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OUTLOOK
NATIONAL
LESBIAN
& GAY
QUARTERLY

LEGALIZING GAY MARRIAGE A Must Or A Bust?

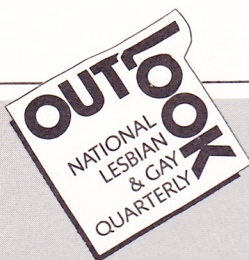
James Baldwin's
Lost Essay

Incest & Other
Sexual Taboos

A Hollywood Square
Comes Out

Old Dykes
& Desert Hearts





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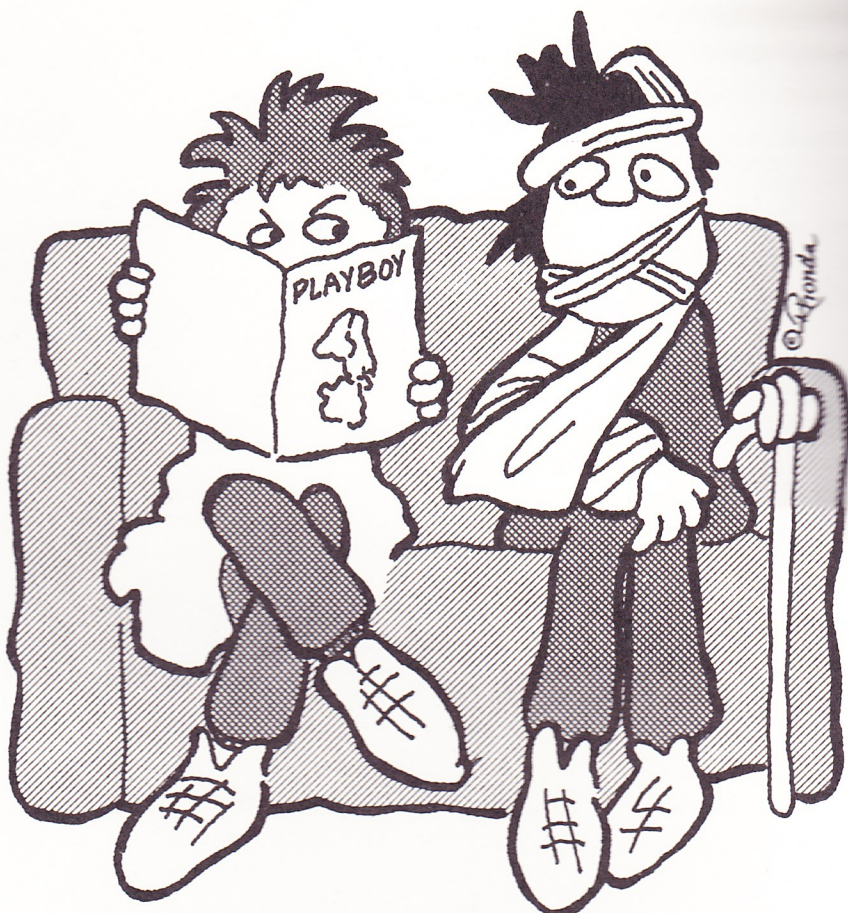
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LESBIAN SURVIVAL HINT #50:
RESPECT THOSE SUBTLE SIGNS OF REFUSAL.

Volume 2, Number 2 — Fall 1989

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Cover collage by Juan Botas.

Can Gay Men and Lesbians Work Together?

ONE SURPRISING result of *OUT/LOOK*'s conscientious effort to create a lesbian *and* gay magazine is the number of complaints from lesbians that it is "too male" and from gay men that it is "too female." Perhaps that suggests that we really are succeeding in producing a "balanced" publication. But it also demonstrates the continuing difficulties of establishing a shared public space.

The public realm—in which *OUT/LOOK* participates as a forum of opinion and discussion—traditionally has been a male prerogative. Publications as different as *The Nation*, *The Atlantic*, or *Tikkun* all have a majority of male subscribers and authors.

In the midst of our second year of publishing, we have come to realize that genuine cooperation between lesbians and gay men requires explicit policies at every level. We have tried to implement the principle of equal representation in all areas of the magazine's operations—staffing, editorial, advertising, and artistic content.

Of course, the most obvious sign of our effort to balance *OUT/LOOK*'s appeal to lesbians and gay men is visible on the cover of each issue—in the usually alternating female and male visual image. But creating gender balance in the editorial content is more complicated. For instance, almost all of the unsolicited nonfiction submissions are by men, and men seem much more willing to write on politics and public issues. Women tend to use other forms of writing or write about subjects that are more closely related to their experience. And many lesbians are still reluctant to write for a mixed audience. These differences mean that we must put an extra effort into looking for essays by women.

Balancing editorial content doesn't mean much if we also are not reaching an audience that is balanced between lesbians and gay men. Therefore, in our subscriber solicitation campaigns, we try to design and write promotional material that appeals to both women and men. When we rent mailing lists from other publications and community organizations, we deliberately order equal numbers of male and female names. And, since women are often more responsive to direct

mail appeals than men are, we occasionally have ordered more male names to ensure that our subscribers remain equally lesbian and gay.

Different attitudes toward sexuality are among the major points of tension between gay men and lesbians. *OUT/LOOK* does not accept sexually explicit advertising (the economic mainstay of many gay newspapers) in order to avoid the overwhelmingly *male* environment that those ads produce in many publications. Yet editorially, we are committed to publishing essays, stories and illustrations that represent the sexualities of all lesbians and gay men—a policy which has alienated some readers.

A NEW COOPERATION between lesbians and gay men has seemed to emerge spontaneously from the lesbian response to the AIDS crisis. But outside the AIDS arena, forging new links between lesbians and gay men hasn't always been easy or successful. The recent movement at some universities to establish lesbian and gay studies programs has not achieved gender parity. Nor have recent efforts to organize the lesbian and gay presence in the publishing industry.

So why go to all this trouble if it is so difficult, and when many gay men or lesbians are unconcerned with bridging the gap between the two communities? We must make the effort because without a public space that is jointly lesbian *and* gay, the public voices (traditionally male) of authority and legitimacy in our community remain unrepresentative. The differences that divide our communities cannot be articulated by men alone.

Nor can we create a shared public space by excluding the sexual and political diversity in our communities. And we certainly cannot realize political and cultural freedom for our communities without mutual identification of our shared interests in American society. We hope that *OUT/LOOK*'s experience is useful in helping create the kinds of conditions that allow lesbians and gay men to work together in public life.

— Jeffrey Escoffier, for the Editors

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How much energy should we expend to get the government to sanction us? A debate.



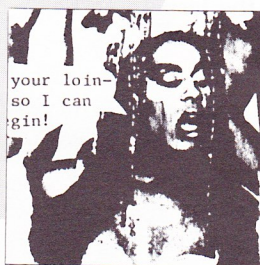
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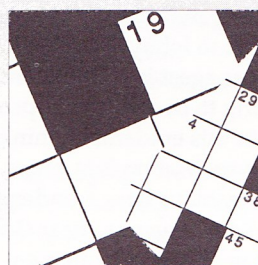
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"Like an aging dyke, the desert thrives by stripping off what is merely display for others."

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Lesbians, AIDS, and Money

■ Almost every *OUT/LOOK* article surprises and delights me, but one in particular moved me to write. It's about time someone like Jackie Winnow spoke up about what's happening to lesbians working on AIDS projects ["Lesbians Working on AIDS, Assessing the Impact on Health Care for Women," Summer 1989].

One of my first encounters with the AIDS epidemic in San Francisco involved a discussion with a policewoman. She was distraught because she'd met a woman and child downtown on the streets. The woman had AIDS, and so the policewoman attempted to find an agency to help her. The men at Shanti [which provides services for people with AIDS] turned them away. "We don't have facilities for women with children." The same story was repeated at other places.

I served on the Board of Directors of a gay/lesbian organization that paid its woman AIDS coordinator less than the minimum wage, and she eventually quit her job, largely because the majority of the men in the organization would not properly fund a caregiver position that benefited 99 percent men. Later, I read about Jim Geary getting over \$70,000 as a golden parachute after he was forced out [as Executive Director] of Shanti.

When women were marching over health issues for the past twenty years, not a gay man was in sight. I worked in Washington the summer women were lobbying Congress for an extension to the ERA; not one man showed his face in our office to lobby.

What I suggest is this: if women are working to save their supposed brothers in this epidemic, I think simple compensation is in order. Don't tell lesbians how wonderful they are. I don't want to hear this self-serving clap trap from men.

When you die dear men, leave your houses, money and worldly goods to the lesbians who cared for you. I'd like to see an obituary where one man left his legacy to the women's building, for example. I have learned over the years never to trust the promises of men. Give me the money up front boys, then maybe I'll have a tiny bit of compassion for you on your death bed. Maybe.

Audrey E. Lockwood
San Francisco, California

Peering at the Peeps

■ I sighed sadly and wearily upon completing my third reading of Steven Heimoff's "The Kindness of Strangers" [Summer 1989]. I had to read it three times, alternating between feelings of anger, revulsion, and pity. Now I am inspired to take up the cudgels once again, in the name of humanity, and write this letter. It's a dark, dirty, lonely job—but damn it, someone has to do it!

We've all met our share of the Mr. Heimoff's of this world: the dangerous, narcissistic, self-hating closet cases who live on the fringes of gay life, unable to accept themselves and hating all other "queers" for their "effeminate" behavior; only usually they're too stupid and self-absorbed to write about themselves at such length.

What amazes me most about Mr. Heimoff—aside from the bizarre account of his "psychoschtick" routine—is his inability to see that he has become one of the "sad and furtive looking...zombies" he despises. He is no more in control of himself ("...surprise, here I am again"), then they are. Like them, he shuffles around a seedy back room night after night looking for sex with strangers. What a pathetic, spiritless dance of degradation! I wonder how many

times a week he sees the same old "geezers" there?

It's time to wake up, Mr. Heimoff. Time to move beyond your lite-beer-ad-inspired of what constitutes an acceptable norm of masculinity. It's time to connect with your humanity. You see, Steve, it's people like you, engaged in behavior like yours, that give us all a bad name. Then to compound the error, you come up with half-baked rationalizations to excuse your creepy habits. It's time to exercise a little self-restraint Steve; that's the first step. Then, try sublimating your "harping, insistent, indiscreet" sex drive; maybe that will engender a little self-respect. And then, who knows, someday you may realize that all men, no matter how out of shape and physically unappealing, are your brothers.

