clear that from their perspective it's okay to be gay, and okay to write about gay subjects.

As gay issues enter the mainstream at an increasing pace, it will often be journalists who serve as gatekeepers. Here, three journalists talk about their experiences.

Who Decides What's Fit to Print?





{ YOU COME OUT WHEN
YOU'RE READY, JUST LIKE
EVERYTHING ELSE IN THIS
WORLD. I WOULD HAVE
PREFERRED TO WAIT. }

RE-HIRE PALOMO!

Who Cares if He's a Homo?

Juan Palomo of the Houston Post made national news last summer when, enraged by a gay bashing murder, he wrote a column in which he came out to his public. His editors censored it, then fired him after news of the action was reported in the alternative press. After widespread protest from the Hispanic and the gay communities, the newspaper rehired him.

You come out when you're ready, just like everything else in this world. You can't do it if you're not ready to face your

family or your friends, your coworkers or the world, and maybe even lose your job.

I would have preferred to wait. I don't think I was ready. I had not told my family. When I came out in that column, I knew that I had to call my sisters and my brother. When it wasn't going to run, I was relieved. As it turned out, my family was very supportive—probably more supportive than ever before.

I had only been writing the column for seven or eight months and

I felt that I needed more time to build up my reputation in the community. But I couldn't continue doing my job while trying to pretend I was a straight man. Every time I wrote a column about gay issues people said, "Oh, you're so sensitive about this, you write like you're one of us." I really did not like the hypocrisy of writing about "them" instead of "us."

When the murder took place, I felt it was time to end the charade. There was so little reaction from the gay community, the religious community, the city officials and the politicians. I just had to say something that would shake people up and another column about what they're doing to "those people" wouldn't be enough.

So at the end of the column I wrote on the murder, I said I had a special responsibility to speak up because, like the young man who got killed, I am gay. Well, I turned it in to my editors and they said no way. They questioned whether I was ready for the consequences of coming out.

"This is no minor decision," I said. "This is something that I've

been thinking about for a long time." But they wouldn't let me do it. The column ran pretty much as written except for my coming out. It was still one of the best columns I've ever written. It caused a tremendous reaction throughout Houston.

The original ending of the column got out to an alternative weekly newspaper, the *Houston Press*. My editors accused me of leaking it but I had only shown the column, in its original form, to friends at that paper. My editors said I was betraying a trust between us by talking to another publication about what was happening within the *Post* and I agreed not to discuss the internal process. I did reserve the right to speak about my feelings about coming out though.

Then, a day after I got back from vacation, I was fired. They made excuses but their main reason for firing me was that I had talked to, and continued to talk to, other media. Later they said it was because of a long-standing disagreement over the direction of my column, that I was a prima donna with my own agenda. I'm always amazed that when other people have strong interests they have causes, when gays do we have agendas. They're all personal agendas. Unfortunately they did not see it that way and I was fired.

There was a huge protest from the Hispanic community and the gay community. I owe a lot to Queer Nation. They marched in front of the editor's high-rise home with signs, chanting, "Re-hire Palomo, who cares if he's a homo?" I felt a little sorry for my editor.

Thanks to the protest the paper rehired me, but my column was moved from the front page of the metro section three times a week, to the inside of the op-ed page twice a week, and I had to help write editorials. One of their gripes was that I wrote opinion. So now I

can write opinion. I can and do write about whatever I want, including gay issues.



PALOMO

I came out when I did because I felt I had no choice. I felt that it would help and I wanted to feel good about myself. I would do it again under the same circumstances, because to have done otherwise would have meant the perpetuation of a lie. It also would have meant a perpetuation of the belief that we're not supposed to write about homosexuality in "family" newspapers.

Maybe it was dishonest for me to take the columnist job without telling my editors that I was gay and that I eventually planned to come out in my column. I think the impact of my coming out was worth that small lie. I'm sure that I would not have gotten the columnist job if

I had told them. My editors claim now that they had an idea I was gay, but that it didn't matter because I was in the closet.

The reaction to my coming out has been almost overwhelmingly positive, although I'm sure there are people who don't read my column as a result. I really feared that the Hispanic community would reject me and would be closed to me, but they have been very supportive.

One thing that helped me was that I was speaking out in my column not only on gay issues but on Hispanic issues, Black issues and all sorts of other issues that other columnists don't cover in Houston. They had never seen a Hispanic person tell the white world to fuck off, and they liked it. It didn't matter that I am gay. Maybe they feel that he may be a queer, but he's our queer. ♦

{ I CAME OUT BECAUSE I WAS
TOTALLY SICK AND TIRED.
OF BEING FIXED UP BY
PEOPLE AT THE MAGAZINE. }

THE RESIDENT DYKE

at Essence

Linda Villarosa is a senior editor at Essence magazine and co-author, with her mother, of a May 1991 article, "The Mother Daughter Thing: Love, Loss and Coming Out."

My magazine is the country's largest Black women's magazine, with five million readers. We get a lot of our stories by personalizing, talking

about our own experiences, and coming up with stories. I would go to the meetings and sit like a lump because everyone was talking about their husbands, their boyfriends, and their families.

I would talk a little bit about my family, but I would even be nervous about that because of fear of having the whole gay thing come up. People started to assume that I'd had

some bad break-up and needed to meet someone. I came out because I was totally sick and tired of being fixed up by people at the magazine, not for any political reason.

I finally just said to the editor-in-chief, "I'm a lesbian. Please stop it. I don't want to meet your brother-in-law." She was quite nice, and really apologetic. It was so much fun that the next Monday I went to all of the editors' offices and came out. I got to be the resident dyke, which was fine. I was so much more comfortable about myself.

As it happens, we were deciding on gay issues to cover when I was making this decision. Everybody was saying, "We need to do more articles for our lesbian sisters," and then looking right at me. "What do you think?" they asked.

I was more curious to know what they thought. They decided they wanted to hear from somebody's

mother. All those eyes were still focused on me. So, I asked my mother. She thought about it and called me the next day. "I really love you," she said. "I think this is an important thing for you and I will do it."

Then they said they wanted my input as well. Talking about myself was absolutely frightening. As a journalist, most of my pieces had been about toxic waste or health care, never about myself.

My mother and I got together for a very intense weekend, talking about how we had felt during my coming out process, which happened when I was in college. We were really happy with the piece we turned in.

My editor called me in and I thought she was just going to say how fabulous it was, but she said, "I

think you need to use a pseudonym because this could really hurt your career." But I thought, "What the hell is she talking about? I'm going to say how fabulous it is to be a lesbian and then say I don't want to say who I really am?"



VILLAROSA

"Not only do I want to use my real name, and my mother's real name," I said, "we want our photos in."

In the time before it hit the stands, we became paralyzed with fear. I wondered if I could just pull them off the newsstand. My mother and people at my job were very afraid for me too. After they shared their fears, I stopped being so afraid. "Oh, you're going to get so much negative mail," they said. "We'll try to shield you from it."

When the magazine hit the newsstand, we were overwhelmed



Kerry Shore

by the positive response. Everybody I ever met in my entire life called me that day. They called my mother. Even some of the crank letters we got were kind of nice. The worst was from one woman who said, "You know I'm going to come up to your office to set you straight. I'm going to fix you."

I also got a lot of frightening and painful letters from young people. One young Howard University student wrote to say: "Of course, all my friends are normal (straight) heterosexual and a majority of them are homophobic, but I'm here crumbling inside trying to find myself with hopes of ever being happy."

Another letter said, "I'd rather face death than face all the bullshit I haven't asked for that's been handed to me. I won't do anything rash, I have a son, I have responsibilities, I won't commit suicide but life is so unfair. I do not like feeling like a freak being around people who think I am."

This article got more mail than any other in the 21-year history of the magazine. We made a decision to do a follow-up that appeared a few months later. I think it was heartening to some people to see that I was still there, still writing and that everything was okay. The follow-up also got a lot of mail.

It's really changed my life for the better. As a journalist it's really helped me to be a better writer and interviewer.

There are risks involved. I think that I was on the editor-in-chief track and now it's been made clear to me that I am not. I don't really care about being editor-in-chief but I certainly didn't want to be taken off that track. That is one of the consequences that I've faced.

Another good thing is that now my boss has changed her tack. The other week she called me in and she was acting a little odd. She said, "You know, I just met this really nice woman...." ♦

I'VE BEEN ACCEPTED.
THEY DON'T QUITE KNOW WHAT
TO DO WITH IT, BUT I WALK
IN THAT NEWSROOM
WITH MY HEAD HIGH.

THREE-PIECE SUITS, *Pride, & Moral Examples*

Gordon Smith is the assistant to the editor of Rhode Island's Providence Journal Bulletin. A 31-year veteran of that paper, he came out to his boss last year, inspired, he says, by the National Lesbian and Gay Journalists Association.

I wore a suit for the first time in fifteen years when I came out to my publisher. I also carried with me a copy of the *Fortune* magazine with the cover story on the emergence of gays and lesbians in the corporate world.

I had finally came out to myself in 1987, after a year of depression and a breakdown because of the welling up of realizing I am gay and the hypocrisy of my perfect family life. I'm 52 years old and was married for 19 years. I have two wonderful children with whom my relationship is now strained at best.

I just couldn't live a lie any longer. It's especially difficult if you're a closeted journalist reporting on the world out there, knowing that your brothers and sisters are out there suffering.

The people at my paper were very understanding about the changes in my life. I separated from

my wife, and I'm now in a wonderful monogamous relationship. Our relationship is an example of traditional family values, which to me are people who love each other and who set a good moral tone for society. I think it's important for the gay community to take back the whole concept of traditional values. Arthur and I are deacons in the Congregational Church and very active in the community.

Last summer I marched in my first gay pride parade. When we were close to the *Journal* building, and I said that I worked there, a friend from ACT UP asked, "Why don't you do something about them?"

I reflected and realized he was right. The paper wasn't covering the parade. It had been covered before, and the feature section did a pretty damn good job covering the gay community, but there were 1,200 people

in the march and the paper ignored it.

"I'm mad too," I said. "But on page two are the names and phone numbers of editors. Call up and complain. I'd say that to anybody who has a complaint about the



SMITH

paper." So they did. They asked the *Journal* editors why this parade wasn't covered.

Then it occurred to me that if there was a meeting, I wanted to be a part of it. I woke up at 5 a.m. and waited for Arthur to get up. "I have to come out," I said when he did. "Will you be with me?"

Well, he had his problems with it because he is a public school teacher, and he'd been burned before, but he said he would support me no matter what.

In the car on the way to an out-of-town meeting, I asked my boss if he had heard from the gay community about not covering the parade. "They are us," I told him. "I want you to know that, and I'm making a statement because I think it's important. Probably ten percent of the readers and potential readers are gay. I hope I'll help the paper

by being out and being visible. They'll know that there is someone on the paper who is open. You can use me as a resource to bounce story ideas off of."

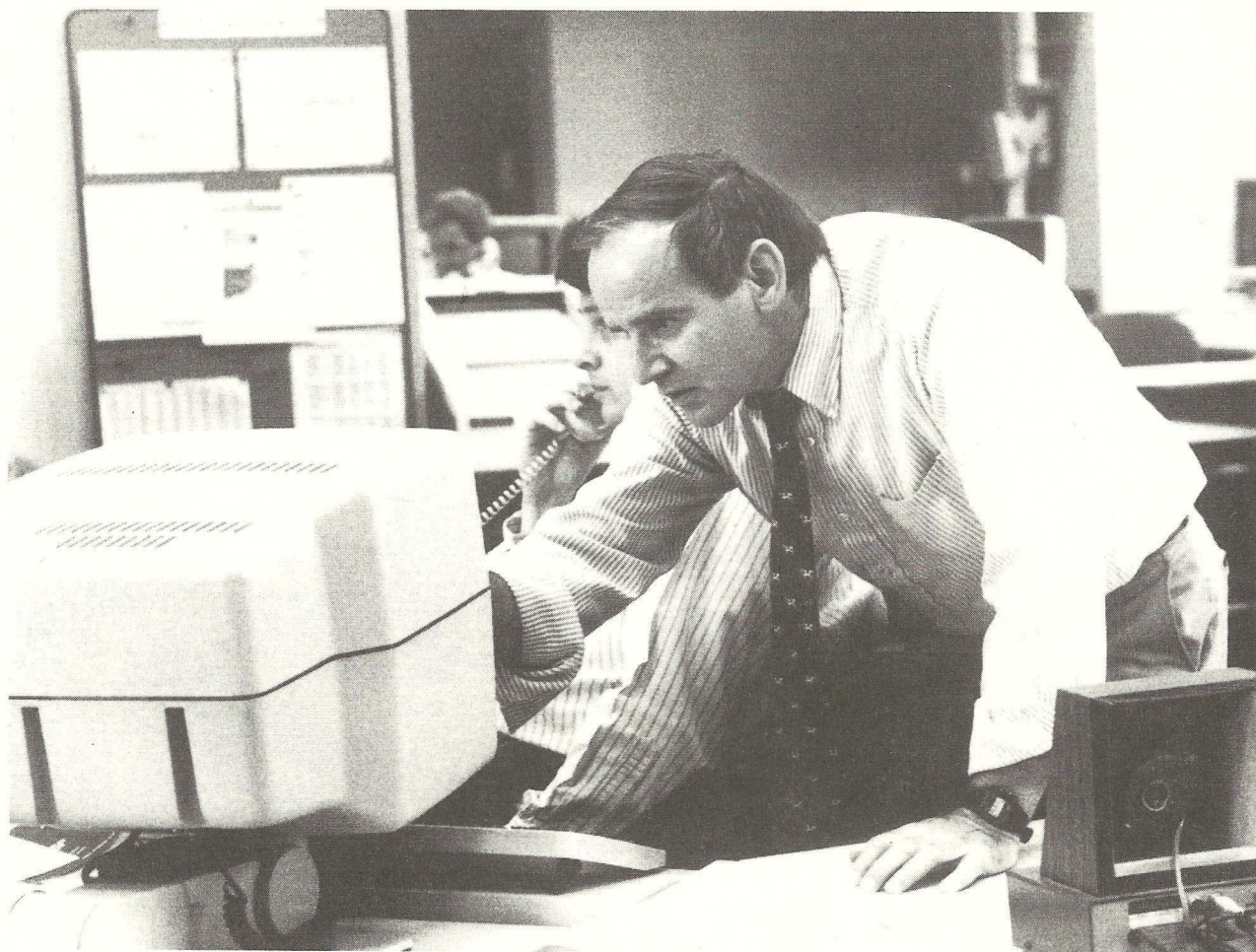
I wasn't fired. He didn't drive off the road. He did have a meeting with representatives of the gay community the next day. On Coming Out Day there was a page-one story. It made page one because I was out.

I've been aggressive in my follow-up to coming out. I've been walking that fine line of activism, where I give story ideas and yet back off. I've been able to use the internal bulletin board of our newspaper to make comments about gay and lesbian coverage. There's not been one negative comment made to me.

However, I had hoped there would be journalists who would be curious and ask, "Why do you think

it's so important to be out? What's this organization (NLGJA) all about?" They don't get it. They're afraid. That's okay. They know I'm there and I hope others will come out too. I came out to all of the editors so that those who made story decisions all knew—especially the editorial department, which has been very conservative. Rhode Island has the highest percentage of Catholics of any state in the Union.

I've been accepted. They don't quite know what to do with it, but I walk in that newsroom with my head high. I've never felt better. Sure there are risks. But after 31 years at the paper, my risk was a lot less than that of a young reporter or photographer trying to work their way up. Once I resolved my privacy issues, it would have been cowardly of me not to come out. ♦





Journalism's HIDDEN AGENDA

The myth of objectivity reinforces reader opinion at a midpoint between right and wrong, argues Advocate editor MASHA GESSEN. She warns the lesbian and gay press to think twice before adopting that standard.

If family legends are to be believed, I represent the sixth generation of journalists in my family. So professional pride being a familial matter, my grandmothers struggle through my articles with their dictionaries and, invariably, raise their heads at the end and say with pained expressions, "But I can't tell what you think!"

At which point I find myself trying to explain to the Russian women who have worked as editors

for fifty years that in America objectivity is held up as an ideal for journalists. At which point they generally inform me, in that patient way that grandmothers have, that there is no such thing as objectivity in anything, least of all in writing.

I bring this up because it behooves us to keep in mind that objectivity is by no means a concept accepted—much less respected—by journalists around the world. (This is also something we'd be wise to remember in our efforts to create a queer press that transcends national boundaries.)

It is hard to find a definition of journalistic objectivity in texts on journalism, which tend to treat it as a universally understood concept. When objectivity is discussed, how-

ever, one can deduce that it has something to do with not being on either side of a particular issue or argument. This, of course, implies that an issue or an argument—any issue and any argument—has just two sides, and everyone knows what these sides are. What the word *everyone* refers to, of course, are the people who read newspapers and the people who write the articles that go in them; historically, both of these groups are dominated by heterosexual white men.

Objectivity, it is important to remember, is not called for in areas where there is a universally accepted (by heterosexual white men) right or wrong, because in such cases—say, murder, Satan worship, and,

maybe, homosexuality or women's rights—the journalist is expected to have an opinion, and that opinion is expected to match the reader's. So objectivity exists to maintain the status quo at the midpoint between right and wrong. Because the much-written-about "homosexual lifestyle" is lower on this scale than, say, the Jewish faith, we have the phenomenon known as "Hitler's opinion," whereby a story about homosexuals includes quotes from people who believe we don't have the right to exist, a practice equivalent to quoting Hitler in every story that has to do with Jews. Anyone who thinks that this practice is a thing of the past should take a look at last month's *Newsweek* cover story on queers.

Perhaps more than producing offensive coverage, the ideal of objectivity has been used as a tool for keeping queers out of the mainstream media, both as subjects and as writers. Gays can't write about gays, women can't write about women's issues, Blacks can't write about Blacks, the logic goes, because they can't be objective. Translation: They can't be heterosexual white men. As an exception to these rules, human beings have generally been allowed to write about human beings, provided, of course, that the human beings were of the white heterosexual male variety.

I do not think that the concept of objectivity is applicable to the queer press. Yet we see a trend in our publications to adopt the concept and its tools—primarily the Language of the Putative Widely Known Fact that is the mainstay of so-called objective journalism—in an effort to make our publications more credible.

The logic goes something like this: (1) The gay and lesbian press is a representative of the gay and lesbian community to the heterosexual world; we should therefore appear as objective as possible, even though we're really an advocacy press, and (2) Not being objective means becoming a weekly—or monthly or quarterly—advertisement for gay and lesbian organizations, which they would very much like, but which would serve our gay and lesbian readers poorly by depriving them of critical coverage of such groups.

The latter argument is easier to debunk than the former. It confuses good reporting with objectivity. Acknowledging our subjectivity—in this case, our presumed support for institutions of the gay and lesbian movement in general—does not prevent us from doing thorough research and reporting the good with the bad. It doesn't even pre-

vent us from carrying out personal vendettas through our publications.

The former argument contains another one of those "universally accepted truths" that cry out to be challenged: the distinction between the objective media and the advocacy press and the fallacious designation of the gay and lesbian media as advocacy press.

Granted, the gay and lesbian press is not an objective press—which is to say, queer is not mainstream. A 1979 study by sociologist Herbert Gans found that "the national media, and journalism generally, appear to recruit people who do not have strong personal values in the first place. They have no prior values about the topics which become news, nor do they always develop them about topics on which they're working. Many of the reporters and writers constantly immersed in American politics did not seem particularly interested in it apart from their work." I don't need to list the reasons why this cannot be true of the queer press: neither the salaries nor the social and professional prestige that come with working for most of the queer press would make it a place where people with no strong personal values and no particular interest in queer politics would flock. And is this really what we aspire to?