Joseph E. Perry
Chicago, Illinois

■ Thank you for publishing Steven Heimoff's "The Kindness of Strangers." I originally read the piece when it came out in the *East Bay Express* and thought it was one of the strongest—and best written—explorations of sexuality I had read. At the time, I wondered if any gay publication would have the guts to publish Heimoff's honest and courageous look at cruising straight men in adult bookstores.

It troubled me, though, that you felt the need for the PBS-style "wrap-around" discussion. Was this to diffuse the controversy of the piece? Surely your readers must know that there are other vastly different experiences of gay male sexuality. Did they really need not just one but three gay men's responses to the piece? I find most gay publications are far too closed to public discussion of anything outside the current

"party line," to the huge range of experiences at the edges of what is recognized as the "gay community." What I most like about *OUT/LOOK* is its willingness to extend these boundaries a bit, to get off some of the well-trod paths of oh-so-virtuous gay journalism.

Let the responses come in form of letters to the editor—as with the Tom of Finland article—and other articles and stories. By surrounding any potentially controversial stances with such heavy-handed editorial introductions and rejoinders, you only reinforce their position of "deviancy" within the gay community.

Liz Kotz
San Francisco, California

Ethnocentric Interpretations

■ Now I know I've heard everything; a revered white gay man—Harry Hay—calling an equally esteemed Chicano historian—Ramón Gutiérrez—a racist [Letters, Summer 1989]. Has research on the berdache tradition reached the point where only the voices of white men are solely granted the legitimacy to interpret canon in gay/lesbian studies and also speak for Indians in this country? It appears that only works that exclusively revere our gay past and do not cast stones at the research of white male arbiters of the field are free of ethnocentrism and, yes, racism as well.

I believe that Ramón Gutiérrez' article in *OUT/LOOK* was one of the most provocative and insightful articles to appear in gay/lesbian studies in quite some time. Unlike [Will] Roscoe's attempt to define every Indian that ever crossed-dressed or sucked a cock as gay (the "gay through the ages" approach [see "The Zúñi Man-Woman," Summer 1988]), Ramón Gutiérrez challenges us to

re-evaluate the uncritical and tendentious nature of gay scholarship on the berdache. I believe Mr. Gutiérrez is undoubtedly correct in his assessment of the berdache tradition but what concerns me here is not who has done a better job of interpreting the ethnographic evidence.

What is at issue is the temerity of white men to continue to place themselves in the position of speaking for people of color. I would have thought that the widespread critique of anthropology in the 1970s (as a form of colonial discourse) and attendant rise of Ethnic Studies would have taught white men that they can no longer serve as interpreters of everyone's reality.

Perhaps gay white men would do better to look for "gay roots" in their own back yards rather than stick their noses in the cultures of people unlike themselves.

Alberto Acuna
Berkeley, California

■ Ramón Gutiérrez' article ["Must We Deracinate Indians to Find Gay Roots?" Winter 1989], which characterized the Native American berdache as a war captive made sex slave, suffers from a lack of anthropological support for its conclusions.

Gutiérrez suggest[s] that the berdaches were pressed into the role as a humiliation: there are a few references in the literature to forcing war captives into the berdache role and also to forced homosexual intercourse, but an authoritative article which he himself cites as a reference (Callender and Kochems: 1983—not 1963 as it reads in the bibliography) dismisses these notions as "mostly an anthropological myth" and "entirely fictional...an invention based upon...misunderstanding of Dakota" respectively. And even if

the things that he reports are indeed based on fact, they are likely isolated occurrences and definitely a separate phenomenon from the berdache.

If the work of 20th century anthropologists in actual contact with Native Americans is subject to such misunderstanding, Gutiérrez, who quotes mostly 15th and 16th century European sources, might well be giving air to a misunderstanding of native actions of the Europeans who reported it. Certainly the attitudes and positions of these sources—they conquered, converted, and ultimately destroyed the civilization that they documented—make their interpretations of native culture suspect. Gutiérrez' ascription of the "universal" concept of the feminization of the enemy to the Native American cultures is only a projection, paralleled and validated by a similar projection by the earlier European contacts who in their view did feminize the vanquished, both conceptually, and through the brutal facts of domination.

I do, however, share with the author an annoyance at the self-serving, and often romanticized portrayal by some gay researchers of the so-called "gay roles" of other cultures. I am more fascinated by variations on a theme than by a vacuous claim of universality. It is, I think, more important to debunk this myth than to stake a claim to the universal for oneself. Freedom lies in the acceptance of all the possibilities; many already exist and here we are creating a few for ourselves right now....

Brad Borevitz
Del Mar, California

Destroying the Lesbian Family

■ I am writing in response to Erica Martinson's letter [Summer 1989] in which she criticizes



Janine Baer and her feelings about the identities of donors in artificial inseminations. Erica states that Janine's analogy between adoption and donor insemination is naive and overly simplistic. I feel that Erica's criticism is just that—naive and simplistic.

Erica is afraid that a donor will invade the [lesbian] family's privacy and that society will reject this lesbian family. It is true that most of society has and will continue to reject us as parents, families, lovers, people... but we cannot allow that fear to make us become like them and create a system that will conceal the truth from our future offspring.

We have lived with lies for too long. We must tell our children who we are and why we love each other and how they were created to join in that love. We must insure them the access to that biological, indentifying information when and if they request it as adults. This will be their right, to choose whether or not they want this information. If we decide now that this information will be too harmful then, then this very act will contribute to the destruction of the lesbian family, right alongside society's hatred for us.

Ilene Cutler
Gardiner, New York

Feminists Can Cruise Babies

■ Many thanks for giving Arlene Stein's recent essay "Lesbian Style Wars" the cover story visibility it deserves [Winter 1989]. [It is] the finest essay about my peer group I have ever read.

In 1982, I was a recovering Mormon and a born-again, blue-jeaned campus feminist. Now look at me—and my sisters! In 1989, our skirts are shorter, our come-ons bolder, our language more colorful. Even our jokes are racier than they used to be. Remember the one about the scarlet "M" on the co-ed's chest—actually an upside-down "W" imprinted by her Wellesley girlfriend's varsity sweater during sex? Way tame.

To hear our banter, you'd think we owned a patent on the objectification of women. Actually, that's the point. We do. We gawk shamelessly at the "Skirts Illustrated" bathing suit fashion show. We wear bright lipstick, talk dirty, and cruise babes on a scale of one to ten. Having rejected male prescriptions of female beauty and evolved through the anti-fashion years, we're now inventing our own definitions of "10," loudly whistling "it's my prerogative" should charges of looksism spook our cultural journey.

However, I don't believe—as

Stein suggests—that the new lesbian sexual brava-do is a wham-bam-thank-you-ma'am salute to the feminist movement. Maybe I'm idealistic, but I think most twenty-something lesbians know in their bones that patriarchy is perverse, that the personal is political. Those slogans have not lost their basic truth—only their sexiness. Rediscovering femininity and its trappings—within our own sexual milieu—

now that's fascinating!

Stein concludes with a warning that "the new lesbianism"—with its sexual rather than political mooring—might endanger hard-fought liberties. Frankly, I'm not alarmed. In 1989, when we march for abortion rights, for example, our lesbian culture is more visible, vital and volumptuous than it ever was in the seventies, when women-identified-women hid their curves behind the straight-edged billboard of feminism.

We've come a long way, Virginia, since those slim, androgynous pickins'!

Karen Everett
San Francisco

How're We Doing?

■ You are publishing a consistently high-quality, amazing journal. The articles are provocative and intelligently written, and reflect the diversity of issues in the national gay and lesbian community. And the design and typography are terrific!

And yes, we were a little squeamish about the Tom of Finland stuff [Fall 1988]. But in these times of learning to eroticize "safe sex," an article on men's erotica is extremely relevant. If that jerk-off picture helps save someone's life,

isn't it socially valuable? Sex and politics are never easy issues. We hope you'll continue to publish articles that deal with compelling, and not-necessarily-easy issues. (We were particularly impressed by the article on AIDS and lesbian health care in the Summer issue.) And even though we're dykes, we don't want to shut our eyes to what's going on in the men's community. We really are all in this mess together—let's consent to keep one another informed.

Adrienne Booth and
Daisy Benson
Austin, Texas

■ Your magazine's overwhelmingly male bias is very repulsive. Ads for fiction about incest and sex with a thirteen-year-old make us angry beyond words at your willingness to encourage dysfunctional and extremely destructive behavior. Please cancel our subscription immediately.

Wally Martin and Rene Meaker
Manhattan, Kansas

■ Finally, a gay/lesbian publication that I feel proud about. I can share this with Mom, Dad, Sis, and all my friends.

Thank you for the articles on us Third World gays and lesbians (e.g., Nicaragua, Cherríe Moraga's play, etc., etc.).

¡Muchas gracias!
Christian Guerra
Bronx, New York

■ Your magazine is one of the best I've seen in years. I'm straight, in case you're counting.

Constance Penley
Rochester, New York

■ I'm thrilled to discover a gay/lesbian quarterly with the courage to stand for literary excellence in the press. It's so refreshing

after years of local publications that either pander to supporters or refuse to risk anyone, that the writing is sludge.

OUT/LOOK is daring, fresh, controversial, amusing, and exceptional in its thought-provoking style. What a relief to know intellectual discourse and biting analysis have not died in our community during this time when we are all so absorbed with AIDS.

Starla C. Muir
Seattle, Washington

THE OUT/LOOK LIST:

LUSTAFTERS/LUSTBUSTERS

A thoroughly unscientific national enqueery as to Who's Hot, Who's Not, according to randomly selected lesbians and gay men in Philadelphia, Atlanta, Houston, Seattle, Miami, and San Francisco.

Let's Hear It From the Boys:

Top Ten Lustafters

John F. Kennedy, Jr.
Sasha Mitchell
Mel Gibson
Kevin Costner
Michael Sheffling
Rich Rosovich
Greg Louganis
Sean Connery
Bruce Springstein
Tom Selleck

Top Ten Lustbusters

Sylvester Stallone
Eddie Murphy
Wayne Newton
Sean Penn
Dan Quayle
Ed Koch
Tom Selleck
Pat Sajak
Ted Koppel
Bruce Willis

Girls Just Wanna Have...

Top Ten Lustafters

Sigourney Weaver
Susan Sarandon
Meryl Streep
Gabrielle Sabatini
Tracy Chapman
Paula Kelley
Glenn Close
Sharon Gless
k.d. lang
Paula Abdul

Top Ten Lustbusters

Phyllis Schlafley
Jeanne Kirkpatrick
Elizabeth Taylor
Jackie Onassis
Tammy Baker
Vanna White
Barbara Walters
Margaret Thatcher
Joan Collins
Nancy Reagan

About the front cover artist:

Juan Botas is an illustrator living in New York City.