Some gay and lesbian publishers would say yes and argue that by staking out a place in the mainstream the gay and lesbian press would most effectively perform its advocacy function—which is, depending on who is talking, to show that gays and lesbians are just like everybody else, or to argue such issues of our movement as civil rights legislation and the right to serve in the military effectively, to

the public at large. Aside from the logical impossibility of attaining a pulpit from which we can preach to the unconverted, I would argue that the function of the queer press is not advocacy but agitation. Rather than an advocacy press, we are a movement press.

The roots of the queer press lie in the radical press—a venerable tradition that has given us such important documents as the American Constitution and the *Gulag Archipelago*. Aleksandr Solzhenitzyn's success was not in educating the party apparatchiks to the horrors of Soviet concentration camps but—and here, I think, my editorial grandmothers, who smuggled his books into Russia, would finally agree with me—in providing a clearly articulated history and agenda to the ranks of the disenchanting and disenfranchised. This is the mandate of the queer press.

THE FUNCTION
OF THE QUEER
PRESS IS NOT
ADVOCACY, BUT
AGITATION

We will not rise to this challenge by borrowing the lifeless language of United Press International. We will not rise to this challenge by feigning indifference to the fate of our organizations. We

will not rise to this challenge by adopting a falsely objective posture and claiming merely to follow the news rather than create it. We will only rise to this challenge by accepting our role as an active part of a liberation movement whose function it is not only to inform but to rouse the troops.

This means making a commitment to putting news events and issues we cover in a historical and intellectual context. For example, when we report on the birth of a Queer Nation, we have a responsibility to report that our community has a history of radical activism that goes back to a time before

Stonewall. Or, when we write a piece about community infighting, we have a responsibility to reject the hackneyed explanation that our tendency to cannibalize our leaders is a function of internalized homophobia; we have a responsibility to bone up on the histories of other small movements—and then we see that horizontal homophobia does not explain why pre-revolutionary Russian Marxists spent most of their time sniping at one another. This sort of contextualizing is not in opposition to “objectivity” in journalism, but it is not part of the tradition of the objective press, whose idea of background is a tie-back graf that tells you what the paper has reported before.

We must also make a commitment to actively advancing an exchange of opinion. This does not mean grabbing an issue and writing a story quoting two people on one side, and two people on another side, and ignoring all other sides. It means bringing into our publications the voices of political, intellectual and cultural leaders in our community—not just the people whose names we all know but people whom we have actively sought out because they are original thinkers. This is also not a part of the tradition of the objective press, which does not recognize multifaceted issues or names that don't belong to so-called “experts.”

And we must use the historical and political expertise we gain to provide some real news analysis. We must give up the comfort of being able to say, “We're just reporting the facts,” and stick our necks out by offering well-written, and most important, inspired and inspirational analysis.

The queer press today finds itself perched on the threshold of the mainstream—last month's front-page *Newsweek* feature is just one bit of the evidence of that. Now is the time for us to reject the inviting comfort of pseudo-objectivity, reaffirm our memory of our radical roots, and own up to our place in the movement. ♦

All articles in this section were originally presented at OutWrite '92.

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WHEN DEBRA CHASNOFF ACCEPTED an Academy Award for her short documentary film DEADLY DECEPTION—General Electric, Nuclear Weapons, and Our Environment, she thanked her lover of almost 12 years, Kim Klausner, and their three-and-a-half year old son Noah, and urged the viewing audience to boycott General Electric.

OUT/LOOK phones rang off the hook. "Chas," as we know her, is the magazine's founding editor.

"Chas won!" one friend answered her phone during the commercial break after her speech. "I can't believe it. Chas won!"

Hollywood had rewarded one of our own. Chasnoff's career has been in lesbian, gay and progressive politics. Deadly Deception, which examines General Electric's role in the nuclear weapons industry and compares it to their feel-good public image, is the third film project she's help shepherd to fruition. Her first film—made with Klausner—was Choosing Children, a groundbreaking look at lesbians becoming parents (made shortly before the two chose to have their child). Then she was associate producer for Acting Our Age, an hour-long documentary

DYKES' NIGHT

OUT

AT THE OSCARS



Phyllis Christopher

"We're not leaving here until we meet Jodie Foster"

about women's experiences of growing old, which was nationally broadcast on PBS.

In between and around her film work, she helped launch and edit *OUT/LOOK*, write down-to-earth articles about economic issues for *Dollars & Sense* magazine, oversaw operations at Berkeley's newspaper, *The Daily Californian*, and did campaign presswork for San Francisco Supervisor Roberta Achtenberg.

On Oscar night 1992, in front of hundreds of millions of people, Chasnoff made history as the first lesbian to come out during the film industry's pinnacle event.

Of course there were a million brainy things we wanted to ask about Hollywood. "What are you going to wear?" for instance. And when she returned, "Who did you meet? Did you talk to Jodie Foster?"

So on a sunny Friday afternoon, not too long after the Academy Awards, a couple of us sat down with Chas and *Deadly Deception*'s editor Joan Lefkowitz. "There've been a lot of articles about all the politics of your film and your speech," we said. "But tell us ... everything." —Robin Stevens

The phone call that blew Chas's mind

After her film won top prizes at qualifying film festivals, Chas submitted it to the Academy. At the private December, 1991 screening to select the nominees, *Deadly Deception* received an ovation ("apparently that never happens," explained Joan).

Chas: "We had a spy at the Academy whose name I cannot reveal.

She leaked to us that she thought we had a good chance of winning. For two months we lived with this secret."

Joan: "Which we told everybody."

Phone call #2

News of the nomination comes February 19 at 5:30 a.m.

Chas: I screamed.

Chas calls her mother to tell her about the nomination.

Mom: "Oh, Deb. You're going to wear an evening gown!"

Chas: "Uh ... no...."

Rallying Tinseltown

There were "industry" rituals to decode and follow. One previous nominee advised aggressive lobbying. Another advised the opposite. The matter was decided when a friend at San Francisco City Hall decided to apply her political organizing skills to Academy voters. Friends designed an ad for *Variety*, urging Academy members to view *Deadly Deception*. They also helped to raise the money to buy the ad.

Chas: "We had to scramble to figure out who to call in Hollywood—who we knew in Hollywood.... Hardly anyone."

"We're not leaving until we meet Jodie Foster"

Two weeks before Oscar night, Kim and Chas got their first taste of glamour at the nominees' luncheon at the Beverly Hilton Hotel.

Chas: "The best part was when they took a picture of all the nominees together. Barbra Streisand in front, Laura Dern on the right near me,

Bette Midler over here, Nick Nolte over there, Anthony Hopkins ... and me!

"Kim asked the woman from the *Hollywood Reporter* if she knew where Jodie Foster was. 'Third table from the left in the back,' she said without missing a beat. We beelined over and introduced ourselves. Then we met Fannie Flagg."

The Clothes Committee

As it got closer to Oscar night, the tension began to mount.

Joan: "What was I going to wear? That's like...."

Chas: "Big."

Joan: "How many tickets can we get? Where do we stay in Los Angeles? To limo or not?"

Chas: "I bought three different outfits. The first two were rejected by my committee. I finally saw a jacket and said, 'That looks like me—only with sequins.'"

The committee debated how much to spend on shoes. The day before leaving for LA, Chas opts for "cheap but classy"—just \$39.

Chas: "I was fine. You couldn't see the shoes on TV."

"Go write out your speech"

At the International Documentary Association gala events preceding the awards, documentarians were in the limelight.

Joan: "In terms of fantasies, it was a very good experience. People treated us like documentarians, filmmakers. They respected the fact that we were there. The Academy Awards was much more of a glitz thing."

MAKING THE MOST
OF THAT
45 SECONDS



"I want to share this wonderful honor with INFAC, the national organization that is campaigning to get General Electric, and all other companies out of the deadly nuclear weapons industry. INFAC's supporters around the world helped us tell the real story about the company that falsely claims it 'brings good

"In terms of fantasies, it was a good experience"

"Most importantly, we got a very important piece of advice that evening: When you get to the Academy Awards, go to the bathroom a lot. That's where the stars are."

Richard Schmiechen, co-producer of the 1985 Academy Award winning film The Times of Harvey Milk, quietly approached Chas in the lobby of the gala.

Richard: "Debra, I think you are going to win. I want you to write out your speech, memorize it, and then practice, practice, practice."

Chas: "I didn't believe him, but I did it anyway. Thank God."

Docuday

On Saturday, all of the short- and feature-length documentaries were screened at the Directors' Guild of America. As Chas, Joan and Deadly Deception's cinematographer Fawn Yacker watched A Little Vicious (a short documentary about a pit bull)...

Joan: "All of a sudden lights start flashing and some sort of alarm system went off. Chas had her bag and was pulling me and Fawn out the door. I thought it was an earthquake but the chandeliers were not moving."

Chas: "It was ACT UP."

Joan: "The organizers said, 'It's okay, it's just ACT UP. They ran through the lobby and pulled all the fire alarms. This is just one of many protests.'"

Chas: "They were upset that *Paris is Burning* wasn't nominated in the documentary feature category. I agreed with them."

Mascara. Shadow.

Foundation. Lipliner.

By Monday at lunchtime the Oscar night entourage was together...

Chas: "We were getting pretty wild."

Joan: "We're trying to remember everything we'd been told along the way. Go to the bathroom a lot, remember your speech, eat at the ball if you get in, that's where the good food is."

...And at the hotel the femmes tried to advise Chas on makeup.

Joan: "Everyone had an opinion: Chas, mascara. Chas, shadow. Chas, foundation. Chas, lipliner."

Chas: "I'd memorized the speech, but I couldn't deal with the makeup at all."

Joan: "So I said, 'Chas, I've got the basics right here. We'll just do the basics, I promise you.'"

Chas: "As another butch, Joan understood."

The only blue car in a long, long line of white limos

The group panicked when Chas announced she'd left her speech up in the hotel room. As the valet brought their rental car up to the lobby door, Chas rushed back to the hotel room to get it.

Chas: "Then we put our sticker that said 'Academy Awards' on the windshield and off we went."

Joan: "Sitting down in a car with six people who are all dressed up is not easy. You shouldn't wear your shoulder belt when you wear sequins."

Chas: "All we saw were limos.

Traffic was stopped."

Joan: "When we got a quarter of a mile away from the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion and saw the two story high Oscar, we all screamed."

Chas & Joan: "Eeeeeeah!"

Chas: "We started snaking up the ramp. Then we saw Karl Malden walking around the back door of the Dorothy Chandler Pavillion."

Joan: "Kim said, 'There's Ed Asner!'"

Girls' Night Out

Eager to see the Queer Nation protestors, the group was excited to see a group of picketers on their way in. But the signs read, "Stop smut in Hollywood"—definitely the wrong demo. Queer Nation and ACT UP, it turned out, were cordoned off just across the street from the entrance. Once they pulled up, women in "little red valet jackets" opened the doors of the blue rental upgrade.

Valet (taking a long hard look at the occupants in the car): "What is this, girls' night out?"

Voices from the car (with relish): "Yes!"

As they stepped out, the women turned to Queer Nation and raised their fists in solidarity. They coupled up and walked hand-in-hand up the red carpet to the Dorothy Chandler Pavillion.

Chas: "I just took Kim's hand and thought, 'I don't believe we're here. I don't believe we're doing this. Let's go!' It was important to all of us to visibly indicate that we were lesbians on the way in."

Joan: "As we did that, all of the cameras turned off. You could hear the lens caps going on the cam-



things to life.' ...I also want to thank my friends and family, especially my life partner, Kim Klausner, who always had faith in me, and our son, Noah, for reminding me on a daily basis of why it is so important not to give up and to keep working for peace, and justice. Thank you very much and BOYCOTT GE!"

eras. No one was interested, but it felt good anyway. Then we stood right next to another woman wearing the same sequined dress my girlfriend had on. That was kind of affirming."

The show

Oscar lore has it that winners are seated on the outside of the rows so they don't have to climb over everyone to get their awards.

Chas: "They had put Kim and me right in the middle of the row. I got very depressed."

Joan: "The rest of us were sitting up in the balcony where we could see where all the stars were seated. We watched the crew of seat-fillers who rush in and sit in celebrities' seats whenever they leave the audience. That's so the viewers at home never think there is an empty seat."

"There were two really nicely dressed gay men sitting behind us. We thought, 'Oh boy, they're from Queer Nation, they're the ones who are going to do something fantastic during the show.' But nothing ever happened."

And the winner is...

Chas: "The tension was just incredible. I couldn't stand it. For weeks I had been in the shower imagining, 'And the Oscar goes to *Deadly Deception*.' Then they really said it! Kim and I stared at each other with our mouths open. Then I kissed her and thought, 'Oh my god, I have to stand up.' It felt fantastic to get up there and really do my speech."

Joan: "Stacey (my girlfriend), Fawn, and I were sitting together and the three of us all held hands. I mean really tight holding hands so you can feel the other person's fingernails digging into your palms. When they announced it, the three of us screamed. It was very hard not to jump out of the balcony."

Right this way, Ms. Chasoff

Backstage, Chas and the two presenters for the Documentary

awards, Spike Lee (singing, "GE, they bring good things to life" under his breath) and John Singleton, were ushered into successive rooms full of press. Reporters asked why she felt it appropriate to make a political statement at the Academy Awards, what she thought about political movies. "All movies are political," she answered. "Every frame." As she left the room, the press corps burst into applause.

In the hallway, a reporter ran after her. "Ms. Chasoff! When you thanked your 'life partner' Kim Klausner—was that a woman?"

"It sure was!" Chas responded. "I'm sorry if that wasn't clear." That remark showed up in *USA Today* the next morning.

Thank you Otto!

After Chas's speech, the celebratory crew assembles in the lobby. One of the officials from the Academy comes over.

Otto: "Oh, Debra. I'm so sorry that I seated you in seats 13 and 14. I should have seated you on the aisle. But sometimes I make a mistake!"

Chas (joking): "Well ... you could make it up to me. My group doesn't have tickets to the ball."

Otto: [Sighs, and reaches behind his lapel] "How many do you need?"

Joan: "He handed us six tickets worth \$500 each!"

Chas: "Then I went to call my mother."

Mom: "Where did you get that jacket?"

The ball

Joan: "We went through a set of double doors and into the tent where the ball was. There was so much glitter. It's a sit down dinner for 3,000 people. You walk in and get your picture taken with a big Oscar, there's free food and an open bar. A lot of tables have Oscars on them."

Chas: "Kim and I danced. That was probably a first too."

Joan: "We all danced. The only reaction we got was from Robert Duvall. His mouth kind of dropped open."

Chas: "Everyone was saying congratulations, and I couldn't distinguish between the people who supported what I said about GE and the people who supported that I came out."

Jodie Foster gives Chas a hug.

Jodie: "That was really cool what you did!"

Chas: "You too!"

Hollywood politicians

Later, at a fundraiser put on by liberal Hollywood, Chas meets Demi Moore (Joan: "She was there with two interesting-looking women") and Oliver Stone.

Chas: "The nicest discussion I had that night was with Callie Khouri, who wrote the screenplay for *Thelma & Louise*. When she had gone backstage, the press corps had asked her didn't she think she was out of touch with American women. She pointed to her Oscar and said, 'No, I don't think so.'"

The aftermath

Beginning immediately after her remarks, phone calls came in from around the country. They came from family, friends of the family, friends of friends of the family, and from lesbians and gay men she'd never met.

Chas: "My sister was written up in her local paper. So were my Mom and Dad. I was denounced on the floor of Congress by a right wing congressman. A boyfriend from before the time I came out wrote me a letter. He said he'd read about me in the *Washington Blade*. He didn't say why he was reading a gay newspaper."

Their home phone machine, the day after the Oscars: "Kim and Chas can't come to the phone right now. We're on Cloud 9."

If you would like to order a copy of Deadly Deception, or find out more about the GE boycott, call INFACT at (800) 688-8797. ♦



Marc Geller

Han Ong Writes Himself

LAST APRIL, HAN ONG DID SOMETHING few playwrights but Shakespeare could rival. He had three plays running simultaneously at three separate venues in San Francisco. Ong, who is Asian American and gay, is the author of a dozen plays and a novel; his works have been produced in New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Sydney, Australia; and he holds commissions from the Mark Taper Forum and the Los Angeles

Theater Center. He's a writer of remarkable skill and maturity. He never bothered to finish high school. And he's twenty-four.

His works show a wide range of subject matter. In the solo performance *Symposium in Manila*, which Ong himself performed, a 29-year-old artist heeds his grandfather's urging to return to a homeland he's never seen before. Once there, he finds the Philippines to be a murky xerox of the United States. By turns funny, somber, and acerbic, the work is a meditation on self-imposed cultural imperialism and the elusive nature of epiphanies.

A 24-year-old playwright makes his mark in the theatre world.

◆
By Christian Huygen

Bachelor Rat, premiered by the San Francisco theater company Thick Description, is the story of a young man—the script specifies that he can be Black, Latino, or Asian, but not white—and the Rainbow Coalition of guys he picks up and brings home with him. There's also a straight female neighbor, who admits to enviously overhearing each night's sexual escapades through the wall; and a rat in the kitchen which proves difficult to get rid of, and insists on making philosophical speeches even after it's dead. Here, Ong infuses a spare, absurdist format with a disarming warmth and charm. It's a stylistic cocktail that's perfect for the nineties.

Reasons to Live. Reason to Live Half. No Reason, premiered by the Magic Theater, pushes further. Spare, poetic interchanges slip like scalpels past our expectations until they find their way to an unguarded place deep inside us; then they inflict more damage than an audience could've expected. *Reasons* is a brutal tale of murder, imprisonment, hatred, longing, and murder again. The events are presented in a restrained, almost ritualistic style. Like a dream, these plays nakedly expose a delicate, fully realized, shimmering consciousness—as well as an implacable sorrow that's big enough to fill up the whole world.

Christian Huygen: In *Reasons to Live*, you present the idea of the ladder, the rigid social hierarchy which determines who you are. Everyone in the play has a place in the hierarchy that they really can't get out of. Do you believe that's true of our society?

Han Ong: Well, I'm very conscious of how people perceive me as an ethnic person, especially in the arts world. There's a certain kind of perception of you if you're an ethnic artist. There are certain opportunities that are just not available to me—or else I have to work doubly hard for them just because of the way I look—and there are certain expectations.

For instance, a lot of the mainstream presses don't seem to know how to approach my stuff. There's a confluence of a wide range of influences in my work, and there's a newness with

'Multiculturalism is more a marketing strategy than a sincere attempt to redress historical grievances.'

which I'm trying to approach my subject matter. Critics don't seem to be prepped for that. When they do see "ethnic drama," they seem to expect a certain kind of dramaturgy which I refer to as the "Merchant of Venice" school of writing: "If you prick us, do we not bleed?" It's a

traditional humanist agenda where you try to prove that ethnic people have human attributes. It's one strategy for dealing with racism, the idea being that if you can make an audience believe that each of us is equally human, then there are no grounds for racism and it will just go away.

This is a benevolent idea, but the problem is, it's old hat. It's been said so many times already that it's become an empty cliché. If I can't buy that strategy myself, how can I foist it on an audience? Take August Wilson for instance. I hate, I *hate* his work. His rise in the art world is a product of the Reagan era. He gives you an ethnic dramaturgy which doesn't deviate from the hierarchy of things. His work reassures you that the status quo is just going to go on and on, and we'll always have these poor befuddled ethnics bumbling around. It's humanist drama, and its intentions are admirable, but it's dead. It's not art. It's recycling.

How can playwrights and writers still believe that they can get away with the same old shit? But they do get away with it—because the people who have enough money to buy tickets and go to the theater *want* to be reassured.

It never seems to occur to critics that I do the work I do because the alternative is shit. They look at my work and go, "Where's the old well-made plays we like so much? Where's that nice comfortable dramaturgy we're used to?"

Are these humanist strategies valid, but so worn out that they can't affect an audience anymore? Or was the whole "Merchant of Venice" idea flawed in the first place?

I think that the core of the idea is true. But the thing about truth is, you say it often enough and it becomes a cliché. And a cliché is never going to affect anybody.