About the back cover artist:

David Alexander, formerly an experimental psychologist, is a painter of portraits and lives in New York City.

About the cartoonist:

Rhonda Dickson is an artist living and working in the wild outskirts of Seattle, Washington. Her book *Lesbian Survival Hints* is being published by Naiad Press next year.

Most of us have probably shouted, "But gay people can't get married!" while explaining why we were less than thrilled to have to attend a cousin's wedding. Lesbians and gay men can't get married; 57 percent of straight people in the US disapprove of two people of the same sex living together as a married couple (according to a recent poll conducted by the San Francisco Examiner); and until recently, the odds of winning the right to marry have seemed impossible.

But slowly, the prospect of legal lesbian and gay marriages have become less of a fairytale. This year, Denmark changed its laws to allow them. And in the US, the Board of Directors of the Bar Association in San Francisco called for a change in the California laws that make marriage the sole province of heterosexuals. Legislation that extends minimal benefits to unmarried "domestic

Photography
by Isa Massu



A Must

GAY MARRIAGE:

Or A Bust?

partners" recently was enacted in San Francisco and West Hollywood, which now join the ranks of Berkeley and Santa Cruz, California and Madison, Wisconsin where domestic partners have been granted even more partial benefits.

If the popularity of "The Wedding" (the event at the 1987 March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights at which thousands of men and women "married" their partners of the same sex) is any indication of popular sentiment in our communities, many lesbians and gay men across the country would get hitched in a second, if we actually could.

But how big of a priority should the lesbian and gay movement place on seeking that right? While few would begrudge any couple the right to publicly celebrate their relationship, there is less consensus about how much energy we should expend to get the government to sanction those same relationships.

Lesbian and gay civil rights organizations across the country, including the New York-based Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund, have been debating this question. In the pages that follow, two Lambda staffers share some of the arguments that have surfaced as their organization has evaluated what kinds of precedent-setting cases it should take on.

✓

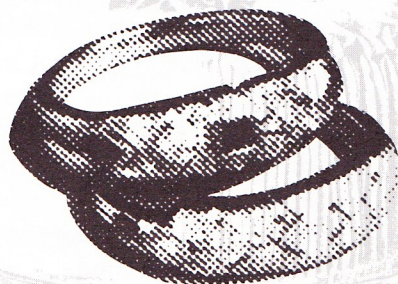
EVEN THOUGH, these days, few lesbians and gay men enter into marriages recognized by law, absolutely every gay person has an opinion on marriage as an "institution." (The word "institution" brings to mind, perhaps appropriately, museums.) After all, we all know quite a bit about the subject. Most of us grew up in marital households. Virtually all of us, regardless of race, creed, gender, and culture, have received lectures on the propriety, if not the sanctity, of marriage—which usually suggests that those who choose not to marry are both unhappy and unhealthy. We all have been witnesses, willing or not, to a lifelong parade of other people's marriages,

from Uncle Harry and Aunt Bernice to the Prince and Princess of Wales. And at one point or another, some nosy relative has inevitably inquired of every gay person when he or she will finally "tie the knot" (an intriguing and probably apt cliché).

I must confess at the outset that I am no fan of the "institution" of marriage as currently constructed and practiced. I may simply be
(Continued next page)

Why Gay People Should Seek the Right to Marry

THOMAS B. STODDARD



"MARRIAGE IS a great institution...if you like living in institutions," according to a bit of T-shirt philosophy I saw recently. Certainly, marriage is an institution. It is one of the most venerable, impenetrable institutions in modern society. Marriage provides the ultimate form of acceptance for personal intimate relationships in our society, and gives those who marry an insider status of the most powerful kind.

Steeped in a patriarchal system that looks to ownership, property, and dominance of men over women as its basis, the institution of marriage long has been the focus of radical feminist revulsion. Marriage defines certain relationships as more valid than all others. Lesbian and gay relationships, being neither legally sanctioned or commingled by blood, are always at the bottom of the heap of social

acceptance and importance.

Given the imprimatur of social and personal approval which marriage provides, it is not surprising that some lesbians and gay men among us would look to legal marriage for self-affirmation. After all, those who marry can be instantaneously transformed from "outsiders" to "insiders," and we have a desperate need to become insiders.

It could make us feel OK about ourselves, perhaps even relieve some of the internalized homophobia that we all know so well. Society will then
(Continued on page 14)

PAULA L. ETTLEBRICK

Since When Is Marriage a Path To Liberation?

S T O D D A R D , C O N T .

unlucky, but I have seen precious few marriages over the course of my forty years that invite admiration and emulation. All too often, marriage appears to petrify rather than satisfy and enrich, even for couples in their twenties and thirties who have had a chance to learn the lessons of feminism. Almost inevitably, the partners seem to fall into a "husband" role and a "wife" role, with such latter-day modifications as the wife who works in addition to raising the children and managing the household.

Let me be blunt: in its traditional form, marriage has been oppressive, especially (although not entirely) to women. Indeed, until the middle of the last century, marriage was, at its legal and social essence, an extension of the husband and his paternal family. Under the English common law, wives were among the husband's "chattel"—personal property—and could not, among other things, hold property in their own names. The common law crime of adultery demonstrates the unequal treatment accorded to husbands and wives: while a woman who slept with a man who wasn't her husband committed adultery, a man who slept with a woman not his wife committed fornication. A man was legally incapable of committing adultery, except as an accomplice to an errant wife. The underlying offense of adultery was not the sexual betrayal of one partner by the other, but the wife's engaging in conduct capable of tainting the husband's bloodlines. (I swear on my *Black's Law Dictionary* that I have not made this up!)

Nevertheless, despite the oppressive nature of marriage historically, and in spite of the general absence of edifying examples of modern heterosexual marriage, I believe very strongly that every lesbian and gay man should have the right to marry the same-sex partner of his or her choice, and that the gay rights movement should aggressively seek full legal recognition for same-sex marriages. To those who might not agree, I respectfully offer three explanations, one practical, one political and one philosophical.

The Practical Explanation

The legal status of marriage rewards the two individuals who travel to the altar (or its secular equivalent) with substantial economic and practical advantages. Married couples may reduce their tax liability by filing a joint return. They are entitled to special government benefits, such as those given surviving spouses and dependents through the Social Security program. They can inherit from one another even when there is no will. They are immune from subpoenas requiring testimony against the other spouse. And marriage to an American citizen gives a foreigner a right to residency in the United States.

Other advantages have arisen not by law but by custom. Most employers offer health insurance to their employees, and many will include an employee's spouse in the benefits package, usually at the employer's expense. Virtually no employer will include a partner who is not married to an employee, whether of the same sex or not. Indeed, very few insurance companies even offer the possibility of a group health plan covering "domestic partners" who are not married to one another. Two years ago, I tried to find such a policy for Lambda, and discovered that not one insurance company authorized to do business in New York—the second-largest state in the country with more than 17 million residents—would accommodate us. (Lambda has tried to make do by paying for individual insurance policies for the same-sex partners of its employees who otherwise would go uninsured but these individual policies are usually narrower in scope than group policies, often require applicants to furnish individual medical information not required under most group plans, and are typically much more expensive per person.)

In short, the law generally presumes in favor of every marital relationship, and acts to preserve and foster it, and to enhance the rights of the individuals who enter into it. It is usually possible, with enough money and the right advice, to replicate some of the benefits conferred by the legal status of marriage through the use of documents like wills and power of attorney forms, but that protection



will inevitably, under current circumstances, be incomplete.

The law (as I suspect will come as no surprise to the readers of this journal) still looks upon lesbians and gay men with suspicion, and this suspicion casts a shadow over the documents they execute in recognition of a same-sex relationship. If a lesbian leaves property to her lover, her will may be invalidated on the grounds that it was executed under the "undue influence" of the would-be

beneficiary. A property agreement may be denied validity because the underlying relationship is "meretricious"—akin to prostitution. (Astonishingly, until the mid-seventies, the law throughout the United States deemed "meretricious" virtually *any* formal economic arrangement between two people not married to one another, on the theory that an exchange of property between them was probably payment for sexual services; the Supreme Court of California helped unravel

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this quaint legal fantasy in its 1976 ruling in the first famous "palimony" case, *Marvin v. Marvin*.) The law has progressed considerably beyond the uniformly oppressive state of affairs before 1969, but it is still far from enthusiastic about gay people and their relationships—to put it mildly.

Moreover, there are some barriers one simply cannot transcend outside of a formal marriage. When the Internal Revenue Code or the Immigration and Naturalization Act say "married," they mean "married" by definition of state statute. When the employer's group health plan says "spouse," it means "spouse" in the eyes of the law, not the eyes of the loving couple.

But there is another drawback. Couples seeking to protect their relationship through wills and other documents need knowledge, determination and—most importantly—money. No money, no lawyer. And no lawyer, no protection. Those who lack the sophistication or the wherewithal to retain a lawyer are simply stuck in most circumstances. Extending the right to marry to gay couples would assure that those at the bottom of the economic ladder have a chance to secure their relationship rights, too.

The Political Explanation

The claim that gay couples ought to be able to marry is not a new one. In the seventies, same-sex couples in three states—Minnesota, Kentucky and Washington—brought constitutional challenges to the marriage statutes, and in all three instances they failed. In each of the three, the court offered two basic justifications for limiting marriage to male-female couples: history and procreation. Witness this passage from the Supreme Court of Minnesota's 1971 opinion in *Baker v. Nelson*: "The institution of marriage as a union of man and woman, uniquely involving the procreation and rearing of children within a family, is as old as the book of Genesis.... This historic institution manifestly is more deeply founded than the asserted contemporary concept of marriage and societal interests for which petitioners contend."

Today no American jurisdiction recognizes the right of two women or two men to marry one another, although several nations in Northern Europe do. Even more telling, until earlier this year, there was little discussion within the gay rights movement about whether such a right should exist. As far as I can tell, no gay organization of any size, local or national, has yet declared the right to marry as one of its goals.

With all due respect to my colleagues and friends who take a different view, I believe it is time to renew the effort to overturn the existing marriage laws, and to do so in earnest, with a commitment of money and energy, through both the courts and the state legislatures. I am not naive about the likelihood of imminent victory. There is none. Nonetheless—and here I will not mince words—I would like to see the issue rise to the top of the agenda of every gay organization, including my own (although that judgment is hardly mine alone).

Why give it such prominence? Why devote resources to such a distant goal? Because marriage is, I believe, the political issue that most fully tests the dedication of people who are *not* gay to full equality for gay people, and also the issue most likely to lead ultimately to a world free from discrimination against lesbians and gay men.

Marriage is much more than a relationship sanctioned by law. It is the centerpiece of our entire social structure, the core of the traditional notion of "family." Even in its present tarnished state, the marital relationship inspires sentiments suggesting that it is something almost suprahuman. The Supreme Court, in striking down an anti-contraception statute in 1965, called marriage "noble" and "intimate to the degree of being sacred." The Roman Catholic Church and the Moral Majority would go—and have gone—considerably further.

Lesbians and gay men are now denied entry to this "noble" and "sacred" institution. The implicit message is this: two men or two women are incapable of achieving such an exalted domestic state. Gay relationships are somehow less significant, less valuable. Such

relationships may, from time to time and from couple to couple, give the appearance of a marriage, but they can never be of the same quality or importance.

I resent—indeed, I loathe—that conception of same-sex relationships. And I am convinced that ultimately the only way to overturn it is to remove the barrier to marriage that now limits the freedom of every gay man and lesbian.

That is to not to deny the value of “domestic partnership” ordinances, statutes that prohibit discrimination based on “marital status,” and other legal advances that can enhance the rights (as well as the dignity) of gay couples. Without question, such advances move us further along the path to equality. But their value can only be partial. (The recently enacted San Francisco “domestic partnership” ordinance, for example, will have practical value only for gay people who happen to be employed by the City of San Francisco and want to include their non-marital spouses in part of the city’s fringe benefit package; the vast majority of gay San Franciscans—those employed by someone other than the city—have only a symbolic victory to savor.) Measures of this kind can never assure full equality. Gay relationships will continue to be accorded a subsidiary status until the day that gay couples have *exactly* the same rights as their heterosexual counterparts. To my mind, that means either that the right to marry be extended to us, or that marriage be abolished in its present form for all couples, presumably to be replaced by some new legal entity—an unlikely alternative.

The Philosophical Explanation

I confessed at the outset that I personally found marriage in its present avatar rather, well, unattractive. Nonetheless, even from a philosophical perspective, I believe the right to marry should become a stated goal of the gay rights movement.

First, and most basically, the issue is not the desirability of marriage, but rather the desirability of the *right* to marry. That I think two lesbians or two gay men should be enti-

led to a marriage license does not mean that I think all gay people should find appropriate partners and exercise the right, should it eventually exist. I actually rather doubt that I, myself, would want to marry, even though I share a household with another man who is exceedingly dear to me. There are others who feel differently, for economic, symbolic, or romantic reasons. They should, to my mind, unquestionably have the opportunity to marry if they wish and otherwise meet the requirements of the state (like being old enough).

Furthermore, marriage may be unattractive and even oppressive as it is currently structured and practiced, but enlarging the concept to embrace same-sex couples would necessarily transform it into something new. If two women can marry, or two men, marriage—even for heterosexuals—need not be a union of a “husband” and a “wife.” Extending the right to marry to gay people—that is, abolishing the traditional gender requirements of marriage—can be one of the means, perhaps the principal one, through which the institution divests itself of the sexist trappings of the past.

Some of my colleagues disagree with me. I welcome their thoughts and the debates and discussions our different perspectives will trigger. The movement for equality for lesbians and gay men can only be enriched through this collective exploration of the question of marriage. But I do believe many thousands of gay people want the right to marry. And I think, too, they will earn that right for themselves sooner than most of us imagine. ▼

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ETTELBRICK, CONT.

celebrate the birth of our children and mourn the death of our spouses. It would be easier to get health insurance for our spouses, family memberships to the local museum, and a right to inherit our spouse's cherished collection of lesbian mystery novels even if she failed to draft a will. Never again would we have to go to a family reunion and debate about the correct term for introducing our lover/partner/significant other to Aunt Flora. Everything would be quite easy and very nice.

So why does this unlikely event so deeply disturb me? For two major reasons. First, marriage will not liberate us as lesbians and gay men. In fact, it will constrain us, make us more invisible, force our assimilation into the mainstream, and undermine the goals of gay liberation. Second, attaining the right to marry will not transform our society from one that makes narrow, but dramatic, distinctions between those who are married and those who are not married to one that respects and encourages choice of relationships and family diversity. Marriage runs contrary to two of the primary goals of the lesbian and gay movement: the affirmation of gay identity and culture; and the validation of many forms of relationships.

When analyzed from the standpoint of civil rights, certainly lesbians and gay men should have a right to marry. But obtaining a right does not always result in justice. White male firefighters in Birmingham, Alabama have been fighting for their "rights" to retain their jobs by overturning the city's affirmative action guidelines. If their "rights" prevail, the courts will have failed in rendering justice. The "right" fought for by the white male firefighters, as well as those who advocate strongly for the "rights" to legal marriage for gay people, will result, at best, in limited or narrowed "justice" for those closest to power at the expense of those who have been historically marginalized.

The fight for justice has as its goal the realignment of power imbalances among

individuals and classes of people in society. A pure "rights" analysis often fails to incorporate a broader understanding of the underlying inequities that operate to deny justice to a fuller range of people and groups. In setting our priorities as a community, we must combine the concept of both rights and justice. At this point in time, making legal marriage for lesbian and gay couples a priority would set an agenda of gaining rights for a few, but would do nothing to correct the power imbalances between those who are married (whether gay or straight) and those who are not. Thus, justice would not be gained.

JUSTICE FOR GAY men and lesbians will be achieved only when we are accepted and supported in this society *despite* our differences from the dominant culture and the choices we make regarding our relationships. Being queer is more than setting up house, sleeping with a person of the same gender, and seeking state approval for doing so. It is an identity, a culture with many variations. It is a way of dealing with the world by diminishing the constraints of gender roles which have for so long kept women and gay people oppressed and invisible. Being queer means pushing the parameters of sex, sexuality, and family, and in the process transforming the very fabric of society. Gay liberation is inexorably linked to women's liberation. Each is essential to the other.

The moment we argue, as some among us insist on doing, that we should be treated as equals because we are really just like married couples and hold the same values to be true, we undermine the very purpose of our movement and begin the dangerous process of silencing our different voices. As a lesbian, I am fundamentally different from non-lesbian women. That's the point. Marriage, as it exists today, is antithetical to my liberation as a lesbian and as a woman because it mainstreams my life and voice. I do not want to be known as "Mrs. Attached-To-Somebody-Else." Nor do I want to give the state the power to regulate my primary relationship.

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Yet, the concept of equality in our legal system does not support differences, it only supports sameness. The very standard for equal protection is that people who are similarly situated must be treated equally. To make an argument for equal protection, we will be required to claim that gay and lesbian relationships are the same as straight relationships. To gain the right, we must compare ourselves to married couples. The law looks to the insiders as the norm, regardless of how flawed or unjust their institutions, and requires that those seeking the law's equal protection situate themselves in a similar posture to those who are already protected. In arguing for the right to legal marriage, lesbians and gay men would be forced to claim that we are just like heterosexual couples, have the same goals and purposes, and vow

to structure our lives similarly. The law provides no room to argue that we are different, but are nonetheless entitled to equal protection.

The thought of emphasizing our sameness to married heterosexuals in order to obtain this "right" terrifies me. It rips away the very heart and soul of what I believe it is to be a lesbian in this world. It robs me of the opportunity to make a difference. We end up mimicking all that is bad about the institution of marriage in our effort to appear to be the same as straight couples.

By looking to our sameness and de-emphasizing our differences, we don't even place ourselves in a position of power that would allow us to transform marriage from an institution that emphasizes property and state regulation of relationships to an institu-



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tion which recognizes one of many types of valid and respected relationships. Until the constitution is interpreted to respect and encourage differences, pursuing the legalization of same-sex marriage would be leading our movement into a trap; we would be demanding access to the very institution which, in its current form, would undermine *our* movement to recognize many different kinds of relationships. We would be perpetuating the elevation of married relationships and of "couples" in general, and further eclipsing other relationships of choice.

Ironically, gay marriage, instead of liberating gay sex and sexuality, would further outlaw all gay and lesbian sex which is not performed in a marital context. Just as sexually active non-married women face stigma and double standards around sex and sexual activity, so too would non-married gay people. The only legitimate gay sex would be that which is cloaked in and regulated by marriage. Its legitimacy would stem not from an acceptance of gay sexuality, but because the Supreme Court and society in general fiercely protect the privacy of marital relationships. Lesbians and gay men who do not seek the state's stamp of approval would clearly face increased sexual oppression.

UNDOUBTEDLY, whether we admit it or not, we all need to be accepted by the broader society. That motivation fuels our work to eliminate discrimination in the workplace and elsewhere, fight for custody of our children, create our own families, and so on. The growing discussion about the right to marry may be explained in part by this need for acceptance. Those closer to the norm or to power in this country are more likely to see marriage as a principle of freedom and equality. Those who are more acceptable to the mainstream because of race, gender, and economic status are more likely to want the right to marry. It is the final acceptance, the ultimate affirmation of identity.

On the other hand, more marginal members of the lesbian and gay community (women, people of color, working class and

poor) are less likely to see marriage as having relevance to our struggles for survival. After all, what good is the affirmation of our relationships (that is, marital relationships) if we are rejected as women, black, or working class?

The path to acceptance is much more complicated for many of us. For instance, if we choose legal marriage, we may enjoy the right to add our spouse to our health insurance policy at work, since most employment policies are defined by one's marital status, not family relationship. However, that choice assumes that we have a job *and* that our employer provides us with health benefits. For women, particularly women of color who tend to occupy the low-paying jobs that do not provide healthcare benefits at all, it will not matter one bit if they are able to marry their woman partners. The opportunity to marry will neither get them the health benefits nor transform them from outsider to insider.

Of course, a white man who marries another white man who has a full-time job with benefits will certainly be able to share in those benefits and overcome the only obstacle left to full societal assimilation—the goal of many in his class. In other words, gay marriage will not topple the system that allows only the privileged few to obtain decent health care. Nor will it close the privilege gap between those who are married and those who are not.

Marriage creates a two-tier system that allows the state to regulate relationships. It has become a facile mechanism for employers to dole out benefits, for businesses to provide special deals and incentives, and for the law to make distinctions in distributing meager public funds. None of these entities bothers to consider the relationship among people; the love, respect, and need to protect that exists among all kinds of family members. Rather, a simple certificate of the state, regardless of whether the spouses love, respect, or even see each other on a regular basis, dominates and is supported. None of this dynamic will change if gay men and lesbians are given the option of marriage.