The thing that's most frustrating is working really hard on something and believing in it, and

then the next day you look in the paper and your work is being misrepresented on a massive scale. Whole groups of people who might otherwise come and see it decide not to go. But you've got to keep doing it and doing it. You've got to keep putting up three shows a year for ten years. You just have to keep being in their faces until you wear them down.

Bertolt Brecht thought that theater audiences shouldn't be allowed to just passively sit there and consume the play; they should be active producers of meaning. They should have to constantly think, evaluate, and judge the actions of the characters. I think you do something similar. You force the audience to keep rethinking the way they're viewing the play. Every time we develop a theory about what's going on, it gets undercut. Something we thought was meant to be funny will become horrific—or heartbreaking. Every time we think we've found a safe spot where we can comfortably sit and watch the play, you knock us off balance and drive us away from it.

I do, off and on, use Theater of Alienation strategies, without necessarily aligning them in my mind as Brechtian, because I don't know enough about Brecht's ideologies or where his writings sprang from to comfortably put my work directly under his lineage. I try to never let the audience "get away with it." To never let them have a level of comfort or satisfaction. People always like to think in terms of "us" and "them." If it's a play about Nazis, the audience always thinks of the Nazis as "them." I try not to be complicit in that kind of moral thought. I'll give an unsympathetic character some humanity or I'll give an inhuman character a compelling logic that makes his actions sensible—and therefore more frightening.

But a lot of theater that exists now isn't like this. It's consumption theater.

Yes, and consumption theater just reassures you that you can go on with your life exactly as before. And when a playwright tries to present an experience that differs from that, audiences

often find it very disorienting. They have to work harder.

Unfortunately, many people who've been weaned on consumption theater won't be willing to work harder if you give them the other kind. They'd rather give up and shut off.

Let's shift gears. Who are some gay writers you admire?

I've come across very few satisfactory "gay writers," which is why I don't much like being called one. If you called me that it would mean lumping me in with a bunch of people who



don't necessarily share my concerns or aesthetics or interests.

But doesn't each successive generation always have its own agendas and concerns?

Sure. They always build upon the funeral pyre of the previous generation's work. For instance, I don't have anything in common with an Edmund White or a David Leavitt. But I don't want to get lumped in with Dennis Cooper either. Actually, I find him kind of hokey.

I don't like most mainstream "gay fiction" because I don't see myself reflected there at all—in fact I see myself *excluded*. The whole agenda of positive gay representation is highly exclusionary. What it actually represents is very narrow, and I don't fit into it.

While we're on the subject, one of the narrowest conceptions of reality that I've ever encountered is the prefabricated construct of the Object of Gay Male Desire (young, white, straight-acting-and-appearing, clean-cut, buff). I don't see myself reflected there either. It isn't what I am and it isn't what I want.

Well, that's the result of marketing strategies. It's always easier to sell things if you can associate them with an easily recognized, monolithic representation of what we allegedly want.

I just think people ought to have more options. There are accepted paradigms of being gay—the things that people mean when they talk about "positive gay representation." And it's always been true that anyone who departs from these paradigms gets relegated to the basement of gay history. They become the footnote at the bottom of the page of what Toni Morrison called the *master narrative*. That's why I write the

plays I do: to put a Black or Latino or Asian American character at the center of everything, as a magnet who pulls in all the other characters in the play.

What's your opinion of multiculturalism?

There's so much shallowness and insecurity in it. Multiculturalism is more a marketing strategy than a sincere attempt to redress historical grievances. And when you get a grant or a booking because you're "multicultural," it makes you feel like you've been invited to the party just so people can point and stare at you.

What would a "good" multiculturalism look like?

I don't know. I'll get back to you when I find something anywhere near it. Right now it's just a way of labelling people to make them less threatening.

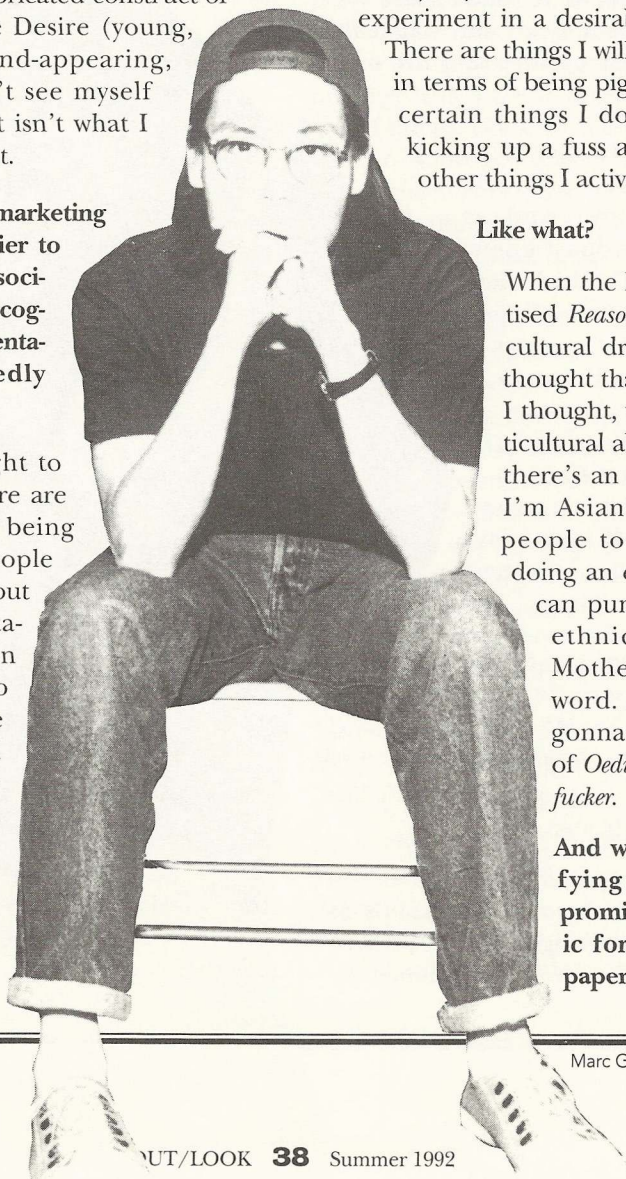
Actually, my career to date has been a kind of experiment in a desirable multiculturalism.

There are things I will and will not tolerate in terms of being pigeonholed. There are certain things I don't think it's worth kicking up a fuss about—but there are other things I actively despise.

Like what?

When the Magic Theater advertised *Reasons to Live* as a "multicultural drama in free verse," I thought that was a crock of shit. I thought, what the fuck is multicultural about this, except that there's an Asian character and I'm Asian? They just wanted people to know that they're doing an ethnic drama so they can pump up their fucking ethnic outreach grants. Motherfuckers. Print that word. Motherfuckers! I'm gonna write an adaptation of *Oedipus* and call it *Motherfucker*.

And what about that mystifying incident where a prominent white male critic for a major daily newspaper—



Marc Geller

Who used to be a *sports-writer*—

A sportswriter? He was a sportswriter?—who said that the race of the main character in the play was never specified—

He's Asian, goddammit! (laughter)

The thing is, the position he's taking is just like the two racist young white guys in the play. All they want to know is whether Rudy is a chink or a jap. This critic was just like them—he wanted it clarified.

As if having it clarified is going to make anything any easier.

But you know, bad reviews kind of give me strength. They don't "make" me, you know? The gasoline that's fueled my work has been a certain poverty of means.

I don't believe in it. It lets the audience off the hook. It just gives them a vicarious experience and then they can leave comfortably.

All of my favorite plays have very little, if any, catharsis in them.

Which plays are those?

Georg Büchner's *Woyzeck*. *Aunt Dan and Lemon*, by Wallace Shawn.

I saw the first production of *Aunt Dan* in London in 1985.

With Linda Hunt?

And Wallace Shawn was in it too.

Oh, I hate you!

Hey, do you want to hear my Wallace Shawn imitation? I never get to do this, so you have to say yes. (frowns earnestly) "Crumpetth! I love crumpetth. They jutht thoak up more and more butter and become richer and richer ... they're like a living being! I love crumpetth."

EXCERPT

KEN: When I was fifteen. With my first girlfriend. Anita. Making love. We made. Made love. Nothing to equal it since. Nothing. Anita. Making. Making things. Love. Love is a thing. Hold between fingers. Squeeze. Love is a thing. A ball. Pacifier. Can I go on? I'd like to go on. Be allowed to go on at length about this. Even if I say the same things over and over. I'd like to say the same things over and over at length. Because these same things are important to me. Important things. I'd like to be allowed to do this. This list. Recitation. OK? Please. Be allowed to. I want to. OK? To repeat myself. That privilege. Privilege. Privilege. Love is a privilege. (*He begins to shake, head to toe; body shiver.*)

From *Bachelor Rat*, by Han Ong.
© Han Ong 1992

Okay, I listened to yours, now you have to listen to mine. Did you see *The Princess Bride*?

No.

It doesn't matter. Okay, here goes (spreads his arms wide): "Inconceeeeeeivable."

That's it?

"Inconceeeeeeivable!" (laughter)

Ahem. Why do you write?

Hmm. Okay. One of the reasons I write is because I want to create images or versions of myself and confer upon them a kind of earthbound, weighty, specific, dirt-under-the-fingernails reality. I don't see myself or anyone like me in the literature and TV and movies that I see. Right now, representations of ethnics, even when they come out of the humanist propaganda

school of thought we talked about earlier, have a weightless, blurry, generalized quality. I want to make images that have weight, images of people who're gay or ethnic or all of the above who are *specific*, encased within their bodies, and brand spanking new—not obscured by brighter suns.

People who have enough specificity to have complicated conflicting desires that don't make sense. People who can be irritating and offensive. People who smell bad.

Exactly.

So what we're talking about here is a political agenda.

I want to confer light—proof of existence—upon a specific group of people who are, in my opinion, more shadow than substance right now. I want to give them corporeality.

The only people who have bodies right now are—

White people.

White beautiful muscular people. We're all

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encouraged to look in the mirror and think, "I don't have a body. That guy on TV has a body but what I have isn't a body."

It's a rehearsal for a body.

And there's another idea we're encouraged to believe: that straight white men are human and everybody else is not really quite human. We're encouraged to believe that—and so are they. And they make their laws and swing their baseball bats based on that idea.

Anyway, let's shift gears again. You've said repeatedly that you're pessimistic and misanthropic and that you have a very dark view of the world. But you're also passionate, prolific, hardworking, ambitious, and demanding of others and of yourself. Why? What keeps you going?

When I'm writing, I'm giving myself weight and reality too. With each play I write I become a little more real. I'm part of a group of people that has been brainwashed into self-loathing, both as ethnics and as gays and lesbians. Or into self-negation.

I feel like a Magritte painting of a bowler hat and a suit with no face. I feel that with each piece I write, I'm giving myself shape and weight and dimension. I'm so invisible right now that I have to write and write and keep writing—there's never enough.

I have an Asian schoolboy's face. I'd like to have a face that represents me better. My face is "cute" and boyish, and I'm cynical and grainy and have an edge to me. I wish I had Leonard Cohen's face—or Marianne Faithfull's. Or Abbey Lincoln's. I think one of the reasons I write so much is that I don't have the face I deserve.

(laughter)

Or I don't have the physicality I deserve. So I'm trying to give myself what I feel I deserve by dint of writing. I'm writing my face. Does that make sense? ♦

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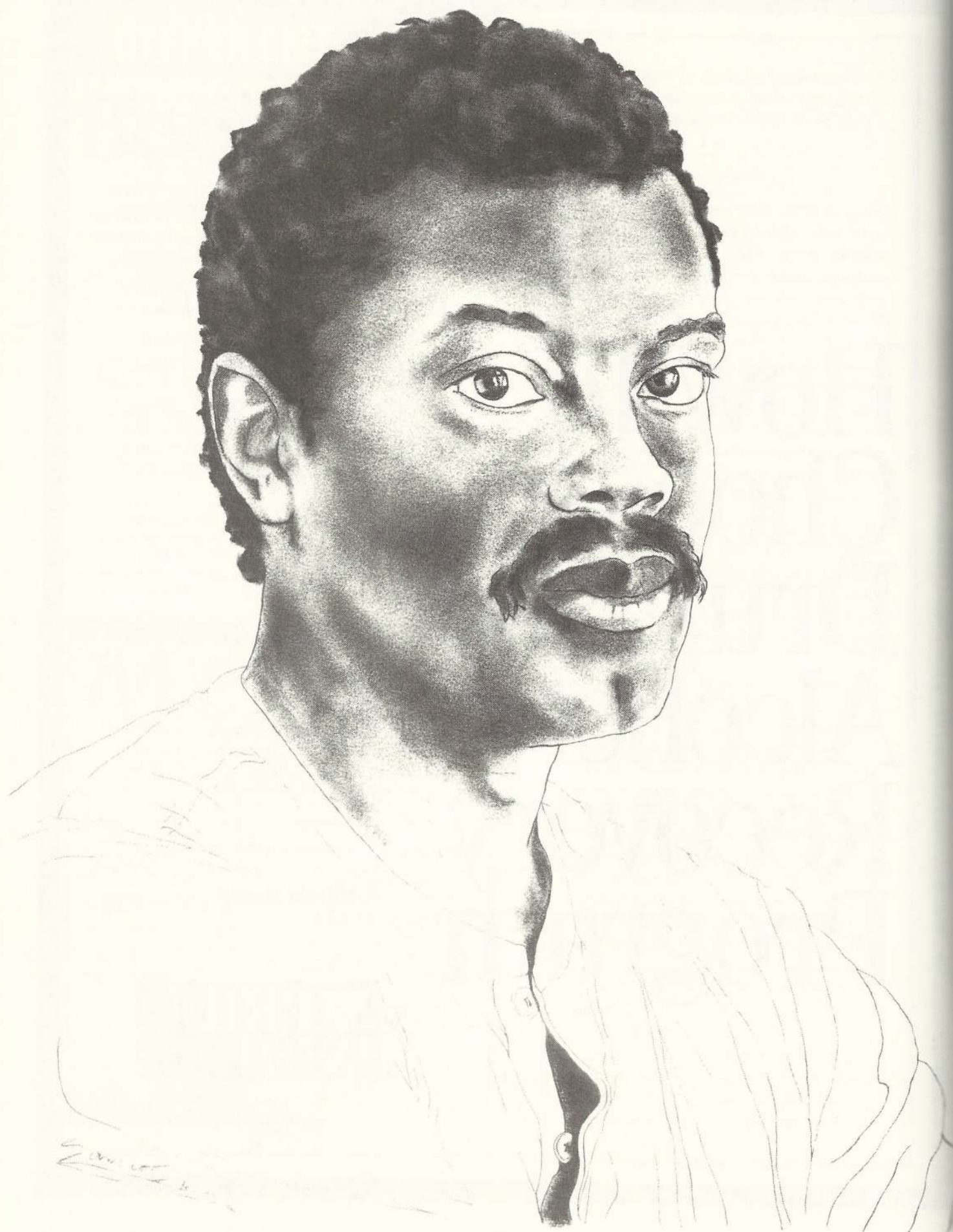
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When He calls me, I will answer

When He calls me, I will answer

When He calls me, I will answer

I'll be somewhere listening for my name

I'll be somewhere listening

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I'll be somewhere listening for my name

I'LL BE
SOMEWHERE
LISTENING
FOR MY
NAME

BY MELVIN DIXON

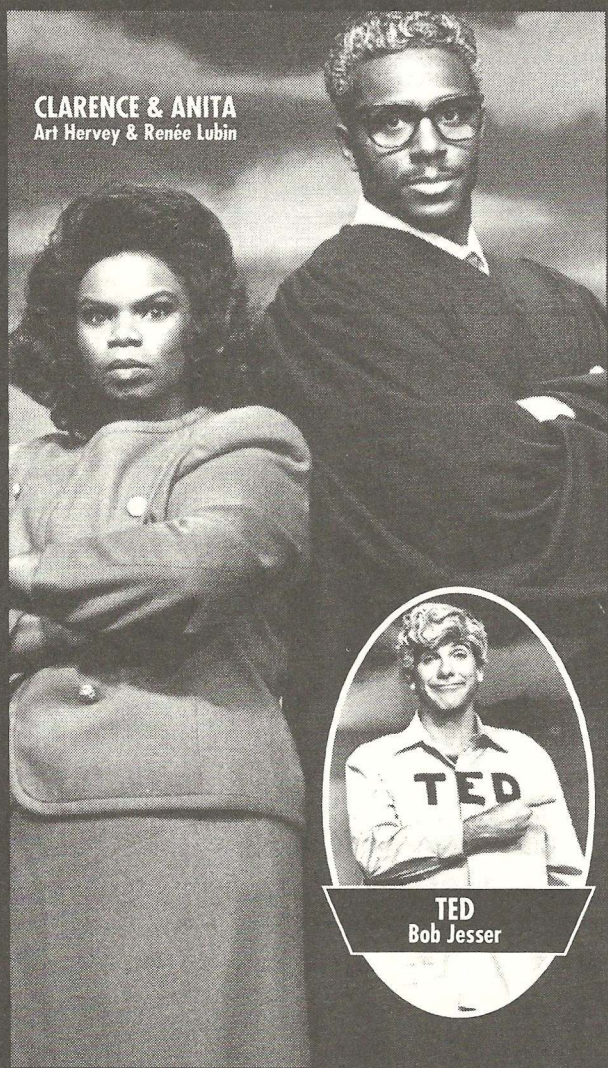
AS GAY MEN AND LESBIANS, we are the sexual niggers of our society.

Some of you may have never before been treated like a second-class, disposable citizen. Some of you have felt a certain privilege and protection in being white, which is not to say that others are accustomed to or have accepted being racial niggers, and feel less alienated. Since I have never encountered a person of no color, I assume that we are all persons of color. Like fashion victims, though, we are led to believe that some colors are more acceptable than others, and

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more acceptable than others, and those acceptable colors have been so endowed with universality and desirability that the color hardly seems to exist at all—except, of course, to those who are of a different color and pushed outside the rainbow. My own fantasy is to be locked inside a Benetton ad.

No one dares call us sexual niggers, at least not to our faces. But the epithets can be devastating or entertaining: We are faggots and dykes, sissies and bulldaggers. We are funny, sensitive, Miss Thing, friends of Dorothy, or men with “a little sugar in the blood,” and we call ourselves what we will. As an anthropologist/linguist friend of mine calls me in one breath, “Miss Lady Sister Woman Honey Girl Child.”

Within this environment of sexual and racial niggerdom, recovery isn't easy. Sometimes it is like trying to fit a size 12 basketball player's foot into one of Imelda Marcos's pumps. The color might be right, but the shoe still pinches. Or, for the more fashionable lesbians in the audience, lacing up those combat boots only to have extra eyelets staring you in the face, and you feel like Olive Oyl gone trucking after Minnie Mouse.

As for me, I've become an acronym queen: BGM ISO same or other. HIV plus or minus. CMV, PCP, MAI, AZT, ddI, ddC. Your prescription gets mine.

Remember those great nocturnal emissions of your adolescent years? They told us we were men, and the gooey stuff proved it. Now in the nineties, our nocturnal emissions are night sweats, inspiring fear, telling us we are mortal and sick, and that time is running out.

In my former neighborhood in Manhattan, I was a member of the 4H Club: the Happy Homosexuals of Hamilton Heights. Now it is the 3D Club: the dead, the dying, those in despair. I used to be in despair; now I'm just dying.

I come to you bearing witness to a broken heart; I come to you bearing witness to a broken body—but a witness to an unbroken spirit. Perhaps it is only to you that such witness can be brought and its jagged edges softened a bit and made meaningful.

We are facing the loss of our entire generation. Lesbians lost to various cancers, gay men lost to AIDS. What kind of witness will you bear? What truth-telling are you brave enough to utter and endure the consequences of your unpopular message?

Last summer my lover Richard died. We had been lovers for twelve years. His illness and death were so much a part of my illness and life that I felt that I too had died. I'm just back from Florida, vis-

iting his family and attending the unveiling of his headstone. Later this month, our attorney will file the necessary papers for the settling of Richard's estate, and I shall return to our summer home in Provincetown without him, but not without the rich memories of our many years there. And he is everywhere inside me listening for his name.

I've lost Richard; I've lost vision in one eye; I've lost the contact of people I thought were friends; I've lost the future tense from my vocabulary; I've lost my libido; and I've lost more weight and appetite than Nutri-System would want to claim.

My life is closing. Oh, I know all the clichés: "We all have to die," and "Everything comes to an end." But when is an ending a closure, and when does closure become a new beginning? Not always. It is not automatic. We have to work at it. If an end is termination, closure involves the will to remember, which gives new life to memory.

As creators, we appear to strike a bargain with the immortality we assume to be inherent in art. Our work exists outside us and will have a life independent of us. Doris Grumbach, in her recent book, *Coming into the End Zone*, reminds us of the life of books: "Let the book make its own way, even through the thick forest of competitors, compelling readers by the force of its words and its vision."

I am reminded of a poignant line from George Whitmore, who struck a Faustian bargain with AIDS: If he wrote about it, perhaps he wouldn't get it. George, as you know, lost that battle, but his books are still with us. His two novels are *The Confessions of Danny Slocum*, and *Nebraska*. His harrowing reporting on AIDS is called *Someone was Here*. And now George is somewhere listening for his name, hearing it among us.

I am not above bargaining for time and health. And I am troubled by the power of prophecy inherent in art. One becomes afraid to write because one's wildest speculations may in fact come true. I wrote all the AIDS poems published in Michael Klein's *Poets for Life* before I knew I was HIV positive. I was responding in part to my sense of isolation and helplessness as friends of mine fell ill. And when I published the poem "And These are Just a Few" in the *Kenyon Review*, I made a point of acknowledging the dead and those yet fighting for life. I'm sorry to report that of the twenty people mentioned in the poem, only two are presently alive.

As writers, we are a curious lot. We begin our projects with much apprehension about the blank page. But then as the material assumes its life, we resist writing that last stanza or paragraph. We want to avoid putting a final period to it all. Readers are no better. We all want to know what new adventures await Huck Finn or if Ishmael finally "comes out" following his

"marriage" with QueeQueg. As sequels go, I'm not sure the world needed Ripley's extension to *Gone with the Wind*, but consider *Rocky 10*, in which the son of the erstwhile fighter discovers he is gay and must take on the arch villain Harry Homophobia. Would the title

have to be changed to *Rockette*?

**In the nineties,
our nocturnal
emissions
are night
sweats, telling
us that time is
running out.**

Then there is the chilling threat of erasure.

Gregory, a friend and former student of mine, died last fall. On the day following a memorial service for him, we all were having lunch and laughing over our fond memories of Greg and his many accomplishments as a journalist.

Suddenly his lover had a shock. He had forgotten the remaining copies of the memorial program in the rental car he had just returned. Frantic to retrieve the programs, which had Greg's picture on the cover and reprints of his autobiographical essays inside, his lover called the rental agency to reclaim the material. They had already claimed the car, but he could come out there, they said, and dig through the dumpster for whatever he could find. Hours later, the lover returned empty-handed, the paper programs already shredded, burned, and the refuse carted away. Greg had been cremated once again, but this time without remains or a classy urn to house them. The image of Greg's lover sifting through the dumpster is more haunting than the reality of Greg's death, for Greg had made his peace with the world. The world, however, had not made its peace with him.

His siblings refused to be named in one very prominent obituary, and Greg's gayness and death from AIDS were not to be mentioned at the memorial service. Fortunately, few of us heeded the family's prohibition. While his family and society may have wanted to dispose of Greg even after his death, some of us tried to reclaim him and love him again and only then release him.

I was reminded of how vulnerable we are as gay men, as black gay men, to the disposal or erasure of our lives.

But Greg was a writer, a journalist who had written on AIDS, on the business world, and on his own curious life journey from his birth in the poor Anacostia district of Washington, DC, to scholarships that allowed him to attend Exeter and then Williams College and on to the city desks of our nation's most prominent

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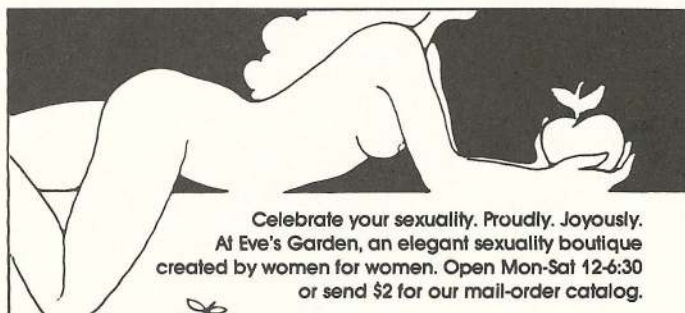


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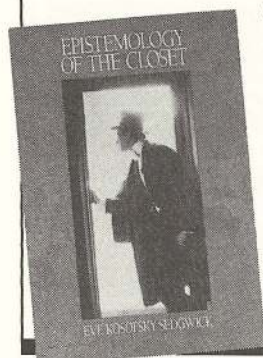
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newspapers. His words are still with us even if his
body and those gorgeous programs are gone. And
Greg is somewhere listening for his name.

We must, however, guard against the erasure of
our experience and our lives. As white gays become
more and more prominent—and acceptable to
mainstream society—they project a racially exclu-
sive image of gay reality. Few men of color will ever
be found on the covers of the *Advocate* or *New York
Native*. As white gays deny multiculturalism among
gays, so too do black communities deny multisexual-
ism among its members. Against this double cre-
mation, we must leave the legacy of our writing and
our perspectives on gay and straight experiences.

Our voice is our weapon.

Several months ago the editors of *Lambda
Book Report* solicited comments from several of us
about the future of gay and lesbian publishing.
My comments began by acknowledging my grief
for writers who had died before they could make
a significant contribution to the literature. The
editors said my comments suggested a "bleak and
nonexistent future" for gay publishing. Although
I still find it difficult to imagine a glorious future
for gay publishing, that does not mean I cannot
offer some concrete suggestion to ensure that a
future does exist.

First, reaffirm the importance of cultural diver-
sity in our community. Second, preserve our liter-
ary heritage by posthumous publications and
reprints, and third, establish grants and fellowships
to ensure that our literary history is written and
passed on to others. I don't think these comments
are bleak, but they should remind us of one thing:
We alone are responsible for the preservation and
future of our literature.

If we don't buy our books, they won't get pub-
lished. If we don't talk about our books, they won't
get reviewed. If we don't write our books, they
won't get written.

As for me ... I may not be well enough or alive
next year to attend the lesbian and gay writers con-
ference, but I'll be somewhere listening for my
name.

I may not be around to celebrate with you the
publication of gay literary history. But I'll be some-
where listening for my name.

If I don't make it to Tea Dance in Provincetown
or the Pines, I'll be somewhere listening for my
name.

You, then, are charged by the possibility of your
good health, by the broadness of your vision, to
remember us. ♦

*This is an adaptation of a keynote speech delivered at
OutWrite '92.*

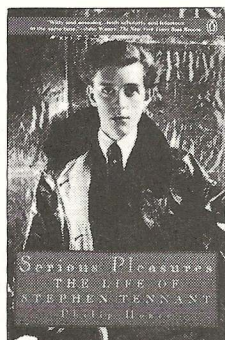
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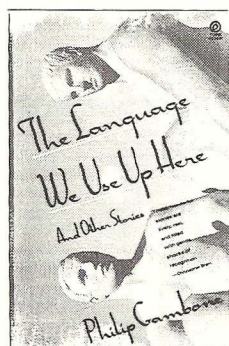
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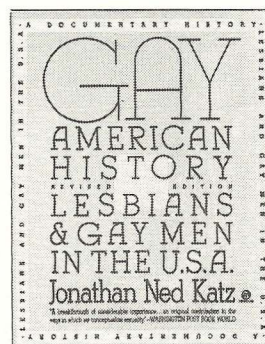
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Ernie Sanchez, right, owner of Norma Jean's and Franco's Restaurant, kissing Francine—the first “Mrs. Franco’s”

E rnie Sanchez claims to be experiencing a lot of stress. The man who in two short years has turned Norma Jean's, a run-down Castroville bar and grill, into the hottest Latino gay nightspot between San Francisco and LA, has just ten days more to bring off one of the most ambitious events of his career, a dinner and dance “Evening of Unity” for the Latino AIDS Task Force and *Salud Para La Gente*. “At the meeting last week,” he says,

QUEEN — OF — HEARTS

“instead of blowing my top I just got up and left.”

But as he ladles cream and then one, two, three teaspoons of sugar into his coffee, Ernie looks anything but anxious. He's wearing a purple and black shirt and thick black-frame glasses; there's a diamond studded ring as big as a jaw breaker on his wedding finger and a bar of green jade set in gold on his pinky. Above his widow's peak Ernie's hair is cut in a streamlined mod pompadour. His new mus-



tache is coming in strong and neat.

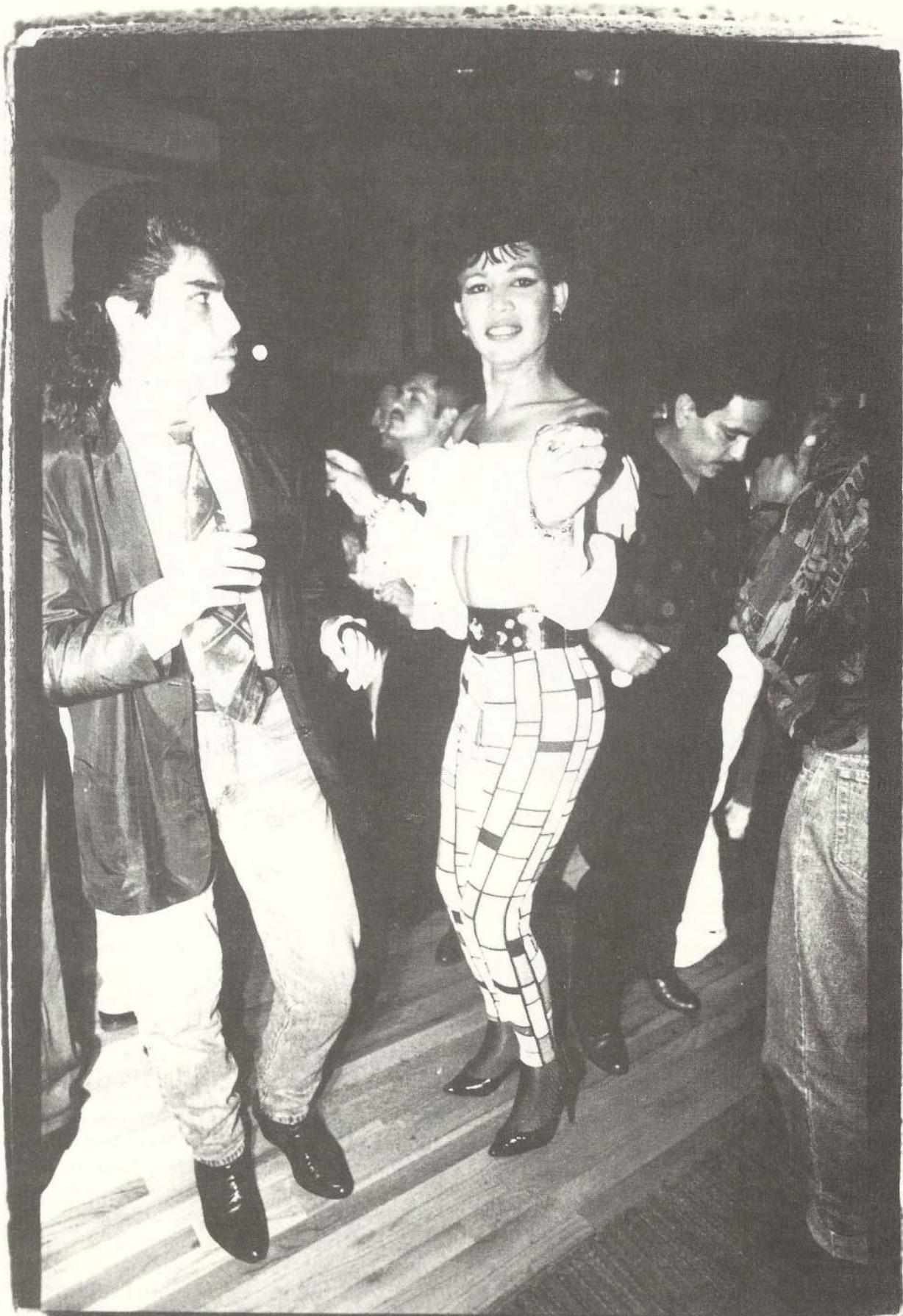
And in fact, with \$900 in raffle tickets and \$1300 in cash collected in advance, the "Unity" extravaganza already looks like a winner. "I didn't know I was such a good hustler," Ernie says. He got his signmaker to donate a neon sign as a raffle prize, a pledge from his plumber, tablecloths from the linen company, a free band, *mariachis* courtesy of Watsonville grower Monico Romero, the deFranco dancers, a cake from North

Dancing till Dawn in the Artichoke Capital of the World

BY CARTER WILSON
PHOTOGRAPHS BY BROOK DILLON

County Bakery, balloons from the Salinas florist, flowers from Gilroy. Monterey Sheriff Norm Hicks dug into his pocket for a personal contribution. The women from the Catholic church are doing desserts and salads, *Pueblos Unidos* is in charge of the tamales. "It's more fun than anything," Ernie admits, "Like a high. I just kept going and going."

Across the street the thin January sun is setting on Ernie's yellow-facaded domain, which includes not only the bar named



after the 1951 Artichoke Festival Queen who went on to bigger things, but Franco's Restaurant and a Norma Jean gift shop as well. Now 36, Ernie has had the business for five years. Before that he spent ten years behind the bar at Mariano's in Salinas, though he himself doesn't drink. ("The only *vicio* I have is men," he says.)

Ernie thinks in the beginning the owners gave him the lease to Franco's, historically an Anglo-Italian restaurant, to spite Castroville. "It was the shock of the town, me being Mexican, being 31, and being gay." He brought with him Vicki, who's the cook (and currently proud holder of the title of Miss Franco's). "They thought we were lovers, but we weren't," says Ernie, "and they called us queers, *jotos*."

Ernie began catering to a Mexican clientele. But when there got to be too much fighting in the bar, he had to throw some people out. They in turn threatened to boycott him. "It was all just too stressful," he recalls, "I had always wanted to open a gay bar and call it La Noa Noa. And I started thinking 'When am I ever going to get my gay bar?' (And you know I *always* do get my way.) So I stood up to them. The following week I started gay night. I was within an inch of getting my ass kicked, but I stood up to them. And that's what you have to do."

Ernie gives generous credit to his friend Jesse. One Saturday right after Ernie started his gay night, Jesse went to After Dark in Monterey where they were having a drag show and spread the word among the Latinos there that they should come over to Castroville and support their own bar. "And about 12:30 that night," as Ernie remembers it, "a big old crowd came in."

Those first shock troops included the indefatigable Francine, current Empress of Monterey and Norma Jean's usual Mistress of Ceremonies, and three other drag queens from Salinas. Ernie's policy is, "Draggs have always been welcome here. I say if they have balls enough to get up and do a show, then go for it." He encourages lesbians to strut their stuff too, although at the moment only Debbie will step into the limelight. He also encourages the guys who lip-sync to male singers.

"What do we call them?" Ernie shrugs and shows his fine, regular toothy smile. "Male impersonators, I guess."

The other three original "girls" turn out to be a disappointment. "They became drags here. This is

where they learned how to do it. But then they started going into straight bars and passing themselves off and they didn't come here anymore. When Francine started doing it too, I had to get up and do the mike."

That was the beginning of Ernie's own career as an emcee. Nowadays, even though Francine has come back and generally reigns overwhelmingly at Saturday's 11 PM show, Ernie himself is no longer shy about getting up and pulling a laugh or a big hand for the next performer out of his widely bilingual audience.

"Ora un aplausa por favor para—FULANA! Es su ultima presentacion aca, senores. Ya se va, porque no es mas que una pinche lechuguera!"

The Mexican transvestite tradition has many outposts in California including Esta Noche in the city and St. John's in San Jose. In his free time, Ernie has taken to visiting other places where *travestis* put on shows, and to following his own regulars—Paloma, Vicki, Francine, Madonna—to lend them support. Surprisingly, Ernie thinks Watsonville has always had more drags than Salinas. "Watsonville treats 'em rough, though. They'll take 'em out to the beach, tie 'em up and fuck the hell out of 'em." Drags in Salinas used to hang out mostly in Chinatown, at a place called the Wagonwheel, now gone. There is even an occasional lip-sync show at a bar in the little agricultural town of Huron. "But not at this time of year," he says. "Those are the *lechugueros*, the drags who follow the lettuce. By now they're in Yuba, Indio...."

Ernie attributes the success of Norma Jean's to the way he provides what his crowd wants, and to the fact that he's there all the time. "The reason there isn't any trouble in my place is that I circulate, I'm in the bar, and everybody knows me. They have a certain respect for me. This year I got over fifty Christmas cards. It was really touching."

Though he wants Norma Jean's to be atmospherically friendly to all gays and lesbians, Ernie pays special attention to his Latino customers. "I give them mariachis four times a year, on *Dieciseis de Septiembre*, *Cinco de Mayo*, my birthday [June 1] and the anniversary of my going gay [February 16]. Food, theme nights, the Mr. Franco's Contest, the Marilyn Monroe Drag Lookalike Contest—" Ernie's held three or four gay wedding parties at the club and looks forward to doing more.

Despite success, there is still criticism and prejudice. Ernie digs out a clipping from the Watsonville *Pajaronian* where, obviously for journalistic "balance" the writer ends his story with

—♦—
"One night this
woman at the bar
complained to me,
'There's nothing
but Mexicans in
here,' so I told her,
'If you don't like it,
then you can get
the fuck out.'"



Veronica

the grandson of the original owners of Franco's saying, "My grandmother would turn over in her grave." Still exasperated, Ernie indicates the Artichoke Capital of the World's dusty main street, the heavy trucks lumbering by. "Look at this town. Everything's all boarded up and I'm successful, bringing in business. And they want to close *me* down."

But he keeps plugging. The upcoming benefit will be held at the Castroville Community Center instead of at Norma Jean's so straight people will feel comfortable coming. "This fundraiser is to reunite Santa Cruz and Monterey Counties," Ernie says. "The Monterey County AIDS Project wasn't doing anything for the Latino community until I did something. If you ask, 'Why aren't you doing anything?' they say you're racist. But that's already changing."

Racism is one thing this generally tolerant man has no patience with. "One night this woman at the bar complained to me, 'There's nothing but Mexicans in here,' so I told her 'If you don't like it, then you can get the fuck out.'"

By now, evening and some salty fog have come in.

Time for me to go. On the way out, that old one more question, *la del estribo*. "Ernie, do you ever think about dressing up yourself?"

"That's what they're always asking for—and the one thing I wouldn't give them," he says. "Then at Christmas I was upstairs and I noticed this red dress hanging there and I thought, 'Would that fit me?' So I tried it on, and it did. Made me look 50 pounds lighter. So I did it. Actually all I had to do was put on the nylons. Vicki and Paloma did the rest. Combed me out and everything. All in an hour."

They didn't have to stuff the front of the dress. "Didn't need to," he says, briefly weighing one of the *chichis* inside his shirt, "I've got plenty already."

"But you shaved your mustache."

"Oh yeah, mustache, the whole bit."

And his drag character's name? "Well," Ernie explains, "you know they call the great Mexican singer Lola Beltran *Madre de Todos los Mexicanos*. So I just called myself *Lola Beltran, Madre de Todos los Jotos*." ♦

This article originally appeared in the Spring 1992 Lavender Reader (from Santa Cruz County, California).