Gay marriage will not help us address the systemic abuses inherent in a society that does not provide decent health care to all of its citizens, a right that should not depend on whether the individual 1) has sufficient resources to afford health care or health insurance, 2) is working and receives health insurance as part of compensation, or 3) is married to a partner who is working and has health coverage which is extended to spouses. It will not address the underlying unfairness that allows businesses to provide discounted services or goods to families and couples—who are defined to include straight, married people and their children, but not domestic partners.

Nor will it address the pain and anguish of the unmarried lesbian who receives word of her partner's accident, rushes to the hospital and is prohibited from entering the intensive care unit or obtaining information about her condition solely because she is not a spouse or family member. Likewise, marriage will not help the gay victim of domestic violence who, because he chose not to marry, finds no protection under the law to keep his violent lover away.

IF THE LAWS CHANGE tomorrow and lesbians and gay men were allowed to marry, where would we find the incentive to continue the progressive movement we have started that is pushing for societal and legal recognition of all kinds of family relationships? To create other options and alternatives? To find a place in the law for the elderly couple who, for companionship and economic reasons, live together but do not marry? To recognize the right of a long-time, but unmarried, gay partner to stay in his rent-controlled apartment after the death of his lover, the only named tenant on the lease? To recognize the family relationship of the lesbian couple and the two gay men who are jointly sharing child-raising responsibilities? To get the law to acknowledge that we may have more than one relationship worthy of legal protection?

Marriage for lesbians and gay men still will not provide a real choice unless we con-

tinue the work our community has begun to spread the privilege around to other relationships. We must first break the tradition of piling benefits and privileges on to those who are married, while ignoring the real life needs of those who are not. Only when we de-institutionalize marriage and bridge the economic and privilege gap between the married and the unmarried will each of us have a true choice. Otherwise, our choice not to marry will continue to lack legal protection and societal respect.

The lesbian and gay community has laid the groundwork for revolutionizing society's views of family. The domestic partnership movement has been an important part of this progress insofar as it validates non-marital relationships. Because it is not limited to sexual or romantic relationships, domestic partnership provides an important opportunity for many who are not related by blood or marriage to claim certain minimal protections.

It is crucial, though, that we avoid the pitfall of framing the push for legal recognition of domestic partners (those who share a primary residence and financial responsibilities for each other) as a stepping stone to marriage. We must keep our eyes on the goals of providing true alternatives to marriage and of radically reordering society's view of family.

The goals of lesbian and gay liberation must simply be broader than the right to marry. Gay and lesbian marriages may minimally transform the institution of marriage by diluting its traditional patriarchal dynamic, but they will not transform society. They will not demolish the two-tier system of the "haves" and the "have nots." We must not fool ourselves into believing that marriage will make it acceptable to be gay or lesbian. We will be liberated only when we are respected and accepted for our differences and the diversity we provide to this society. Marriage is not a path to that liberation. ▼

Paula L. Ettelbrick is the Legal Director of the Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund. She is the National Vice President of the National Lawyers Guild.

Being queer is more than setting up house, sleeping with a person of the same gender, and seeking state approval for doing so.

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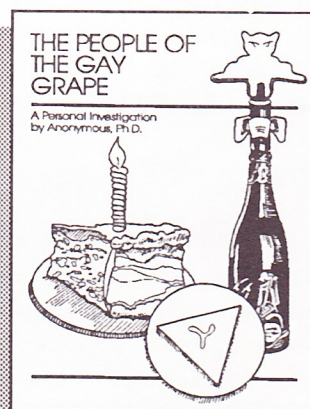
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How a chemically dependent gay man or lesbian feels
in a conventional treatment center.



causes.

by Jacqueline Woodson

Illustration by Graham Chaffee

SOME DAMN caseworker come by here today wantin' to know how well I knowed Lisa. Yeah, we was tight. Shit, Lisa and me go back so far I don't even try to remember no more. She saying I had some sort of 'fluence on Lisa's life, talkin' 'bout how Lisa lay there and yell my name all the time. I guess I'd be yellin' somebody's name too if my ass was strapped to a bed all day.

This damn caseworker talkin' 'bout there must of been somethin' sexual 'tween the two of us. I'd of knocked some fire out of her head if my cousin weren't sittin' there. I let her know right off that we wasn't practicin' nobody's freak innercourse. Let her know right off I could show her in the Bible where the Lord destroyed a whole city for committin' those acts! I ain't let on that she had hit a soft spot that made me start 'memberin' 'bout the time my mama said she gone send me away to meet some boys 'cause all I ever talk 'bout is Lisa this and Lisa that. Ain't let her know neither that it'll be a cold day in hell 'fore someone 'cuse me of being in love with Lisa 'cause my mama ain't raise no dykes!

Me and Lisa go back so far I can still 'member us gettin' our bloods somethin' like a week apart. First Lisa come runnin' to my house screamin' "SaraMae! SaraMae! I got my friend! I got it! I got it!" She just was smilin' and carryin' on. And then the two of us ran into the bathroom to take a peak into her panties to see if there really was blood comin' outta her body. I kissed her on the cheek to let her know I was proud, weren't jealous of nothin'. Let her know I respected her, wishin' my friend would hurry up and come. But that ain't near none of that nastiness that caseworker talkin' 'bout!

Shit, I wouldn't a let that ol' woman in my house had it not been that I was throwin' somethin' out the window for Joe to catch. See, I wanted him to go buy me one of those real coconut pops they makin' now. And me standin' in the window countin' change see this woman all prissy wit' her hair all straightened and pulled tight in a bun like my *Granmother's* *Grandma* would of wore.

"Kin I help you wit' somethin'?" I asked her real neighborly. See, I thought she was one of them undercover cops and if she was, I was

gonna run to the back of the stairs and let Charlie know there was cops aroun' so he could hide his stash in my 'partment til the coast was clear. But this lady look up wit' her hands hidin' the sun from eyes; lookin' like she too scared to be outside, let alone outside in this neighborhood, talkin' 'bout "Are you Mrs. Ferguson? I'm from the Belldaire Psychiatric Center. I want to ask you a few questions about your friend Marilisa Paigne."

I told her to come on up the stairs and stop yellin' up and down the block about psychiatrics 'fore someone think I'm the one gone crazy.

Now I don't live in the nicest part of Brooklyn but I got a big livin' room that I keeps real clean. I like to let people come in and tell me how nice it look with everything all polished and all. So even though I saw this lady was dressed in a fine expensive-lookin' suit, I wasn't the least bit shy to invite her up and let her see what I got.

I tell her to sit down in the blue cushion chair. That's the one my mama left to me. I guess it's a antique. I asked her if she'd like a cup of tea but she looking all nervous and squinchin' up in my chair like it

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I looked at
her across the room
and had to squeeze my
man's hand to keep from
s'pressin' no feelings for a woman.



got lice in it and all and I guess she was just too good to say yeah. I seen the way she looked at the cup I was holdin'. It's a old plastic cup that's gotten yellow in its old age but I refuse to drink tea outta anything else. It gives it just the right flavor, you know? But there she sittin' lookin' at the cup talkin' 'bout how she had lunch and was tryin' to watch her weight and all. Lookin' at her skinny body, I know she better be watchin' somethin' before it disappear. It didn't bother me that she didn't want no tea though because it's a pain makin' a fresh pot anyway. I just as well drink what I had made that mornin'.

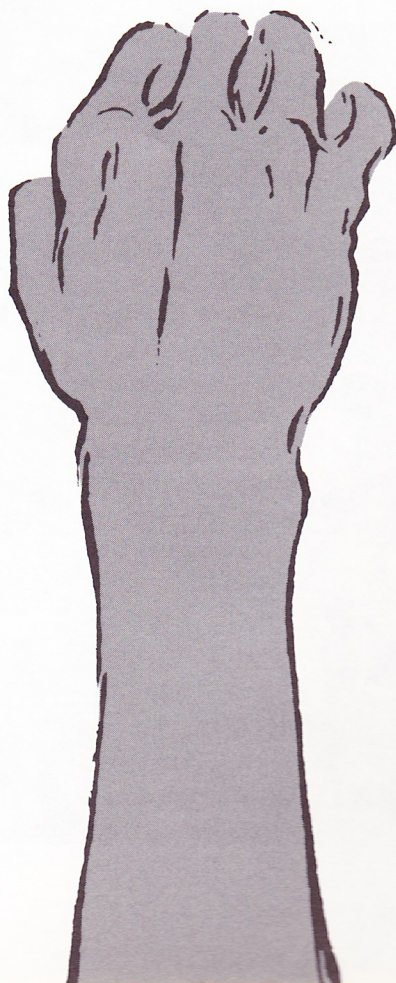
So Miss Diet Lady sits there and start takin' out all these papers 'bout Lisa. I told her if she think I'm the cause of Lisa tryna do herself in, she was wrong. Me and Lisa was tight but when she got involve with that ol' no good Johnny Ray, I told her she was on her own. See, Johnny Ray thought he was a real lady's man. He come boppin' down the street all scrubbed up for Saturday night with that conked hair tellin' me it ain't conked, it's "relaxed." I just know when you put lye in your naturally kinky hair, it's conked! But I told Lisa that man wasn't no better for her than chittlins for high blood pressure.

Ol' Lisa had to find out for herself though. Caught him right in the act at that party. I was watchin' Lisa 'cause I hadn't seen her in a long time. Saw she had let her hair grow out pretty, put some makeup on and bought a new dress. I looked at her across the room and had to squeeze my man's hand to keep from callin' out to her. You see, my ol' man didn't like me callin' ladies across the

room, said it made it seem like they was *my* lady or somethin'. Well, I told this to the case-worker and she come pipin' up 'bout how they may be some s'pressed feelings of homosexuality or somethin'. That's when I was gonna knock those pinch-nose glasses from her head 'cause my mama ain't raise no dykes! I got two kids, one four and one six to tell anybody I ain't s'pressin' no feelings for a woman.

Lisa and me, we was just tight, that's all. Ain't nothin' wrong with two women bein' tight. Just like it probably ain't nothin' wrong with Lisa. She was fine til she seen that no good Johnny Ray slow grindin' with ol' crater face Freda. That's when she asked me to take a walk with her 'round the block, help her think things out a little bit. My ol' man wasn't likin' it a bit neither but I let him know he *would* get over it!