Madonna

THE FABULOUS FIGHT BACK

ON THE STREETS AFTER DARK TO CONFRONT GAY BASHERS

BY
SARA
MILES

IT'S GETTING DARK, AND MIKE hits me. I can hear a dog barking, and a group of people shouting at the other end of the park. He hits me again. "You can do it harder," I say. Mike holds out his forearm to show me the motion. "Up like this," he says, "Block. Lift, block. Now hit me."

It's taken me a while to get to this chilly corner of San Francisco's Dolores Park, where a dozen queers in sweatpants and ripped T-shirts are shivering in the wind, training each other in street fighting. It's not that I've been nonviolent, but

I've always been scared—and scared to admit it, as if naming the terror would increase the danger. So I flinched through childhood, ducking the shouts and blows; walked brittle for almost twenty years through New York; lay stunned and adult under the black boots of a man kicking my face in; and tried not to think about any of it.

Then, back in 1980, before most of the men I knew were dying, my friend Vernon died. On his way for a beer, passing through the crowd in front of the waterfront gay bars, as the great gray Hudson rolled past the piers, Vernon turned and was murdered by someone with a semi-automatic rifle shouting "Faggots die!" Lots of us cried, and I trembled and went to the memorial service, and in the newspaper I wrote an elegy for Vernon and the other slain man, George Wenz:

"The responsible community leaders were at it again, deploring violence and urging restraint. As the sermons went on, pouring grease on the waters, you would have thought that the hundreds of us gathered at Washington Square Church were there resting after a mob attack on the heterosexuals of New York, and were poised to go out again, running wild in armed, savage, frenzy.

"We were there to mourn. And we were there in anger as well, acknowledging the difference between a sad event and an event that is sad and wrong. In the face of wrong, of wrongful death, of violation, of murder, we were being told to celebrate martyrdom and to turn the other cheek.

"A community that defines itself by the degree of its victimization is a community without power. To glorify persecution, declaring that a victim status confers a special nobility upon us, is obscene. We cannot find self-worth by measuring the extent to which we are hated; cannot find strength by claiming our weakness makes of us a chosen people; cannot inherit the earth by being gunned down to bleed our lives away on the winter street.

"Suffering is not good for the soul. Suffering evil does not make us good, will not prepare us to actively resist wrong. The despised, the rejected, the outcast, the murdered, the martyred—there are other names for what we need to do with our lives.

ASTOR





HIT THE GROUND

Street Patrol members train together weekly in self-defense, de-escalation, and street-fighting techniques.

"I suggest we begin with our anger, an anger at least as real as our very real pain, and infinitely more useful than the acceptance of such pain as our lot in life, our identity, our blessing. I suggest we recognize, instead, that our capacity to feel rage is a blessing. I suggest we take back our souls from the sorry, the sad, and the saints. Let us refuse martyrdom and regain rightful rage. And then, I suggest, let us act on it."

Several people told me I was advocating violence, and several more told me I was stupid. I didn't know what to do, and in any case I was moving a little farther away, to Brooklyn.

In Brooklyn it seemed like each month the police were killing

another Black kid. My lover's nineteen-year old son lived down the block. Every time he was late coming home his mother panicked and damned all white people to hell forever and lit another cigarette, straining for the sound of the phone or the downstairs door. One month, they killed two men, and there was a march. It was freezing cold and I was walking through the dirty late-afternoon air, one arm linked in my friend Gale's, the other in the arm of a burly, angry man with a salt-and-pepper beard. Jitu from the Black United Front was leading us in a chant, his voice hoarse and almost hysterical,

repeating: "Whose streets? OUR streets! Whose streets?" We roared back, "OUR streets!" A lie. They were the cops' streets. We all knew this. We kept walking. "OUR streets!"

I moved a little farther away. Most of the rest of the decade I spent in and out of Central America, in different kinds of wars. It didn't occur to me I was learning about being gay in the world—it was too hot and immediate for me to keep my mind on a metaphor. But in the dailiness of dust and bad food and jokes, and the extremity of organized terror, I learned more about violence, more about passing and hiding, and a great deal more about fear.

I shouldn't have to be scared in San Francisco, I thought, coming up for air in 1991. I have a job now in which I don't look at corpses and soldiers every day. With my gay boyfriend and our two-year old daughter, I'm some-

where that could finally be a home for our own weird queer household. Here's a safe place, a community that even has some amount of power. Here, for whatever it's worth, are my people.

Right, says Ellen. Be sure to wear some flowers in your hair, too.

Because here, she says, is also where gay-bashings happen. Still. Every week. Every night. Like the night Jo wound up with a knife stuck deep in her. "It's not just in dark alleys," Jo tells me "Mostly the bashings happen on 18th and Castro, right in the thick of it." Right where someone who doesn't know

the first thing about faggots can find one, and take aim.

• • •
"Faggots." "Faggots, hey, fags!" "Fucking faggots!" The cars go by. We're posted up in front of the 7-11, eight of us at two in the morning in our less-than-totally intimidating colors. White t-shirts with a triangle that say DON'T TREAD ON ME. Black leather jackets on half of us, sweatshirts stuffed under. "Butch 'em up," advises our friend Chris, from the Guardian Angels, "Get some bulk on you, try at least to look like you got muscle." Dary, the Army vet, wears surplus camo, a first-aid pouch, and our radio. "Militaristic yet fabulous," says Adam, the skinny, tattooed musician, "That's the look we're aiming for." Adam has a sleeveless denim vest that he's painted with a quote from Malcolm X. "I am nonviolent with those who are nonviolent with me," it says. Peg and Shela, the couple who moonlight as Olympic wrestlers, are the toughest-looking of all, in ordinary jeans and sneakers. Peg is a grandmother; Shayin, standing next to her with a nose ring and lots of curly hair, is seventeen. Most patrollers carry handcuffs. All of us wear fuschia berets. You might say we're obsessed with fashion. "Faggots!" The tires squeal, and an egg flies past us, splattering on the sidewalk. Suegee, a peroxide blond with a crew cut and combat boots, sighs. "I wish they'd get that right," she says. "Dykes and faggots."

• • •
One night we walk, and walk into a parking lot where two guys are menacing another with a tire iron. Another we walk, and listen to stories from frantic men who come up to ask for help. One night we walk, and cruise, and chat, and windowshop, and wonder if anything will happen, and nothing ever does. We run hard for false alarms; we stay in formation; we stop for soda and wait in the shadows with our hearts pounding. One night we

intervene in an attack, and Marvin takes away a baseball bat from a group of bashers. "Faggots," they hiss, "We'll get you."

• • •
"It's not about getting rid of fear," says Ellen. "It's about having the fear, and learning to control it." But the only time I ever hear Ellen admit that she's scared is when I say I want to kiss her. We're in her bare apartment, a week before she leaves San Francisco, waiting for Street

Patrol to come over for a goodbye party. "Be brave," I tell her.

Later, up on the roof, we test Dary's night vision goggles, looking out, off-duty, at the lights of the Castro. Marvin says Ellen's the Mother of All Battles, and Adam gives her a set of brass knuckles. "This has been fun," she says. "But you know, sometimes I think there's something wrong that I needed to raise my own private army in order to feel safe on the street."

STREET PATROL RULES

We are not politically correct. We are not a consensus organization. We are not vigilantes. If you have a problem with any of these rules, please go away rapidly.

There are two things that are not tolerated in Street Patrol. Either of these behaviors will result in your immediate expulsion from the group.

1. Carrying weapons to training, on patrol, or while wearing our colors.
2. Showing up for training or patrol under the influence of drugs or alcohol, or having drugs or drug paraphernalia in your possession while wearing our colors.

The following infractions also result in expulsion:

1. Vigilante (punitive) activity/use of excessive force.
2. The WRONG ATTITUDE (psychopathic desire to stomp nazi skinheads or the people who rip down flyers or the homeless or straights or anyone else who rubs you the wrong way).
3. Endangering a patrol or a patrol member or an innocent bystander.
4. Inability to withstand verbal abuse.
5. Racial or sexual prejudice.
6. Continuous destructive complaining or negativity.
7. Escalating verbal confrontation, or

inviting physical confrontation (yelling at passing cars, bumping into people roughly, etc.).

8. "Looking the other way" when a person is being endangered. If you cannot safely intervene, you are expected to make a call to the police.

Any of these infractions may endanger patrol members and bystanders. If you have any more questions about these rules, just ask one of us.

ADDITIONAL RULES

1. Appropriate clothing must be worn. This includes the uniform (beret and T-shirt) and appropriate footwear (NO BIRKENSTOCKS!)
2. All patrol members must submit to a weapons search at the beginning of each patrol. If you have questions about what is a weapon, just ask.
3. All patrol members must participate in all Street Patrol training and follow procedures while on patrol, such as maintaining formations and following commands.
4. All patrol members must carry a pen/pencil, paper, a whistle, and valid identification while on patrol.

"A good soldier is never aggressive;
A good fighter is never angry."

—Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*

I do lots of things I thought I never would. Follow orders without backtalk. Learn to break someone's kneecaps. Go out way after midnight to the most dangerous place I can find and look for attackers. Be glad to see the cops. Trust men. Really trust, for that matter, women—night after night, with my life.

The Guardian Angels teach us to use the word "mutants" to describe bashers: it has a nice sci-fi ring, and avoids any racial, ethnic, or gender stereotypes we might slip into in the heat of battle. The fact is, we all know what mutants look like. It's the five white guys with baseball caps crowded into the red Camaro who lean out the windows

as they pick up speed, and scream that we should suck their dicks. The angry Black man with hunched-over shoulders and a fade cut, daring some queer to start something with him, just touch me, touch me and I'll kill you. Four teenagers in hooded blue jackets and their mean-faced chola girlfriends, taunting the drag queens in front of the 7-11. Skinheads, writing death threats on the walls. The man with the baseball bat, the knife, the gun, the two-by-four, the icepick, the shovel, the clenched fists. Usually teenagers, but not always; usually males, but not always; usually a group but sometimes any solo straight with enough alcohol, enough rage, enough fear inside him to strike.

There's a group of mutants on the corner now, in the sick fluorescent light buzzing off the side of the grocery store, right where it butts up against the dark park, the local cruising ground after the bars close. The mutants are huddled together, watching us. We spread out and I try to remember what to do with my hands. Out of my pockets, at my sides, don't fold your arms, don't lift them unless you're hit—in the tension as one mutant starts to curse us, methodically, from across the street, my hands clench and rise and fall, a tiny arc of nerves. "Shela—" I say in what I mean to be a low voice, but it comes out high, "Shela, look at the guy facing towards the park, what's he got in his pocket?" My mouth tastes like tin, and all the noise of the street fades away, the jukes' bad music pounding out, the crash of glasses at closing time and the sound of car doors slamming, the traffic and the gossip from the boys, unaware, screeching goodnight down the block. It's very quiet, and my ears are roaring. I think if I pay enough attention I can hear the mutants' breathing. "Take a deep breath," says Shela, "I think they're coming over here."

We look at everyone, here late at night in the Castro. There are the drunks, gay and straight; the sick and the homeless; the guys at the bar, and the girls leaning out windows at the upstairs cafe. Dizzy queens and tough dykes, fools and assholes, annoying and wonderful and gorgeous. John got beaten with a baseball bat. Kathy got slashed with a knife. Susan got yelled at, Lee got yelled at, Bruce got yelled at and shot. Whose streets?

Adam and Mark run us all through paces at training. We stretch first, warming up—"especially the wrists, now," says Adam, "Can't be a fag if you don't have

COMING SOON TO A NEIGHBORHOOD NEAR YOU

Street patrols are springing up around the country in response to violence against lesbians and gays. While all of them are interested in stopping bashings, they take different approaches to their work. Some, like San Francisco's Street Patrol, the Panther Patrol in New York's East Village, and Seattle's Q Patrol, are "interventionist," which means members are trained to physically intervene in attacks. Others, like the Christopher Street Patrol in New York's West Village, and the Lavender Angels in Sacramento, are "watchdog" groups that call the police to respond to bashings.

There are differences in style (the Road Warrior vs. softball-team look), organization (free-form consensus vs.

the Submit to Your Mistress approach), and how to relate to the Guardian Angels and the cops. But patrols around the country are forming a loose network to share intelligence, training, and information about anti-queer violence.

Street Patrol, San Francisco:

415-985-7423

Panther Patrol, New York: 212-475-4363

Christopher Street Patrol, New York:

212-627-5855

Q-Patrol, Seattle: 206-325-9128

Pynk Panthers, Boston: 617-499-9558

Lavender Angels, Sacramento:

916-334-4400

Q-Patrol, Houston: 713-524-4657

Street Patrol Los Angeles: 213-466-2629

Pink Angels, Chicago: 312-871-7465



SISTERS ARE GETTING PISSED

Some of the members of San Francisco's Street Patrol gather at midnight. "We don't: carry weapons; 'enforce the law;' or 'clean up the streets.' We do: intervene in bashings; stop anti-gay violence; cruise, dish, and window-shop shamelessly."

nice limp wrists." Mike does karate twice weekly and a special ninja class on weekends. Suegee does Aikido. Jo lifts weights. The last organized physical activity I did was tenth-grade gym, which I failed. We roll, we fall, we take turns being pinned to the floor and hurling each other down by the throat. We practice not getting angry. "Remember, you get style points for appearing harmless," Mark says, "yet kicking butt. And, of course, for accessorizing your uniform."

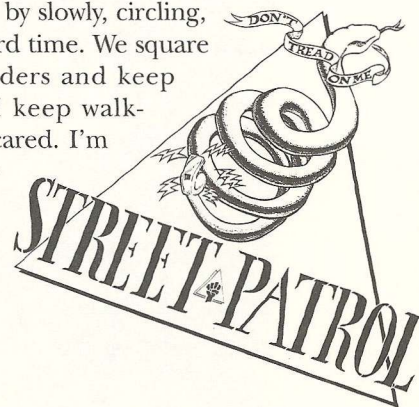
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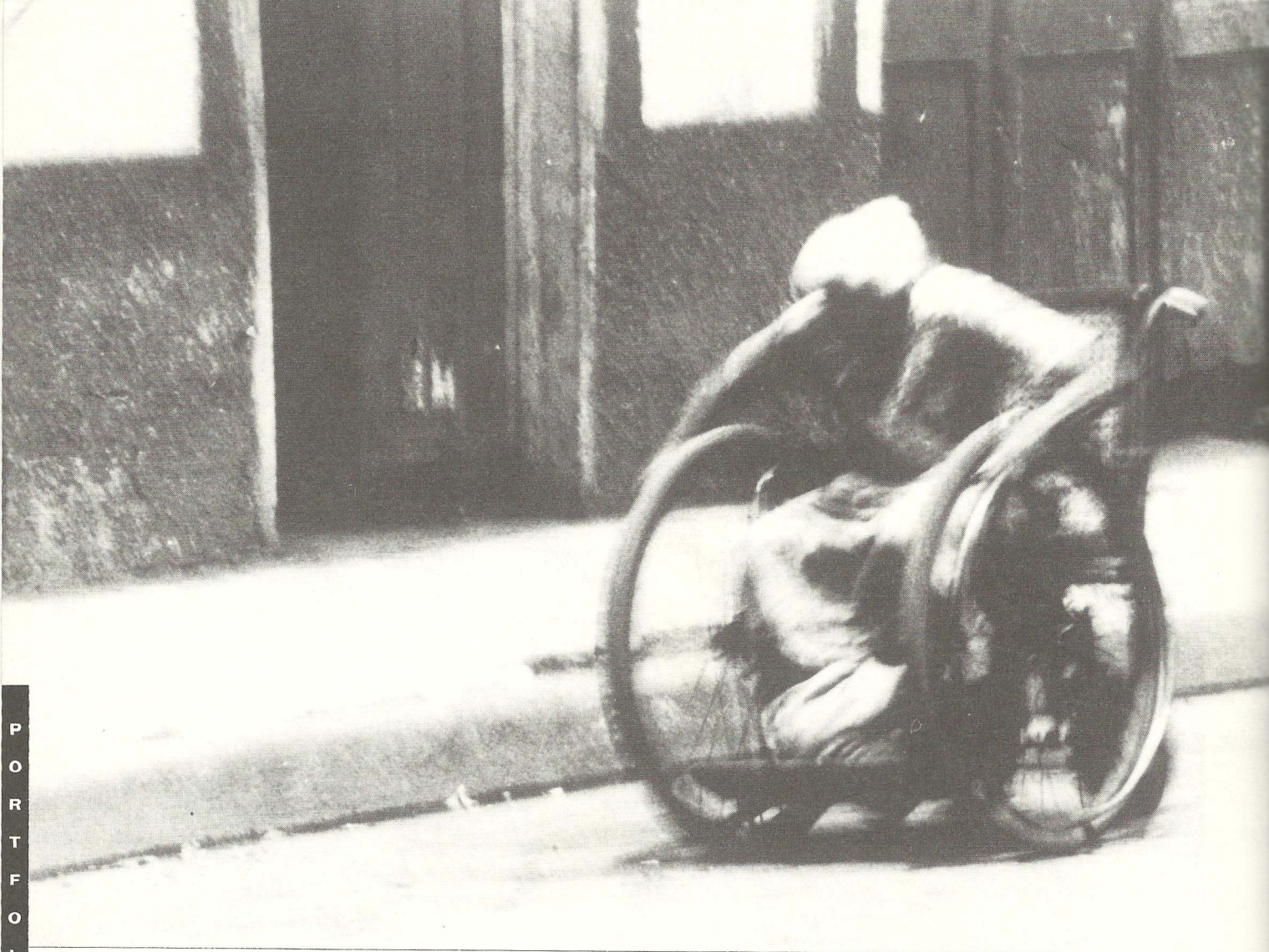
I do my first turn as Hostess, patrol leader for the night, with Jo beside me. It's cool, and heavy fog

is misting our faces as we turn the corner into an alley. Suddenly it's something, one very big guy on top of a very drunk queer, threatening him. The patrol posts up six feet away, poised delicately in their biker gloves, berets glowing under the streetlight. The Mistress, second in command, directs them under his breath; the 911 runner sprints for a phone. Jo and I talk to the basher. We talk it down, hands not raised but ready, voices steady, firm. And then we are standing, still talking, in between the basher and the bashee, our bodies a wedge pushing the attacker out. "It's OK," we say, "It's OK, let's go now. Enough."

• • •

It's late and we're tired, walking and talking trash. "Girlfriend!" shouts Dary at a figure skittering down Market towards the last bus. "Get home safe, honey!" Suegee complains about her love life. Annette complains about her feet. A car goes by slowly, circling, for the third time. We square our shoulders and keep walking. I keep walking. I'm scared. I'm walking. ♦





Since its introduction at the 1990 Michigan Womyn's Music Festival, Lesbian Visual Artists (LVA) has grown into an international organization comprised of visual artists in every medium. Members network through a newsletter, and the group organizes exhibits of lesbian visual artwork. Happy/L.A. Hyder, the group's founder, sees art as an integral part of the lesbian and gay activist agenda. Art, she believes, can confront those who don't want to see homosexual images

LVA

before they turn away, and artists supply vision in a form that attracts people—or slaps them in the face. Hyder particularly recognized a need to promote lesbian visibility and imagery. She decid-

ed to form a lesbian arts organization after organizing "Dynamics of Color," an exhibit of lesbian artists' work on racism (a portion of which appeared in the spring 1990 issue of OUT/LOOK). Here we feature the work of four of LVA's members.

— Ann McClintock

Lesbian Visual Artists



Julia Youngblood

(LEFT) "Into the Streets"/Nicaragua
Black and white photograph, 8" x 10"

Milagro eyes from the heart this is how I hope to see to photograph no matter the subject no matter where no matter when may this never change may this bring my images to you.

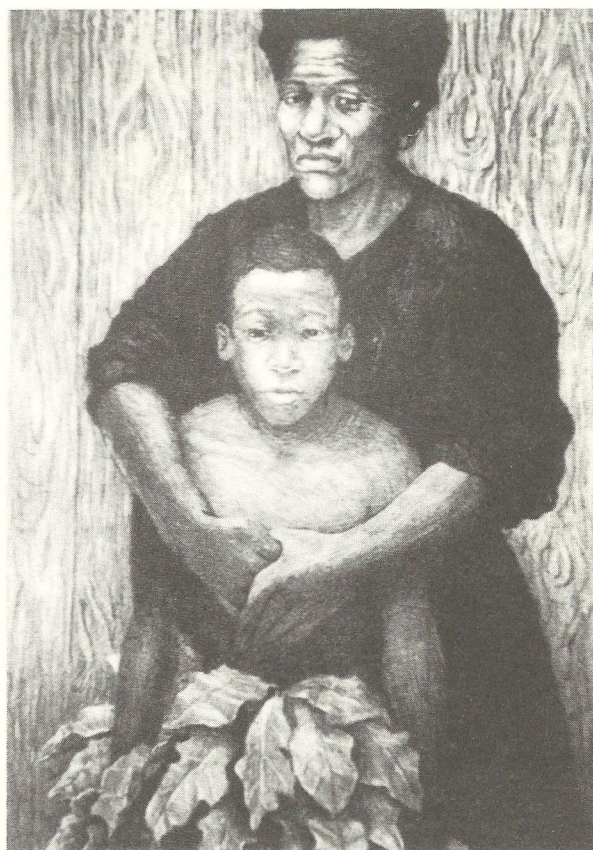
I've been photographing for fifteen years. My work is black and white and often incorporates written or spoken word. Recent works include images about women and disability, installation of "Grief-Spot" portraits for Day of the Dead, lesbian erotica, Cuban life, and a book on incest (not yet published) called *Sing Fire, Tell All*.

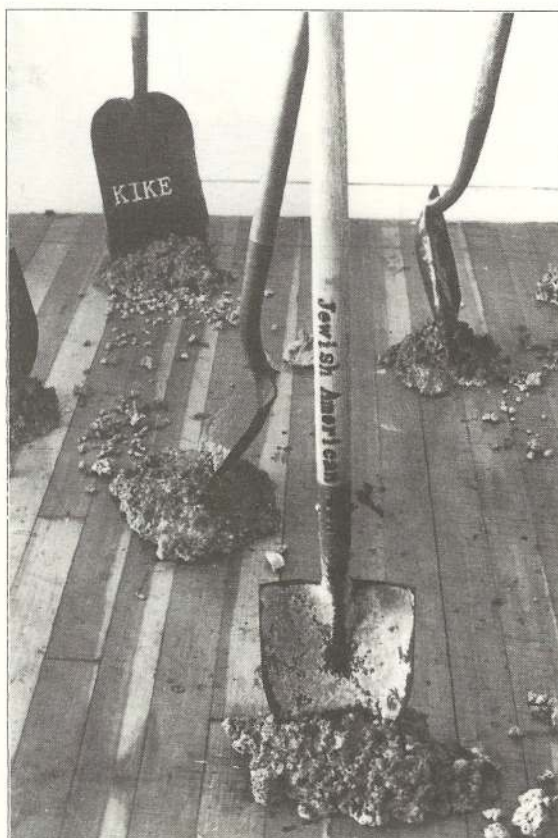
Sarita Johnson-Calvo

(RIGHT) "Green Giant II" 1990
Lithograph, 12" x 9"

(ABOVE) "Nosebleed" 1990
Woodcut, 17.75" x 23.75"

A lot of my work is really autobiographical. I give credit to my own stories by illustrating them. Giving those stories a place where other people can see them is my way of valuing my African American-ness. I like being very direct.





Lisa Kokin

(ABOVE and LEFT) "Unearthing" 1990-91
Shovels, concrete, installation (detail)

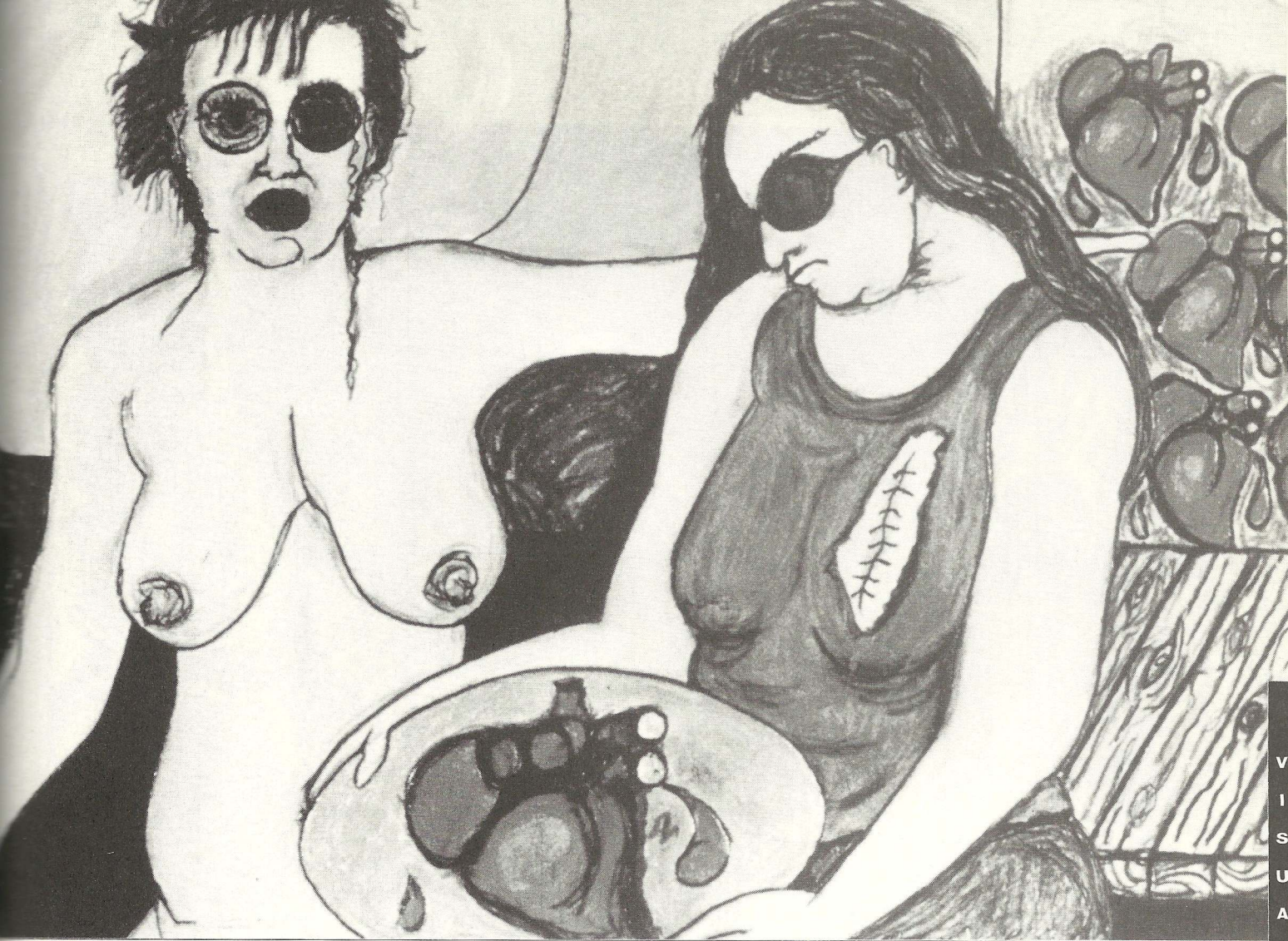
No one has ever called me kike or yid, although my mother remembers hearing those words fifty or sixty years ago in New York. Anti-Semitism is on the rise (as exemplified in the US by the candidacies of David Duke and Patrick Buchanan). I decided to do "Unearthing" after completing several pieces on the Holocaust and realizing that I wanted to comment upon contemporary anti-Semitism. I focused on labels since I believe they dehumanize the person or group in question and inhibit complex thought.

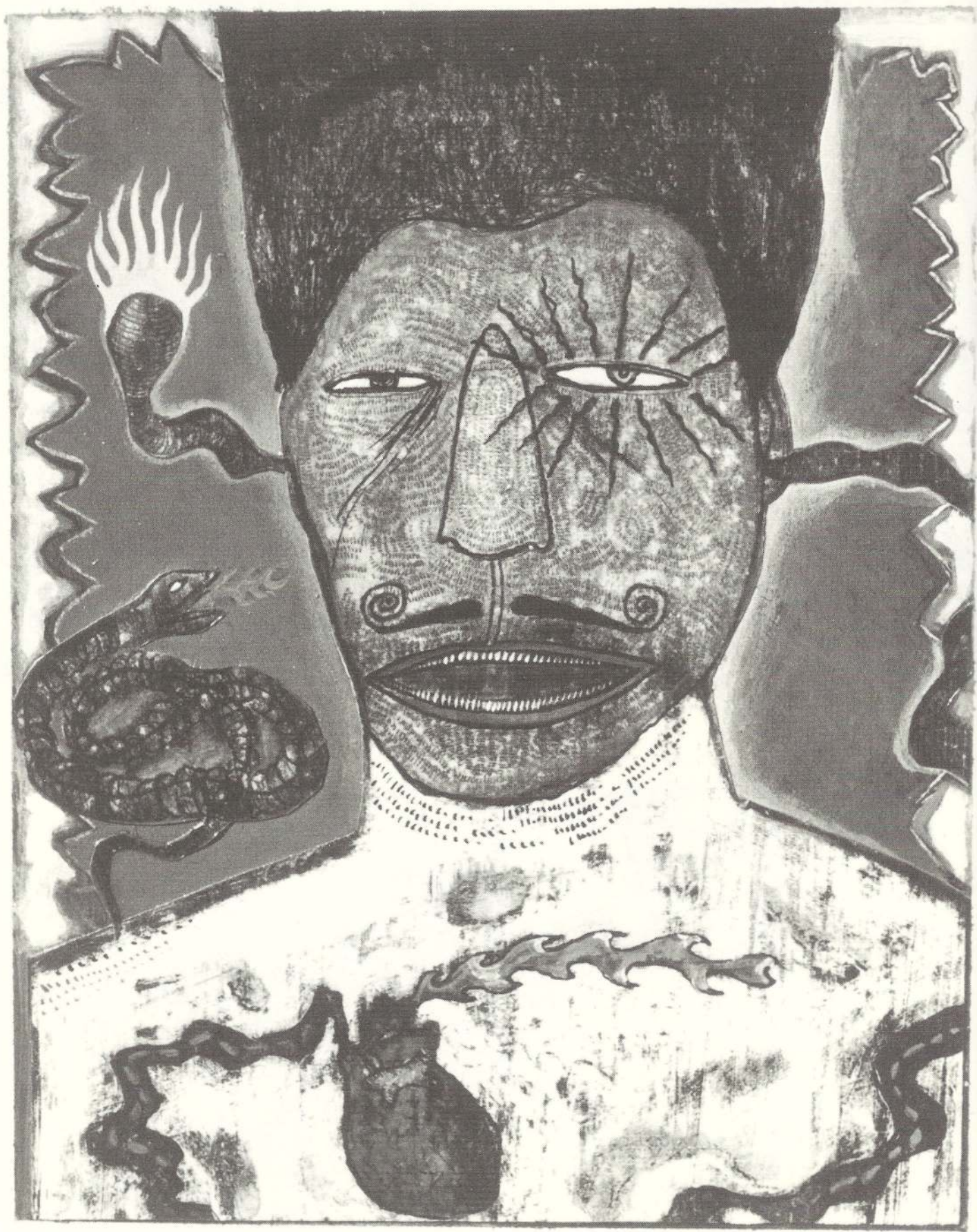
Mary J. Kerr

(RIGHT, above) "Hello, 911?" 1990
Pencils on paper, 7"x10-1/4"

(RIGHT, below) "With the Rest" 1990
Pencils on paper, 7"x10-1/4"

Most of my work is political in nature. I sometimes call it propaganda. I was educated as a photographer but I cross media lines a lot. I like the physical action of doing the little drawings as opposed to working photographic equipment.





Trapped in a House That Won't Burn

Waycross, 1960

I had been smelling smoke all morning. It was nearly noon and I was out on the back porch when the smell finally stopped me and made me look around. It was high summer and the grass was brown and the wind was still. Smoke was coming from the chimney as I was cooking greens for the noon meal. Luella, right down the road, was cooking. But all that was smoke I was used to.

I was smelling *smoke*. Ever since I woke up this morning.

I walked down into the yard and ol' Lancelot gave a long dog stretch and yawned and came out from under the porch. He wagged his tail as best he could in that noon heat. Walked over and sniffed and waited for food. The smoke seemed to just be on the air. It wasn't coming from any one direction.

But I walked through the house anyway. The parlor, the hallway, my room, Rosie's room; even the closet before I went to his room.

I cracked the door to his room, but all I could smell there was his rubbing liniment mixed together with the heat like a gas. I didn't go in. I go in there as little as possible.

I went back to the kitchen. The greens had boiled down, so I dipped more water on them. The cornbread was ready. I laid the towels back over it to keep it warm. Would be nice to have some fresh tomatoes I thought. So I went out into the garden and picked a half dozen. It was

enough for Rosie and me. If she came home. She might stay at her boyfriend's house. There wasn't much else to do right then. I sat down on the edge of the porch, but then I moved back against the house into the shade.

In that heat it was hard to think about any one thing for long. I lay my head back and my eyelids got drowsy. Chicken-cackling flaring up now and then in a fight over some bit of worm or garbage. Sounds I'd heard all my life. Snaps and hisses and buzzes coming from the thick dry summer grass.

Something flashed and I opened my eyes wide again. Looked like a spark floating across the yard. I watched it dip and float like it was carried on a wind but there wasn't a wind.

Then I saw what it was for real. A orange butterfly. Sun must have caught on his wing to make him flash like that. I stretched and took a long deep breath and suddenly my nose and mouth filled so full of smoke until I had a coughing fit. I rolled on the porch, wheezing and coughing and trying to suck in clean air. But all that came was smoke, like almost to choke me. I kicked and I spit and hammered at my own chest with my hands. Finally I could get my breath. I lay there, my eyes watering. The cat, who had been staring at me, got up and silently walked away as if I was bad company.

Gradually the smoke smell lessened, but it didn't go away.

When I went in to check on the food, something nudged me towards his room. I hesitated, but then I went.

The heavy odor poured out and I hesitated just inside the door while my eyes adjusted.

He looked seventy though he was only



by **Pat Ligon**
Suncircle

nine years older than me. Matter of fact his fortieth birthday had been last Sunday.

I'd forgot. Maybe that was why Rosie had been away all week. Well certainly she didn't think I'd bake a cake for him.

Looked like his eyes were opened, then he belched and I took a step back because his breath was putrid. Then he made some noise that could have been a chuckle. I put my hands against my thighs though there was no danger of me touching him.

"I had a dream. Last night." His voice was raw and thin; his words were slurred as if he was just waking up.

Didn't smell like he had crapped yet. Maybe I could get away without changing him until that night. Maybe he'd be dead by then. But that thought put a little guilt in me.

"Dreamed about RoseLinda," he said.

I looked down into his face. It was always wet with sweat and his eyes shown with fever or lust or hate.

His spirit beads seemed to have shrunk around his neck, like the sex disease in him was swelling.

"RoseLinda," he whispered. "RoseLinda was sittin' on my knee. She had all that red bright red ribbon in her hair. Pretty pretty bright red ribbon."

"Allen, you been smelling smoke?" I asked.

"Just sittin' on my knee straddled like you sit a horse," he went on.

"You ain' got no matches, do you?" I said.

I strained my eyes looking around the bed.

"You better hope I don't," he said.

I knew there weren't any matches there. I knew, by now, that smoke had to be something else. That scared me some. And being scared brought on a strange feeling. It was strange because I hadn't felt it in so long.

When Allen and I were boys I'd talk to him about anything and he would always find a way out for me. So I said to him, "I don't think this smoke is natural."

He laughed again. "I can't smell nothing."

"I think it's the spirits," I said. "Wonder what they want with me."

"Way to find out what the spirits want is to ask 'em," he said. "Go on over to Wino's."

I nodded. That was good advice.

Yet I couldn't thank him for it. I stood there for a long time, minutes passed. Yet I couldn't thank him.

I would always go into my elder brother's room



and sit on the side of the bed and talk to him. He'd tell me what to do. He never called me faggot. He didn't have to. He knew he was better.

I think even lying there he still did. But then he mentioned RoseLinda again.

"I runned my fingers up her back, slow like. 'Long her skin...."

I told him to shut up.

"And that make her squeeze her legs 'round my knee."

I raised my hand back to slap him but something stopped me, and instead of hitting him I said, "You must be hurting awful bad to talk like that." I knew he hadn't dreamed that.

That made him mad. The skin on his face seemed to tighten and he tried to raise up. He couldn't. He said, "Shut up faggot. Faggot. Sissy! Babybuster. Baby raper...."

Last thing I saw as I turned to go was the sweat running off his face.

I'd lived my whole life in that house. He'd come and gone. Lived up north for ten years. Rosie, my sister, had gone and come. Got married.

I remember how Allen used to step out on a Saturday evening dressed in his white suit coat and his red tie. He had a white straw hat setting on the back of his head. He was pure Chango spirit. Pants creased sharp as a razor. And he'd say to me, "Why don't you shine my shoes."

I would. Kneel down as if I was going to take him in my mouth and rub away. When Daddy passed he was head of the family.

I took the greens off the fire, then went outside wanting to get as far away from him as I could. Dog made a whine from under the porch telling me he wasn't going to follow me out in all that heat.

Through the barbed wire fence and out across the peanut field. From there I cut through the north corner of Edmund's pasture. The heat wasn't just hot, the sun was a weight on my head. I could feel it pressing down and I knew I'd have to walk back in it. Even a fool would have grabbed a hat.

I stopped under a big old white oak at the edge of the pasture. Stood there sorting things out.

One Sunday, just after he had come back from up

north, all of us went down to Hess Landing along the river. We took a picnic. I'd made potato salad and chicken. Rosie made that carrot salad she used to make with brown sugar. We'd worked together to make Allen's favorite kind of cake. I had wanted to put a different kind of icing on it, one with lemon, but she'd said we should make it like always so he'd be sure to like it. It had been a hot late fall day and the breeze off the river was cool.

Rosie was wearing a blue and white dress clean and pretty as the October sky. Little RoseLinda had on her jumpsuit her daddy had sent her for her third birthday. He had on one of his white-on-white-as-a-Baptist-preacher's shirts. It was opened at the collar and he smelled like Old Spice.

I was sitting watching the river take all the time in the world going past. He had brought his guitar and he played it. When he played I knew why all the women fell before him. My brother was Chango. Chango is fire. The river is Oshun. I sat there, never having had a lover, and watched Chango make love to Oshun. I remembered that time so well and from so far away because that day we felt so much like a family.

I still smelled smoke.

I was about ready to head back to the house when I saw something that stopped me. Past the worn out corn patch with the piece of scarecrow standing in it I saw a sweetgum tree in full orange and red fall colors. Colors that it turned in the fall, except any kind of fall was a good two months away. The other thing was that it moved like it was aflame or like a wind went through it. But there wasn't any wind.

The thing that happened next made me take Allen's advice and go running over to Winoa's.

While I was looking over that way the scarecrow just burst into fire. Flames shot out like it had exploded and it burned like a whirlwind was in it. Black smoke poured from it. None of the smoke came near me but I was breathing mouthfuls of it, almost choking again. It had burned up in no time. When I walked over there and stood over the place there was just hot ashes.

I shut up the place and drove over to Winoa's.



"A fire's after me," I told her.

"Sit down. Mesash bring out some of that blackberry tea," she called to her son.

Didn't really want to see her son but I sat down. She sat at a table under the elder tree in her back yard. She was bent over it doing some kind of herb making.