So me and Lisa went on outside and shared a joint in the park. Since it was September beginnin', it was real nice out, the leaves smellin' like fall and the night real warm. Then Lisa starts in 'bout how she don't feel the things she should for Johnny Ray and how she like him 'cause the other women do and she wants to show women that she can get a good-lookin' man



Me and Lisa was
tight but when she got
involve with that ol' no
good Johnny Ray, I told
her she was and I ain't no dyke.

like him. I don't think Johnny Ray is anything to write home to the boys about but that was Lisa's ol' man and it wasn't none of my business how he look. Lisa was goin' on about how her feelin's for him weren't right and how she needed someone to be soft like I was that time I kissed her. I told her she should have some babies because babies are soft. But she kept goin' on and on 'bout how she needs a special some kind of love that a lot of people can't understand. I didn't know what she was talkin' 'bout and figured it was the reefer talkin' so I just said "Uh huh" and "Yeah, baby, I know what you mean" when I was s'poze to.

We got back to the party and Johnny Ray and his grind partner had split. Lisa looked like she didn't even care. Looked a little bit happy about it if you ask me. So I took my ol' man home 'cause he was near drunk and actin' crazy. I told Lisa to get in touch wit' me and we could talk some more. But she was lookin' at her drink and not really listenin'. Lisa and me was tight though so I know she heard. I ain't tell all this to that damn social worker 'cause what she know about growin' up tight in Brooklyn. Growin' up tight meant tellin' Lisa what it felt like when you did it with

someone for the first time. I ain't like some people and say it didn't hurt because it sure did. Felt like a train was tryna knock out its own tunnel 'tween my legs or somethin'. Lisa said she ain't want to feel no pain like that if she could help it. But then I showed her how to kiss for the first time so that spit didn't come out of the edge of your mouth and she liked that. We kissed together a lot but that was only for practice. That's what I should have told her that night in the park when she said she wanted to feel softness like when we used to kiss. I should've told her that was just for practice until the real thing happened. Then she wouldn't be all mixed up about everything. I should have told her men make women feel different things. Then she wouldn't be crazy now.

I guess I'm the cause for all her craziness. I ain't 'splain things the right way. But that caseworker woman got on my nerves so bad, I was sorry I even thought about throwin' that change out the window. No one tol' me to be all show-offy wantin' someone to see the little bit I got. My ol' man say that's gonna always be my downfall.

I had to shoo that woman outta my house quick. Seem to me, she was tryna get me in that

crazy hospital with Lisa. I showed her pictures of the kids and my ol' man. Showed her my Bible and tol' her if she want, I'd show her where Sodom and Gomorrah was destroyed for the likes of the kinds of peoples she was talkin' 'bout. Ain't nothin' wrong wit' bein' tight though and that's what we was.

We was real close and went way, way back. But I ain't crazy and I ain't no dyke. Lisa just got a little mixed up 'bout the way things s'pozed to be. Now she laying strapped down in some crazy hospital talkin' 'bout "SaraMae! SaraMae!" but she don't understand I got these two kids now and can't be playin' those girl-games anymore. I done teachd her all I could 'bout kissin and such. I can't teach her nothin' 'bout softness, though, 'cause my mama ain't raise no dykes! ▼

Jacqueline Woodson lives in Brooklyn, New York. Her first novel, Last Summer With Maizon, is forthcoming from Dell/Delacourt.

About the artist: Graham Chaffee is a San Francisco freelance illustrator who—if he had the brains God gave a goat—would have moved to New York by now.



Paul Lynde
1926-1982

The Gay Life of a HOLLYWOOD SQUARE

A Conversation With Comedian Paul Lynde

by Boze Hadleigh

Illustrations by Kris Kovick

Paul Lynde became a household word on the original "The Hollywood Squares." He starred in and dominated, via his central square and un-square wit, some dozen of the 16 years of the series, considered by many TV's all-time favorite game show. Lynde was described by pal Alice Ghostley as "amiably crotchety." "Squares" host Peter Marshall called him "the funniest man I've ever known, and in this business, I've known thousands."

Lynde was discovered in a 1952 show that introduced the likes of Eartha Kitt, Mel Brooks, Ronnie Graham, and Alice Ghostley. In *Bye Bye Birdie*, Lynde wowed Broadway, then got to reprise his role in the hit movie version. However, his film career languished, though he did two films with Doris Day—one less than Rock Hudson. Lynde also turned up in the camp classic *Beach Blanket Bingo*, opposite the 1960s' ideal hetero couple, Frankie and

Annette.

But, to his utter amazement, it was Paul, not Frankie, who went on "Hollywood Squares," and found that his subsequent stage appearances were sell-outs. Elsewhere on TV, Lynde was less successful, with numerous failed pilots. He finally played a paterfamilias in his own, short-lived "The Paul Lynde Show."

In 1978, *Talk* magazine asked me to interview Lynde, who was instantly ready, willing, and agreeable. The resultant piece was titled "Now I Love Me!" Like similar articles at the time, it briefly circumvented Paul's "bachelorhood" by noting that, like Mae West, he felt, "I'm single because I was born that way" (West, however, had contractually wed).

The first thing I noticed in Lynde's home above Sunset Boulevard was his taste. We sat on a Recamier chaise lounge, the tape-recorder between us. The living room of the Mediterranean-style home was blue and white. Sunshine flooded the place, lending what Paul called "a Doris Day ambiance." He wagged his head, but in repose, his tanned face was actually handsome. It was difficult to picture him as the fat, unhappy youth he said he'd had to grow to love.

After the *Talk* questions were covered, I asked some others of personal interest. The campier and more honest Paul Lynde appeared after both sides of the tape had been used up. He was unusually candid, partly because he knew that his statements, and the individuals mentioned, would not find their way into pages edited by women and men afraid of lawsuits and of the truth that well over ten percent of Hollywood's performers are homosexual.

Q: Such a beautiful home you have. Do you ever get lonely?

A: There's a difference between being alone and being lonely. I guess it's an old cliché, but when you're young, you always want to be on the go, around someone all the time. I'm not saying I prefer to be alone, but now I can enjoy it. And if I were involved with someone, I'd want time and space to myself, which might sound selfish, but would be essential.

Q: Do you have hobbies? Or time for them?

A: Telling little jokes—that's a kind of hobby. For instance: I have a very, very rich friend. He even has a roll of one-dollar bills...

Q: What's unusual about having a roll of one-dollar bills?

A: In his *bathroom*?

Q: Very good! Speaking of rooms, do you spend much time in the second-smallest room in the house?

A: My closet? (*titters*) No, strike that. *Please!* Oh, you mean the kitchen! Yes. I'm a life-long dieter, but I feel very secure in a kitchen with a big refrigerator with very little in it.

Q: As for relationships, do you think being a busy performer discourages long relationships?

A: Oh, absolutely. I worked 24 hours-a-day to make sure that the loves of my life *didn't* work. I don't know, maybe I shouldn't say this, but hate is very close to love, and many people live in hate, in so-called loving relationships, with contracts and everything, but they can't stand the sight of each other. I couldn't, or wouldn't, live that way.

Q: Are female stars harder to work with than male ones?

A: All stars have hard-ons about themselves....Now, then...

Q: Alice Ghostley is so funny; she has many of your mannerisms. I've always thought of her as a female Paul Lynde. I remember her best from "Bewitched" and Julie Andrews' variety series.

A: Oh, Alice is a pearl. A real gem. And the stories she could tell you about Miss Julie Andrews! (*covers mouth with hand*)

Q: Julie isn't Mary Poppins, is she?

A: Well, you know what [Hollywood columnist] Joyce Haber says about her—she makes General Patton look like Pollyanna.

Q: You know what was so funny? Your drag scene in *The Glass Bottom Boat*, one of my favorite comedies. You looked so uncomfortable and antsy in that gown and red wig!

A: Not *that* uncomfortable, dear. (*winks*) Actually, my dress was more expensive than any of the ones Doris [Day] had to wear. That day I came in fully dressed and coiffed, I was the belle of the set! Everybody went wild! Doris came over and looked me up and down, and told me, "Oh, I'd never wear anything that feminine."

Q: You were also hilarious as the funeral director in *Send Me No Flowers*, with Doris Day and Rock Hudson.

A: Wasn't that fabulous?! Those were some of my best lines in any movie.

Q: Was Rock Hudson any fun to work with?

A: Not on the set. The guy was—maybe I shouldn't say this—he was mentally constipated. Real tight-ass. I suppose anyone in his shoes would have to be, but he didn't seem a very happy man.

Q: You mean because he had to repress his own sexuality all



Doris Day & Rock Hudson

Agnes Moorehead



the time?

A: Well, *yes*. What a pain in the ass! It's a tremendous price to pay, but apparently it suits Rock.

Q: Wasn't Tony Randall in all three of those Rock Hudson/Doris Day movies? He was funny, too, but in a much more low-key way. I think it took television to bring him really out.

A: Oh, honey, it would take a miracle to bring that man really out....His thing is to act one way, like everybody's nellie uncle, then mention his wife in every other sentence. He was closer to Rock than I was.

Q: Let's see: you were also in a movie with Debbie Reynolds...?

A: Yes (*sourly*). *How Sweet It Is*. Her and James Garner. They were nice enough; the movie

stank. We did make it on an ocean liner, on the way to Acapulco. Jerry Paris, the director, wrote it on-board, each day. We all had fun, but no wonder it stank.

At night, we'd sit around and dish. Jerry told me those rumors that everybody's heard about Debbie and her *close friend* Agnes Moorehead. Well, the whole world knows Agnes was a lesbian—I mean classy as hell, but one of the all-time Hollywood dykes. I'd heard those rumors, but Jerry filled in some details that....Oh, I'd better not; I'm not even sure if the story's really true. [Eddie Fisher, Debbie's first husband, had announced his intention to include the story in his memoirs, until Reynolds threatened a lawsuit.]

Q: You know, I vaguely remember "The Paul Lynde Show," mostly because it was set in my hometown, Santa Barbara.

nett, Dean Martin...

A: Yes, yes. But I always wanted to have my own show. Oh, but you know what was marvelous? Jack Benny sent me a note once, after I did Carol Burnett—she's nice, too. It was so complimentary, so lovely... but ya know, we could never have worked together. It wouldn't work—too lavender, with two old queens together. It's a shame, though.

Q: The official Benny biography is Mary Livingstone's project...

A: Yes, the truth about *that* will be a long time coming. I mean the truth always does get out, even officially. But look how long it takes—look at Cole Porter.

Q: It takes longer when the individual was particularly popular.

A: God, yes.

Q: Now who do you think is quite funny? Comedians, I mean.

.....

The whole world knows Agnes was a lesbian — I mean classy as hell, but one of the all-time Hollywood dykes.

.....