She wore a green headrag and she had on her blue jean jacket hot as it was. Her two ganders—things were almost as big as hogs—primed themselves, strutting around opposite ends of the yard. One of them had a blue handkerchief tied around his neck.

"How Rosie?" she said.

"She been in town all week. I ain' heard nothing from her. Guess she's all right or that boy would call. He seems like a good one."

"Hmmmm." Winoa had her own ideas about that. Her long fingers picked at the herbs. Then her lips half turned in a smile that slowly waned. "How's Allen?" she said.

"Same." I clutched my hands together for a moment and Winoa caught that movement.

Mesash brought out the tea and I nodded to him quick and looked away.

Not before I took in how fine he was. He'd got the best of everything both Winoa and her Chickasaw husband—ex-husband—had to give a child, Rosie used to say. And the day being so hot he wasn't wearing a shirt.

I told Winoa my story and she said, "Sounds like Chango."

She was slowly starting to glance up from her herbs.

"All kind of smoke is a warning. You a son of Chango."

I knew what she was going to say next so I said, "I keep his days. I wear my colors."

She nodded as if she knew that.

I guess when you come to Winoa you end up thinking what you should be thinking because I went on. "Chango wants brave children. He wants his children to live life much as they can."

Winoa nodded. "The lightning is Chango's sign. Lightning is fire that wakes you up. Chango don't have no time for half-live children hiding out rotting somewhere. Best they get hit by lightning. Ease the load on the earth."

I was thinking how once, some years ago, I'd been

to a stomp Winoa gave. I'd stepped out past her garden, away from the music, to relieve myself or for a minute of quiet. When here come my dream coming true.

Mesash walked up to me, dropped his cigarette and stepped on it. He let the last of the smoke float from his mouth in an easy breath. Then he smiled. Even, pretty teeth, the moon on them like pearls. His hair was loose and fell almost to his shoulders. And with two fingers he touched my cheek. And when I put my hands on his waist he stepped closer. We kissed and his breath was of mint and cigarette smoke. Indian tobacco that he grew himself. Then it came over me.

All of a sudden like something rising in my throat and I shoved him with my shoulder like I'd seen Allen do to a man he was fighting once. And I ran. I just saw, for a moment, the surprise in his eyes and that it was turning to hurt when I spun away.

I'd run through the dark pastures and fields nearly the whole three miles home. I ran and got under my bed. I hid there.

Hiding.

But. I hope I didn't make him think he isn't beautiful.

"You answer your own questions," Winoa was saying. "Providing your questions are the right ones. Sometimes you need a little assistance there."

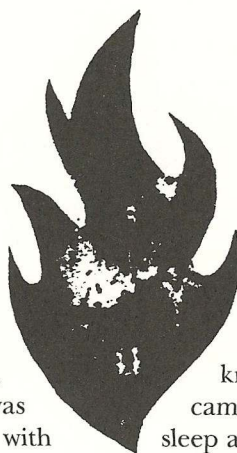
"You know I'm thinking there's more to this smoke business, but go on and do what I tell you and we'll start there."

I nodded and listened to the directions she gave me. I bought some red and white candles from her before I left. And I looked around for Mesash but he was nowhere in sight.

I went home and ate. There was no sign of Rosie. I fed the chickens and the dog and had the last piece of Rosie's peach pie. Everything smelled of smoke.

Evening didn't bring any relief from the heat or the smoke. I sat on the edge of the porch for a long time.

Another thing about Winoa and Mesash is that they were about the only people that didn't turn from me when everybody was calling me RoseLinda's killer. A baby raper. I couldn't walk down the public road. I had thought somebody would kill me.



For just a moment I let RoseLinda slip into my mind. But only for a moment. I couldn't think of her without seeing the syphilis sores on her body. The terror and then the deadness in her eyes when she found that crying and screaming wouldn't stop the pain. I couldn't imagine the pain. I knew I'd never hurt that bad. Finally Winoa came over with some herbs that caused her to sleep and sleep. And way before she died, while she slept, I could smell her flesh rotting. I'd rather smell smoke.

I hadn't fed Allen since early that morning. He would need changing too. I was left to take care of him because Rosie couldn't stand to be in the same room with him after what he'd done to her child, though at first she didn't believe RoseLinda had that. It was just some infection that would go away after it had run its course. But it didn't.

I had always spent so much time with RoseLinda. You know she was the first baby I'd ever seen born.

Folks figured it was me did that to her. It was so much easier to believe that it was me, especially since Rosie wouldn't open her mouth. Then they saw him dying from it. Nobody would say a word.

What if I didn't go in there? What if I just left him?

What if I just started walking out across the fields?

I breathed in a noseful of smoke and my eyes teared.

"Lonnie. Lonnie."

He was calling me. Must have heard me moving about. Since I couldn't go in there right then I went about the preparations for my rite to Chango.

"Lonnie!"

To Chango, not to live is not to exist. To Chango, to hide, to lie is to seek death.

"Lonnie."

To the Master of my Head it had to be as swift as lightning and just as bright or nothing at all. The Master of the axe and of thunder. And I wished for a thunderstorm to end the heat for a spell. In thunderstorms, Chango's children grow stronger. But Allen kept calling.

I shook my head trying to clear it of the smoke and of his voice. I lit the rest of my candles.

"Lonnie!"

Then it was silent for a long time. And I thought, oh please let it be.

I made my way with one of Chango's candles, into his room. It was silent. I made my way over to the bed. And he was laying there. Unmoving as a stone.

I touched his chest and his throat and they were still warm but as empty of breath as a doll.

One time when he was just starting to get sick from the disease, I came home from shopping over at Waycross. I started in the door and he met me and took me by my arm and my coat and threw me out into the yard. He told me to stay away because I'd killed RoseLinda.

He wouldn't let me back in the house for nearly a week. I had to go stay with Rev. Taylor's family.

He started believing that lie himself. That it was me that raped RoseLinda, ruined the family. Maybe he thought that the sickness and all that had happened would go away like some woman he could throw out.

Now I clawed my fingers against his neck instead of screaming, and with almost no effort they sliced into the soft rotting flesh. And instead of cursing I whispered, "My elder brother, Chango take you into his arms, bless you and give you rest."

Cold smoke filled the room and I was shaking like it was February. My teeth chattered.

I pushed the candle over into the oily rank bedclothes and flames leaped in a dozen places. Catching on the very air of that room. At that moment I didn't plan on moving.

I would still be breathing smoke, no matter what.

His shiny shoes set at the edge of the bed.

That was what finally made me leave Allen to burn alone.

I backed out of that room that was filling with a roar. I went to Bill Edmund's tractor, to the truck and got gasoline. Poured it on the kitchen, the hall, the back porch. Emptied what was left of Luella's 180-proof homemade all over the parlor. Struck fire everywhere. Breathed in the smoke to block my thoughts.

I ran out of the house yelling and got down and threw rocks and sticks and shouted underneath the house for all the dogs and cats and snakes and coons and whatever else to clear out it was all going. I stood back and watched until every window was filled with fire. When I heard somebody calling from across the field I ran.



I ran way out into the peanut field and sat there and watched.

All of Rosie's pretty clothes. All the photographs of Mama and Daddy. My brother's guitar. My shoes that I'd tried to shine as bright as his. All the stains on the wall.

The fire department finally made it out from town but all they could do by then was wet down the barn. People kept calling out my name and Rosie's name. Heard somebody over there crying. Felt my face wet and my head clearing of smoke.

"What happened Bro'?"

It was Mesash, the only one who could have walked right to me in the dark. I shook my head.

"Allen in there?"

I nodded. The dog curled against me whined.

I pulled at some leaves and grass and used them to wipe the tears and snot off my face. We didn't say anything for a long time.

"That's over then," Mesash said. Then he went on. "Wasn't just Chango after you. Mama sent me over to tell you to come back by. She thinks it's Olokun too."

"Olokun," I whispered.

"Sometimes you got a secret even you don't know. That's Olokun. It's a bitch to deal with."

"Olokun, Master of the the bottom of the sea," I said. "And don't nobody know what's down there."

Mesash nodded. I know he wanted to put his hand on my shoulder or pat my arm or something but he was scared I might act crazy.

"I got to ask Olokun," I said. "Mesash I was so 'shamed of what he did to that baby. I couldn't bear to think of what was down there. Couldn't think about doing it with nobody. I didn't want to touch people. Couldn't even bear to hug myself. If taking a knife to myself down there had stopped her pain I would have."

Gave that to Mesash—and myself too I guess—for I'd never say those words to another person again.

Mesash talked on about Olokun and I listened to the sound of his words, soft as a touch, on and on. "There are more secrets," I whispered and he nodded.

The world stank of smoke but it was not inside my head anymore.

I would tell Rosie everything I had done that day. We would both go to Winoa. She would tell us to wash our hands in the sea someday, pay homage to Olokun's realm and start living our lives. ♦



The Politics of Seduction

New Anthologies of Lesbian Erotica

By Gail Shepherd

Riding Desire: An Anthology of Erotic Writing, edited by Tee Corinne. Austin: Banned Books, 1991.

An Intimate Wilderness: Lesbian Writers on Sexuality, edited by Judith Barrington. Portland: Eighth Mountain Press, 1991.

More Serious Pleasure: Lesbian Erotic Stories and Poetry, edited by the Sheba Collective. Pittsburgh: Cleis Press, 1991.

Lesbian Love Stories, Volume 2, edited by Irene Zahava. Freedom: The Crossing Press, 1991.

I developed an early taste for lesbian erotica in my mother's library. I think I fantasized my way through most of those summers between junior high and high school with dog-eared copies of Colette's *Claudine* novels propped under my nose, rereading the juicy parts of Anais Nin's diaries, and memorizing what fragments of Sappho I could sift from the pages of our *Complete Guide to the Poetics of Ancient Greece*.

Nin's diaries were full of betrayal and psychic disintegration; they were about power plays and money and steamy, illicit seductions. Colette's boarding-school scenarios were small, transient oases of female separatism plunked down in the midst of a turn-of-the-century patriarchy that would eventually lay claim to its graduates. And Sappho was weaving fresh flowers into Cleis' hair, reminding her that "sounds of grief" were "unbecoming in a poet's household." Who I was, what turned me on, who I wanted to become, fell somewhere in the gaps between these representations.

Since then, the market for everything from pulp pornography to serious "literary" erotica has exploded: Anthologies of these writings go into second and third printings and allow publishers to take a few risks on dicier offerings. Four such books published last year provide us with a map of the varied terrains inhabited by lesbian communities. Their content and

style touch on issues of identity, sexual politics and the lesbian imagination.

In her introduction to *Riding Desire*, Tee Corinne lets us know that because she grew up in a violent household, she wants to ensure that the stories she has collected are "safe" for us to read and for her to edit. Corinne's concern with nonviolent representation and her vision of a healing erotic informs her selections in *Riding Desire*. Erotic literature, then, is good for what ails us. The result is a diversity that celebrates safe and healthy *social* differences but excludes *sexual* variance. Most of us will appreciate that the stories in *Riding Desire* are written by and about lesbians of color, about lesbians who are aging, ill, disabled, fat; survivors of rape and incest; mothers, daughters and grandmothers.

Unfortunately, the organizing principle reduces characters to social types. "She is of Chinese origin. I am of Japanese descent" ("Stork Cools Wings"); "She is an incest survivor" ("Sometimes"); "People who are unkind might call me fat" ("Maggie, Sex, and the Baby Jesus Too"); "the aluminum crutches I now use all the time" ("Texas Two Step"). Most of *Riding Desire's* protagonists and their lovers have no jobs, no histories, no individual quirks, no bizarre sexual appetites. Corinne gives short shrift to our social behaviors and practices, and finally limits our sense of our own hybridity and power.

The utopian world of *Riding Desire* is as seemingly uncomplicated as a Benetton ad. In this vision of the lesbian "community," women of every color, size, and social class are equal partners; desire binds us together and simultaneously defuses considerations of interpersonal, interracial, and interclass power dynamics. Only Rocky Gamez's "A Matter of Fact" hints at a lesbian community divided by conflicting loyalties, histories, and sexualities.

Most of the stories in *Riding Desire* are eroticized fantasies of our public faces: the faces we could hap-

pily turn to our mothers, our congressmen, the heterosexual world. This anthology addresses an audience in search of reassurance even as it betrays some anxiety about our status as outsiders. *Riding Desire* hopes to persuade us that in spite of racial and class differences, lesbians are "safe," not only for each other but for the larger culture: We won't really disturb the status quo.

Most of the forty-five poets, fiction-writers, and essayists in *An Intimate Wilderness* are either employed by universities or have, like Adrienne Rich and Audre Lourde, achieved "classic" status as lesbian writers. Let's face it—you don't get tenure by writing *Rubber Sluts in the Year 2000*. It's probably safe to say that these authors' stances on lesbian sexuality are pretty heavily influenced by the reality of who butters the daily baguette. Thus, *An Intimate Wilderness* is greatly concerned with the relationship of literature to erotic writing: less with questions of how lesbians do it than how lesbians write about it. Editor Judith Barrington writes that the selections in *An Intimate Wilderness* were chosen not for "their potential to arouse" (as if a story's arousal potential could be objectively measured) but rather to illuminate "some aspect of our sexual lives ... although good writing was a given, they

were chosen as much for what they had to say as for how it was said." One can't help wondering if Barrington's selection process doesn't reinforce the cultural taboo against female sexual pleasure, which must be contained, directed, sanitized, intellectualized, or—in this case—prevented from erupting between the lines of "literature."

What makes us wet is subsumed here in ethereal discussions about the language of sexuality and its discontents. There's a general agreement that lesbians have been "inarticulate" about their sexuality due, at least in part, to a limited vocabulary—as Jane Rule has put it, we ought to have "as many words for sexuality as the Eskimo has for snow." Barbara Wilson examines her discomfort with writing erotica as "an end in itself." She sees it as a form apparently "detached from real life, real narrative, real literature." However much one may share her discomfort with a detached, anonymous erotic or her desire for an integrated, rather than isolated, sexuality—there's the whole problem of what constitutes "real" here. Is an intellectual or emotional response to erotica more "real" than a visceral one? There's a pervasive, unarticulated assumption in this anthology that lesbian sexuality in itself is not "real"—that the only way to

Writers' Bookshelf

Men on Men: Four novelists on what they're reading.

Bo Huston

author of *Horse and other Stories* and *Remember Me*, a novel.

I've been on a bit of a Jean Rhys kick lately, having picked up Carole Angier's definitive biography *Jean Rhys, Life and Work* (Little, Brown and Company). Rhys was born on the island of Dominica at the end of the nineteenth century; she was a drinker, a traveler, an expatriate in

Paris and, most important, a complex and greatly talented writer. Her novels *Quartet*, *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie* and *Good Morning, Midnight* were praised for the strange beauty of the prose and damned for a "lack of morality." Jean Rhys's masterpiece, though, was *Wide Sargasso Sea*, written when she was in her sixties and quite frail, which imagines the story of Antoinette, Mr. Rochester's cap-

tive in the attic in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*.

Angier's book is a brilliant intriguing portrait of Rhys, but it is also a literary study, rich with theory and detailed text analysis. Anyone unfamiliar with Rhys's work (as I was) will be confused by the references and be inclined either to give up this biography or start poring over the tormented, fascinating fiction of Jean Rhys. (That's what I did.)

I've also been reading Denis Johnson's *Resuscitation of a Hanged Man* (Penguin). This novel tells the story of Leonard English,

"Let's face it—

rescue it from its inherent inauthenticity is to marry it off respectably to narrative literature, feminist theory, or bourgeois morality.

This preoccupation with an authentic lesbian sexuality reaches its climax in Gillian Hanscombe's disturbing and intellectually indefensible essay on the "market forces" of erotica. Hanscombe sums up whole alternative-sexuality movements as "empty-headed, wrong-headed, disreputable, disrespectful, decadent." Sex in its "degraded modes" is a practice of "defiance, titillation, cruelty, blackmail...childish indiscipline." With the installation on the 1937 Nazi exhibit on Degenerate Art that is currently touring this country reminding us of how often these terms—disrespectful, disreputable, decadent—became fuel for fascist rhetoric against a variety of groups including homosexuals, this kind of pat dismissal of such a complex issue is more than tiresome. It's dangerous.

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writing Rubber Sluts in
the Year 2000. It's safe to
say that these authors'
stances on lesbian sexuality
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by the reality of who butters
the daily baguette.

Part of my uneasiness with *An Intimate Wilderness* springs from a sense that lesbian sexuality is indeed being disciplined—made safer, better, cleaner, *realer*, and more palatable to the mainstream academic readership this anthology addresses. Barrington and her readership are engaged in canon-building here, and this anthology will fit comfortably into many a syllabus. Part of building a canon, of course, is deciding whom to exclude. The powerful voices of radical sexuality—Pat Califia, Kathy Acker, the voice of the prostitute, or the militant, or the slut—are noticeably absent. Like *Riding Desire*, *An Intimate Wilderness* betrays an anxiety

about the dangers of lesbian sexuality and power relations, but here the anxiety is cloaked in academic ruminations about the nature of language.

I've often wondered why lesbian erotica, grounded as it is in fantasy and invested, for obvious reasons, in nonpatriarchal strategies of representation, has so

recovering from a suicide attempt, who goes to work as a private detective in Provincetown. It's no genre piece, however. Johnson is an elegant writer, and his desperate, alienated hero is masterfully drawn. This is a profound, eerie story about searching—for love, art, identity, salvation.

Dennis Cooper

author of the novels *Closer* and *Frisk* and the short story collection *Wrong*

Jon Savage, *England's Dreaming* (St. Martin's Press): A great, precise, rolling study of how Punk was born,

lived and half-died, half-transmuted into what we listen to today. Savage's writing is bright and vaguely theoretical, but it avoids the strict Situationist agenda that sidetracked Greil Marcus' similar *Lipstick Traces*. Casey McKinney, *Untitled* (manuscript): McKinney, a nineteen-year-old heterosexual Los Angeleno by way of Atlanta, is probably the most brilliant new writer of any age that I've encountered in years. This first novel-in-progress is an innovative, melancholy self-portrait that distills contemporary horrors with unnerving beauty.

Herve Guibert, *To the Friend*

Who Did Not Save my Life

(Atheneum): This book hasn't been widely read or reviewed, even in the gay press, but it's the best novel I've ever found on the subject of AIDS. Intelligent, erudite, honest, physically fresh, it's a kind of stately companion piece to David Wojnarowicz's great *Close to the Knives*.

John Preston

author of *The Big Gay Book* and editor of *Personal Dispatches: Writers Confront AIDS*.

My recent reading moves from the sacred to the profane. Harlan

rarely attempted to cross erotic writing with other genres. It's satisfying, then, that *More Serious Pleasure* includes a number of experiments in style and genre. Fiona Cooper's punk satire, "Rotary Spokes Meets Tallulah the Bag Lady," sets her protagonist in a post-modern dystopia where love masquerades under a "skunk's nest of motheaten fabrics":

She peeled off her bedraggled, moss-green outer-coat and dropped it on the floor. Next went an out-size cardigan, which might have been grey at some point. She unpinned her skirt. Rather, her top skirt. Then the next skirt. And then a series of shirts, tattered colours like a city river and about as appealing to the nostrils.

"You like watching a woman take her clothes off?" she snarled.

This parodic strip-tease is a compelling vision of contemporary lesbian desire, a kind of Love Among the Ruins of Late Capitalism. Like the best of the stories included in *More Serious Pleasure*, it doesn't trivialize either the social or psychic difficulties of finding Ms. Right, a woman who all too often is concealed

under layers and layers of the cultural baggage we all cart around with us, like so many "bags spilling string," mountains of paper heaped at our feet.

The literary quality of *More Serious Pleasure* is uneven, but the Sheba Collective has made an effort to engage a radical diversity of lesbian experience—not merely pay it lip service—in both style and substance. And these stories *are* meant to arouse. This hard-boiled erotica may have its roots in London's sex industry as well as in feminist theory, but the anthology asks a general readership to consider that the axis of desire is crossed and recrossed by social, cultural and political difference.