A: Yes. (*waggles*) It was kind of based on "All In the Family," only we had someone who looked like a human being for my son-in-law. I was no Archie Bunker, though—the guy didn't have a mean bone, just cranky. The actor who played my son-in-law was real nice, too. I had a wife, two daughters, the whole bit. Oh, well, that's TV for you!

Q: You've certainly been on everyone's show—Carol Bur-

A: Well...Richard Deacon [of "The Dick Van Dyke Show"] is very amusing, in his deadpan way. He's so one-note, you'd never *guess* about *him*. Stop me if I'm shocking you, sonny! But if you've hung around Hollywood, you've *heard* who's gay—what else do they talk about at cocktail parties? Cock-sizes and big deals. And who's sleeping with who and why. It all boils down to sex and

✓
Jack Benny

deals....What were we talking about?

Q: Who you think is funny...

A: I'm sorry, I just think the sisters *are* funnier. Outsiders develop humor as a defense, but they also think funnier. If you're on the inside, you can *afford* to be more shallow. Why do you think most of the comedians and also the composers are gay or Jewish? It's a defense, a refuge—laughter and music. So, to round off this list I have to say another deadpan character actor, Richard Haydn. I mean he's best-known as that gay old uncle in *The Sound of Music*, but he's done a million and one things. Oh, of course: and Billy De Wolfe. Now he was on Doris' TV series, and he was priceless! He's done drag and everything.

Q: Other than your drag turn in *Glass Bottom Boat*, do you have any partiality to drag?

A: No, no. Not really. It gets a guaranteed laugh, and I love

Is your sexual image a big concern to you?

A: As long as I can work, I'm okay. And they like this quirky persona I've got. If they call me

sionally. But ya know, it's the quality of life that's important, and at my age I can honestly say that. Today I'm thin, successful, I'm far more confident, and I truly mean it. I think, regardless of whether you're a celebrity or not, if you can honestly say that the recent years you've lived through have been the best so far, then you *are* doing something right! ▼

.....
**Outsiders develop humor as a defense;
why do you think most of the comedians
are gay or Jewish?**
.....

that, but no. Women's clothes are so *tedious*. Not to mention the hair and makeup. They're crazy to put up with it. I guess men just don't like women the way they already look. Besides, the only transvestite I know is a married man—not gay—and he does it so he can make it with his wife. He can't, otherwise.

Q: On "Hollywood Squares" your quips are often quite risqué, sometimes daringly gay.

nellie, okay, so long as they call me. You'd have to be a moron not to guess that I'm not a heterosexual, by my age. Best of all, the young people love me. They're my biggest audience. That's extremely comforting to a young man in his early fifties.

Q: How big a concern is aging?

A: For a man, it's big. For a comic—a comedian, a droll—not so big. Not big at all, profes-

Boze Hadleigh is the author of *Conversations with My Elders (St. Martin's)*, a collection of interviews with six gay men of cinema. This interview with Paul Lynde is from his forthcoming book, *Celebrity Gaze*. Hadleigh lives in West Hollywood, California.

About the artist: "Faces are my specialty," says Kris Kovick, San Francisco artist.



The Drag Queen In The Age of Mechanical Reproduction

MY COMRADE

BY MARK LEGER

THE NEW YORK PUBLIC Library had an exhibition called "Revolution in Print." In a grand marble room, the viewer could see both the means of production and the product that spread the ideas of the French Revolution: the ancient presses, the cases of lead type, the book stalls, and the books, pamphlets, and broadsides. It was all very wooden and labor-intensive, a printing technology dependent on skilled craftsmen—hand typesetters, printers, and bookbinders.

In the year 2189, an exhibition of the print of today's social movements would present a fluorescent-lit lineup of photocopy machines, from the era when anybody could push a photocopier button, and, if they had the knack, engage a readership. Informational plaques would discuss the harried office workers who copied reams of leaflets and underground 'zines while the boss was at lunch. Today, around New York ACT-UP, this activity is called Xerox Anonymous. Or "taking a copy break."

Although *My Comrade*, the revolutionary gay magazine from Manhattan, is now offset print, it retains the collaged, techno-rustic of xerox art. Its editor, Les Simpson, coaxes in the contributions of about 30 contributing writers, photographers, and illus-



Our first issue featured downtown drag queen, Tabboo!, armed with exciting slogans of gay and personal liberation

trators, then presides over the assembling, printing, and distribution of the magazine. *My Comrade* was originally distributed at "Whispers," a Sunday evening multi-media drag event at the Pyramid Club. It is now carried by several bookstores, and issue four, at this writing the most recent, had a 1000 copy print-run that sold out.

My Comrade arose out of the downtown Manhattan scene, which still provides its main distribution outlets and readership pool. But although the magazine does contain many idiosyncratic geographical and personal references, it is more a product of and for a mass gay culture. *My Comrade* assembles the documents of bygone popular homosexualities and contraposes them against the most recent: sexy guy photos old and new, ideology old and new, slang old and new, and drag queens eternally youthful. It wryly transforms these documents into a utopian guide that infuses a sense of missed possibility into everyday life. An inspection of the map of *My Comrade's* "Land of Enchantment" alters the meaning of Manhattan. The program listings for "Channel 69" call short network television.

In *My Comrade*, drag queens are the leaders, the shapers of opinion, the expert analysts; they are *My Comrade's* hero(ine)s in quotes. Mistresses of illusion, always forefront is the irony, the possible falsehood, of everything they pose. You never can take them too seriously, but yet they do know how to attract attention and how to get the word out. Drag queens willingly have taken on the guise of the abject, the emasculated, the gender fucker, and made themselves powerful in the process. This is the complete opposite of the academic or politician who uncritically adopts the demeanor and techniques of established power—the usual model of an "effective" leader. When a drag queen

speaks, it is not so much a question of "who do you trust" as "what do you find plausible?" Discourse may take imaginative flight, but always lands in the field of material reality; being a drag queen means the constant assertion of the *body*.

As Walter Benjamin demonstrated, before the techniques of mechanical reproduction, a work of art had a unique existence imbued with a ritual-based "cult value," an *aura*. With the development of mechanical reproduction—lithography, then photography and films, the *aura* was supplanted by an "exhibition value." The public now desires the end of uniqueness; it wants to be able to grasp the heretofore distanced art work.

Drag queens have been willing participants in this moment. Before, if you wanted to see drag, you had to venture out to small clubs where you would join small (but wildly appreciative) audiences. Drag queens were the first to recognize that they were separated from the masses by the tinniness of their *boites*. To create political art, drag queens resoundingly have destroyed their *aura* by photocopying their image and their discursive texts, both formerly presented only at privileged performances. Now anyone in the tri-state area can pin up star columnist, Hapi Phace, (and call her home phone number)—and not because of MGM or CBS, but only Not-a-Sloppy Copy Shop.

My Comrade provokes our mobilization. In the tradition of other homegrown 'zines, it desires our response, our involvement, our inspired imitation. ▼

FROM LES SIMPSON:

Whew! It ain't easy being publisher/editor of My Comrade, a small, underground, radical, gay magazine. There's porno to be edited, gay lib slogans to be typed, glamorous drag queens to be photographed, sexy hunks to be interviewed for potential Centerfolds, calls to be made, stamps to be licked....

But please don't think I'm complaining. The incredible benefits certainly have been worth all the time and energy. Although for years I'd been deeply involved in a passionate relationship with gay people, after two years of collaboration with the contributors of My Comrade, I'm head-over-heels, madly in love with them.

I'd like to think of My Comrade as comparable to one of those goofy Bob Hope USO shows that not only razzle-dazzled, but also inspired the troops. On My Comrade's stage appear scantily dressed young men, outrageous drag queens, lovely lesbians, and campy raunchy skits, intermingled with bold messages of gay pride, unity, and love. My Comrade's audience leaves with a smile on its face, but also with a tear in its eye and a fist clenched to the sky, eager to join the magazine's spiritually uplifting crusade.

"Onward to victory," the audience chants, "Onward to justice, Onward to liberation, Onward to My Comrade!"





In issue three, Lisa Lederer, co-anchor of "Sixty Photos," the "television magazine," profiled The Institute of Homosexual Inclination. Lisa is seen here interviewing star columnist, Hapi Phace, and centerfold hunk, Aner.



NANCY JUNG

HOLY HOMOSEXUAL!

JESUS CHRIST! HE'S BACK! SOURPUSS BIBLE-THUMPERS PREDICTED A VENGEFUL CRUSADER, MAINSTREAM CHRISTIANITY FORECAST A STRAIGHTLACED SAVIOR, BUT THE "NEW" JESUS IT TURNS OUT IS HIP, MEDIA-SAAVY, FUN-LOVING, SEXY AND - OHMYGOD - GAY.

AS THE PRINCE OF PEACE PREPARES TO SPREAD THE LATEST TESTAMENT VIA AN ELABORATE INTERNATIONAL TOUR HE TOOK TIME TO POSE FOR OUR CAMERAS AND TALK TO MY COMRADE'S LES SIMPSON.

A crucifixion, a virgin birth, miracles galore and the kickoff of one of the world's great religions ain't an easy act to follow. How could Christ's reappearance possible top the controversy and excitement of his first visit to Earth?

Well hello gay Jesus.