If literature's *raison d'être* is to offer new ways of being, then *Lesbian Love Stories, Volume 2* may be the most revolutionary of those reviewed here. The stories collected here range from social realism to post-modern collage; the sexualities from "coming out stories" and long-term monogamy to infidelity, one-night stands, failed bisexual threesomes and baby-dyke infatuations. Gloria Anzaldua's "Ms. Right, My True Love, My Soul Mate" is a determinedly anti-aesthetic horror story. Susan J. Leonardi has re-appropriated both the epistolary form and a classic girl-sleuth ("The Secret of the Silenced Singer"). Sarah

Greene's long-awaited second novel *What the Dead Remember* (Dutton) is remarkable proof that the promise of his first novel, *Why We Never Danced the Charleston*, was no fluke. This dark and glimmering novel of betrayal and love in the age of AIDS is a compelling read. It's sure to secure Greene's position as a major gay writer, and a major Southern writer as well.

Dorothy Allison's *Bastard Out of Carolina* (Dutton) is a match for Greene's book. It's a beautifully written tale of an abusive childhood and a redemptive spirit that drips with the authenticity of its Southern

setting. Neither Greene nor Allison is out to portray life through rose-colored glasses. Their tales produce the shock of saddened recognition of what happens to young people in our society.

At the other far, far end of the spectrum is Robert Plunket's *Love Junkie* (HarperCollins). This just may be the quintessential gay comic novel. I haven't laughed out loud over a book this way since the first time I read *Catch-22*. *Love Junkie* is the story of Mimi Smithers, who is thrown by fortune into the midst of a gay subculture for which her life in Bronxville has not prepared her.

Mimi's adventures include a love affair (one-sided) with a porn star who sells his dirty underwear by mail order. Plunket, who has served on the board of the Sarasota (Florida) AIDS support group, not only has the comedic tone down perfectly, but also does the impossible by bringing AIDS into a humorous novel and does it with feeling.

Stephen Corbin

author of *No Easy Place to Be*.

Just finished *Men on Men 2* (Plume), (after having read *Men on Men 1* and *3*), which despite the unevenness of the overall

This parodic strip-tease is a

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or psychic difficulties.*

Schulman, in her gorgeous linguistic experiment "Lupita," collages a story from her forthcoming novel *Empathy* which reads with the weird and evocative beauty of a surrealist prose poem.

There's a freshness to this anthology I admire, a humor and lightness of touch that is rather lacking in the three other collections reviewed here. The line between "art" and "smut," or between "popular fiction" and "literature" isn't too sharply drawn; an element of play works to diffuse our often narcissistic ruminations about our sexualities and identities. The camp identities, the literary appropriations, the gender and genre games these authors and their characters play out may be tremendously liberating for the post-modern lesbian exhausted by essentialist/constructivist arguments and the porn wars. *Lesbian Love Stories 2* couldn't possibly have been conceived without the twenty years of debate and discussion on lesbian identity, desire and

representation that preceded its publication. For a readership of lesbians in search of a way to slip the chains of patriarchy as well as the knots of classic feminism, *Lesbian Love Stories 2* offers a variety of escape tactics.

What turns us on has everything to do with who we think we are and how we'll negotiate an increasingly uncertain future. If *Riding Desire's* concern with "safe sex" and *An Intimate Wilderness's* investment in "good writing" conceal an anxiety about "degenerate" sexuality, this anxiety is very much to the point in a contemporary culture obsessed with the sexually transmitted disease and culturally

transmitted immorality. *Lesbian Love Stories 2* and *More Serious Pleasure* suggest another vision: one in which identity and sexuality are as diverse as their representations. To paraphrase Eve Sedgwick, in dangerous times, we'd best be flexible. Such flexibility is, I think, a mark of our relative health. ♦

anthology, still manages to piss me off in its flagrant omission of writers of color, some of whom so deserved the spots reserved for the otherwise marginally talented and the overanthologized—speaking of which, Melvin Dixon's "Red Leaves," an excerpt from the since published novel, *Vanishing Rooms* (Dutton, 1991), is the most brilliant piece in the collection; an important tale about queer-bashing delineated through prose that rises to the dizzying heights of poetry and myth and allegory. Two snaps up!

Reviewed Essex Hemphill's

Ceremonies (Plume, June 1992) for the Lambda BOOK REPORT. Again, Hemphill does exactly what we've come to expect from him—to spellbindingly delight and provoke with his no-holds-barred prose and razor-sharp imagery as he tells it like it is—vis-a-vis poems and essays—and what it's like to grow up Black and male and queer in America. A ceremonial three snaps up!

Currently reading Toni Morrison's long-awaited *Jazz* (Knopf), which is—as is the case with any novel she publishes—a literary event. Once again, as she so deftly demonstrated in *The Bluest*

Eye and the Pulitzer prize-winning *Beloved*, Morrison moves not laterally, but forward, as she pushes the envelope yet a little further in reinventing and redefining the American novel. Upon reading the first page, I (as well as other writers I know) began to question my own worth as a novelist. In this love story set in early twentieth century Harlem, Morrison's pen brilliantly renders a narrative that seamlessly weaves in and out of the past, present and future, like an improvisational Charlie Parker solo. A literary lioness/diva snap! ♦

More

Nothing is enough
lately.
I'm the one asking
for more spice,
more hot oil.
I'm the one chewing
the dried red chiles,
a season's worth of fire.
I release it into me
I want to read the poems that crack bones.
I'm hungry for a bite
of ash and bone splinter.
Winter, and I'm blood hungry.
I tear up leaves
for my salad,
slice the hearts of tomatoes,
light the fire
and hum.
When I go dancing,
I'll watch.
I want to be fed
the bodies,
I want more
than anything
to sink my teeth into that arm's gesture.

—Eloise Klein Healy

Hot Chilis

I put one
chili
in your mouth

it bites
your tongue

You put one
chili
in my mouth

it ignites
my soul.

—Jorge-Mario Cabrera, Jr.

Chiles Picantes

Pongo
un chile
en tu boca

te muerde
la lengua

Pones
un chile
en mi boca

me enciende
el alma.

A State of Transit

I am in a car on this California highway
shifting lanes along the 5
San Francisco travelling south
closing in on home.

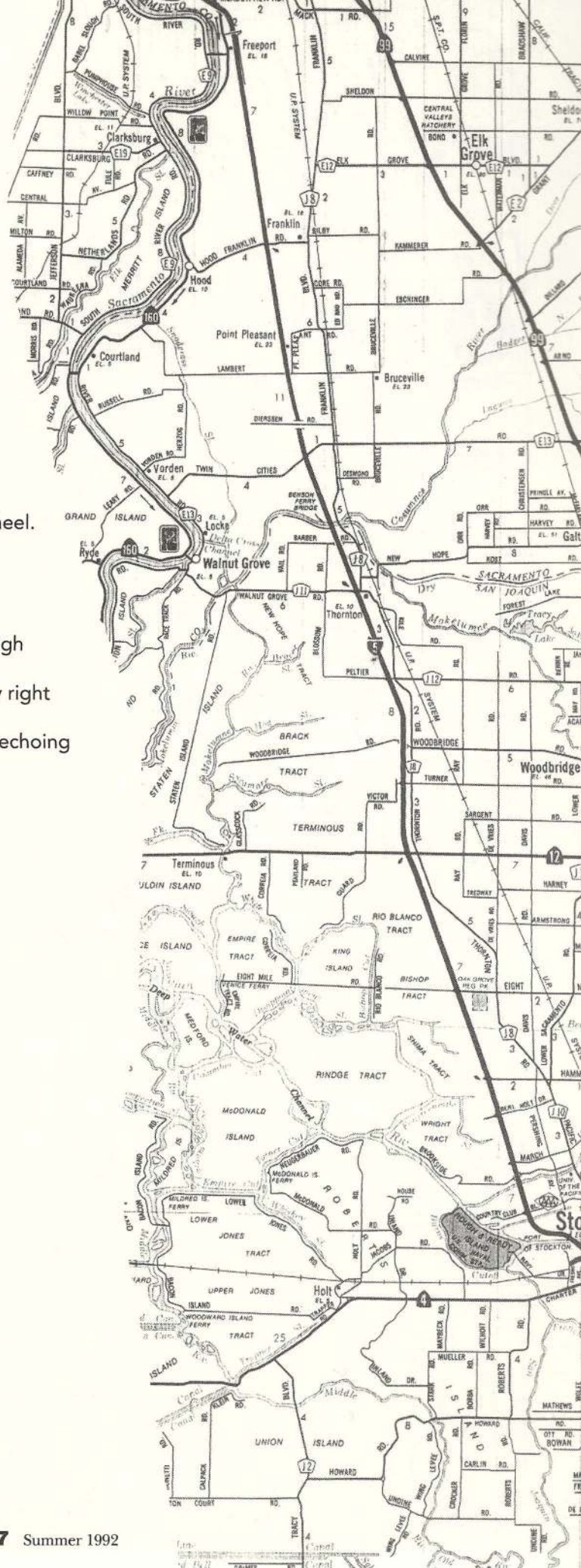
Roberto is on my left, the sun is on my right
Dark clouds overhead.
Roberto is driving and I am dozing in my seat.
Once I wake up and think I've fallen asleep at the wheel.
The road rises up before me in a blur
and the truck ahead tilts crazily.
I reach out my arms and Roberto touches my hand
He supports my palm mid air, folding his fingers
around mine, guiding me down to the calm of his thigh

Dark mountains and furrowed brown fields are to my right
Black cows, black sheep, the aqueduct on my left
Bushes of irrigation jets soak the ground in the rain, echoing
the cuffed trees, precisely planted.
Inside the car is silence, faint Brazilian music
turned low so I can sleep.
Outside the sound of tires, humming.

I looked toward Roberto, who is looking at the road
He reaches his right hand to his cheek,
the other is on the wheel.
Across the median headlights come up in pairs
Men move together toward the lip of the fields.
Around us cloud-mist,
grazing the land, racing south.

Here in this car we are still.
The sun finds its high horizon
Shade blankets the wet yellow hills.
Rain has made our arrival time uncertain,
but we are moving:
On this road, where we come from, where we are,
is all I know.

—Kevin Martin



Pillars of Gay Culture

hand-written by Doctor Maurice "Vivienne" Vellekoop, Bachelor. ©1991

1 Oscar Wilde

Surely Wilde represents the first true flowering of a gay sensibility both in his art and life. His epigrams come in handy in any situation.



2 The Wizard of Oz

One of the most utterly perfect creations of Hollywood. Gays often memorize the script through repeated viewings and can develop an alarming affinity for Judy Garland.



3 Style

Beauty, Perfection, fashion, decoration, taste and extravagance are the traditional realms of the homosexual.



4 What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?

If camp was a bicycle, Bette Davis and this film would be the training wheels. Davis is arguably the greatest movie star ever.



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Rates: per word: \$1.50; per bold word: \$2.00. 10% discount for four-issue placement. **Deadline:** Copy must be received by July 2, 1992, for Fall 1992, Issue 18. **Et Cetera:** All ads must be prepaid. Post office boxes, phone numbers, zip codes, abbreviations, and initials count as one word. Hyphenated words count as two. Include your phone number with your order. **Now accepting personal ads—Sorry, no explicit language.** Send ad copy and payment to: OUT/LOOK Classifieds, 540 Castro St., San Francisco, CA 94114.

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QUEER MONEY: The quarterly personal financial newsletter for lesbians and gays. Devoted to financial planning for singles and couples. Retirement, household budgeting, debt, Q/A investment column. Free sample. Write: Q/M Productions, P.O. Box 59856, Dayton, OH 45459.

GROUPS

KU JAYHAWKS! Gay and Lesbian Alumni Association. Newsletters, social events, scholarship fund. KU GALA, P.O. Box 3645, Lawrence, KS 66046.

MERCHANDISE

Essential queer music from Jamie Anderson! "Center of Balance" on CD (\$15) and tape (\$10). \$1.50 p/h. Tsunami Records, Box 42282, Dept. O, Tucson, AZ 85733.

SISSY SOFTWARE FOR WRITERS. Ms-dos. Inquire. Louie Crew, Box 30, Newark, NJ 07101.

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SMART PEOPLE UNITE! Do you crave intellectual fulfillment? Do you think the sexiest thing on earth is a brilliant woman analyzing...anything? Would you let a man who has a way with words have his way with you? Time to place an OUT/LOOK SmartPersonal. We won't run sex ads, but we will help you find the brain of your dreams. All at our regular low rates, plus \$6 if you want your responses mailed to OUT/LOOK and forwarded to you.

PUBLICATIONS

ENTRE NOUS: Monthly calendar/newsletter for Bay Area lesbians. PO Box 412, Santa Clara, CA 95052, for free sample. Subs \$12/year.

LEARN ABOUT OUT/LOOK PUBLISHING: Volunteer positions available. Office help needed 9 to 5. Call our office at (415) 626-7929. Editorial and design internships also available.

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TEMA INTERNATIONAL, a quarterly publication of the International Gay & Lesbian Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC), covers gay and lesbian news worldwide. Subscription, \$15/year, entitles you to all IGLHRC mailings. IGLHRC, 540 Castro St., SF, CA 94114. Tel. (415) 255-8680.

NAMBLA IS A POLITICAL ORGANIZATION defending men and boys interested in *consensual* relationships. Bulletin features news, fiction, art.

Confidential mailing list. Join! \$25/year. NAMBLA, POB 174, New York NY, 10018.

REAL ESTATE

GAY/LESBIAN REALTOR REFERRAL: Buying? Selling? FREE Referral to Gay/Gay Supportive Realtor any USA City. Toll-free 1-800-346-5592.

STUDY

Gay Domestic Violence University Study (303) 238-4347.

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GABRIEL'S—Charming and immaculate apartments and guestrooms. Always open. Color TV, hot tub, sun decks, breakfast, fireplaced common room. 104 Bradford Street, Provincetown, MA 02657. (508) 487-3232.

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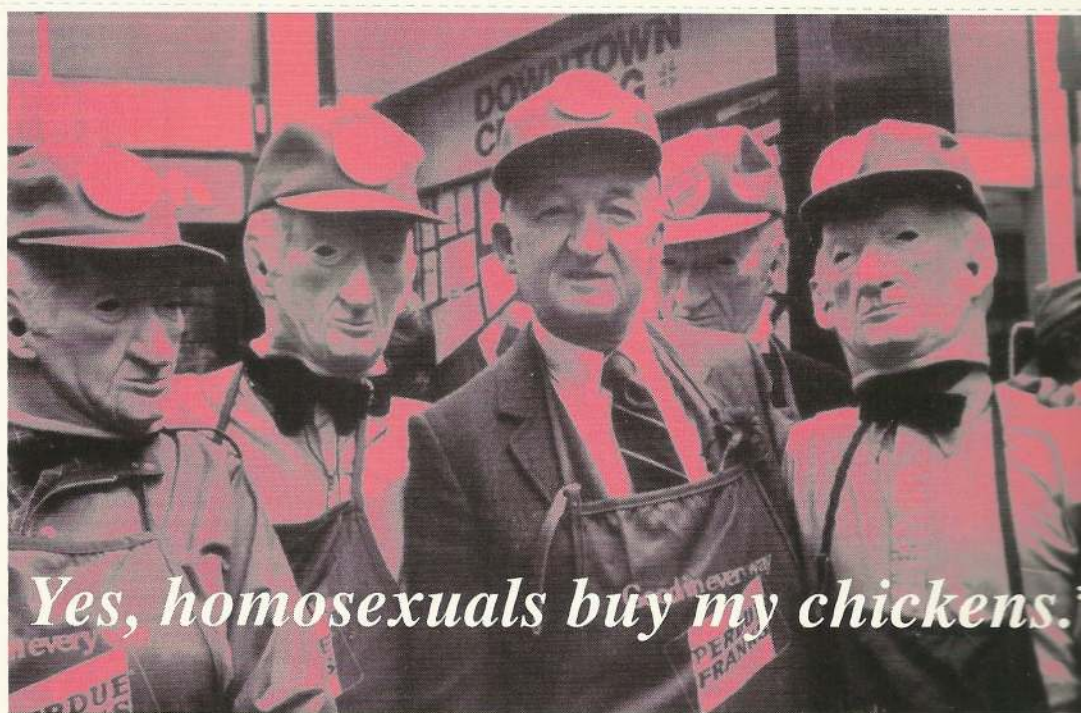
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GANG salutes all americans who support gay pride

*I can't
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That's
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*Yes, homosexuals buy my chickens.**

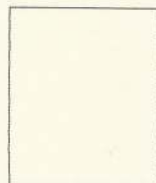
*'Family values' is bullshit. It's who you
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**Cindy Crawford supports
GAY PRIDE**



*GANG hopes Cindy will say this.

**Frank Perdue supports
GAY PRIDE**



*GANG hopes Frank will say this.

**Latoya Jackson supports
GAY PRIDE**



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Without YOU we're nothing!

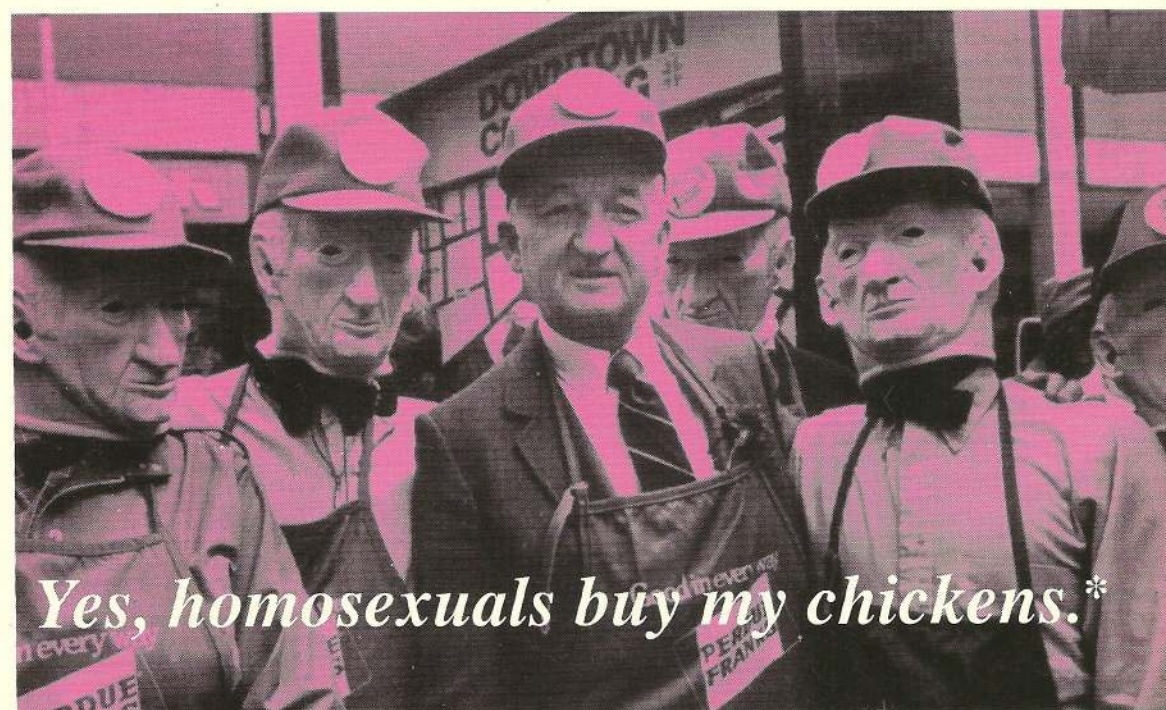
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On behalf of the OUT/LOOK Foundation, and all of the volunteers and staff who comprise it, a sincere thank you to our supporters from around the country, who together have contributed more than \$40,000 this year. Without you, we wouldn't be happening.

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Woods, Cedric Yap, Mickie Zacuto, Jan Zobel, And 7 who wish to remain anonymous.

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