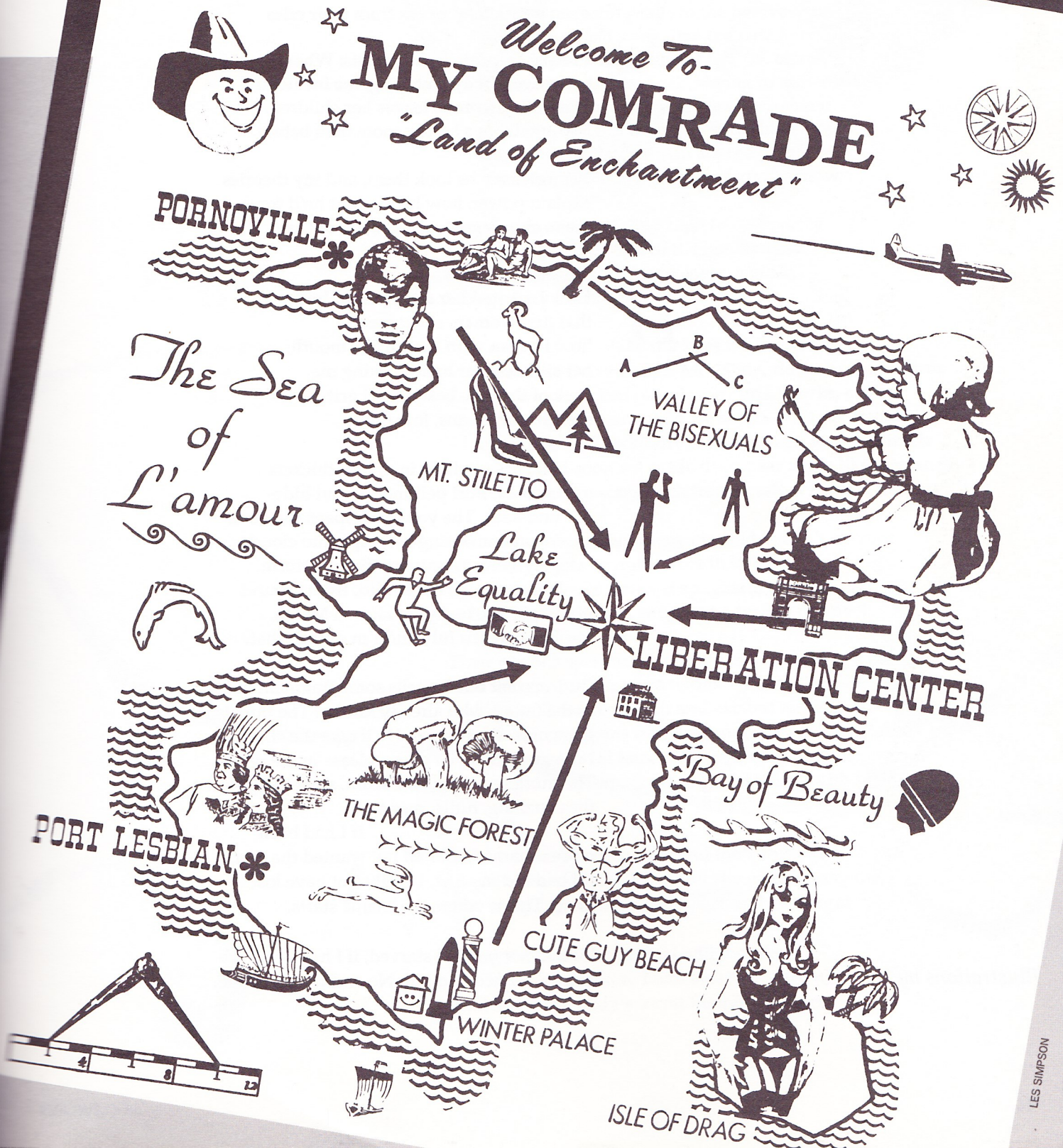
Century old rumors were finally confirmed at history's most momentous news conference last month when Jesus, back for his second coming, proudly proclaimed his gayness, and in one swift announcement contradicted 2000 years of Christianity's not very pretty attitude towards homosexuality.

PHOTOS BY nancy jung

In our second My Comrade, we entered the New Age. Our cover story featured the second coming of Jesus, who turned out to be hip, sexy, and gay.

In issue four, we visited the gay nation. ▶

The most recent issue of My Comrade exposes the shocking world of gay and lesbian sex. After many long, hard nights of investigative reporting, we found it to be quite appealing. We may just have to explore that subject again.... For a copy, send five dollars (cash or checks made out to L. Simpson only) to: 326 E. 13th Street, #15, New York City, New York 10003.



SHAME

MINNIE BRUCE PRATT

I I ask for justice but do not release myself. Do I think I was wrong? Yes. Of course. Was wrong. Am wrong. Can justify everything except their pain. Even now their cries rattle in my ears like icy winds pierce in cold weather, even now a tenderness from their cries.

The past repeats in fragments: What I see is everybody watching, me included, as a selfish woman leaves her children, two small boys hardly more than babies.

Though I say he took them, and my theories explain power, how he thought he'd force me to choose, me or them, her or them.

II How I wanted her slant humid body, that first woman, silent reach, how I began with her furtive mouth, her silences, her hand fucking me back of the van, beach sand grit scritch at my jeans, low tide.

The boys yelling in myrtle thickets outside, hurl pell-mell, count hide-and-seek. The youngest opens the door. What I am doing is escape into clouds, grey heat, promise of thunderstorm not ominous, not sordid, from ground to air, like us flying kites in March. But here it's July and I'm doing what?

Curious, left out, he tells some fragment later to the father, who already knows. The threats get worse, spat curses: He'll take the children, I can go fly where I damn please in the world. The muttered words for scum, something rotten, flies buzzing, futile, mean.

If I had been more ashamed, if I had not wanted the world. If I had hid my lust, I might not have lost them. This is where the shame starts.

If I had not been so starved, if I had been more ashamed and hid. No end to this blame.

Illustrations by Tobe Correal

III

At times I can say it was good, even better
for them, my hunger for her. Now that we're
here, they've grown up, survived, no suicides,
despite their talk of walks in front of cars,
smashing through plate glass. Despite guilt:

The long sweating calls to the twelve-year
old, saying *Hold on* against the pain,
how I knew it from when I left, the blame
inside, the splintered self, saying to him *Walk
out*, remind the body you are alive, even if
rain is freezing in the thickets to clatter
like icy seeds, even if you are the only one
plodding through the drifts of grainy snow.

Now we've survived. They call to talk poetry
or chaos of physics. Out of the blue to hear
their voices, a kind of forgiveness, a giddy
lifting of my heart:

Like the kites we flew once
below the Occoneechee Mountain, down in the pasture.
The wind spirited our plastic birds, hawks, eagles,
or crumpled them while we shouted *No, no*. I waded
deep into the blackberry thicket thorns for the miracle
wings that soon we made disappear again like airplanes,
soon made to come back from mystery travels, the way

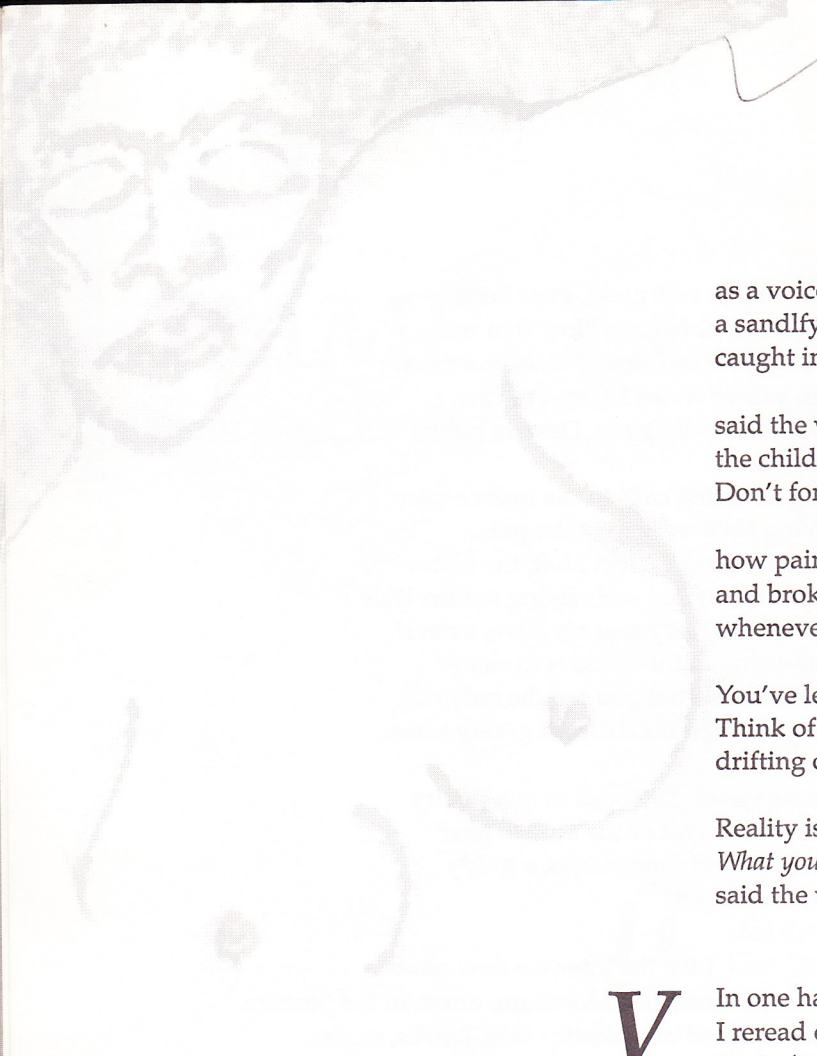
the boys appear today in my city, old enough to come
by rickety plane or train, whiz in to be
with me, my lover now, eat spaghetti, talk serious
politics in my kitchen, snug, but a feeling of travel.

Their curious eyes are on our life that widens in a place
little known, our pleasure without shame. We talk
and the walls seem to shift and expand around us.
The breaking of some frozen frame. The youngest jokes
lovebirds at our held hands. Late evening we stir.
Goodnight: they expect me to go off to bed with her.

IV

All the years between now and then, the nights.
One December when I thought she would leave me,
was weeping her hand's loss, her body's weight

lifting away, and thought: I will lose her
like I lost the children. I will lose her.
And knew my body's secret thought, endured



as a voice creeping on my skin, a buzz,
a sandlfy's bite of pain, a grain of sand
caught in the sheets, abrading my skin. *Loss*,

said the voice, *love is loss*. Don't forget
the children, how pleasure brings pain.
Don't forget you're to blame. Don't forget

how pain digs in your hands, like thorns stuck
and broken off, invisible ache you feel
whenever you touch: you lose what you touch.

You've learned it: don't want too much.
Think of her arms as nothing: blowing foam,
drifting clouds, scudding caress.

Reality is flesh of your flesh taken.
What you want to last is fantasy, imagination,
said the voice creeping in my body, pain.

V In one hand, the memory of pain.
I reread one of these poems and begin
again (again, it's been fifteen years)
to cry at the fragmented naked faces,
at the noise of the crying, somewhere
inside us, even now, like an old wind.
In one hand, the memory of pain.

In the other hand, change. When
did it all begin? Over and over. Once
we all were walking on the street,
me and her, hand in hand, very loud
singing sixties rock-and-roll, rattle,
shake, smiling goofily, indecent
(but not quite illegally), escaped
out with the boys in a gusty wind.
The youngest sang, the oldest lagged,
ashamed? But we waited for him.
It was a comedy, a happy ending,
pleasure. We kept saying, *Spring*,
it's spring, so the boys brought us
to their lake, its body-thick ice thinned
at the edge to broken glass splinters.
The new waves widened and glittered in the ice,
a delicate clinking like glass wind chimes.

And now, sometimes, one of them will say: *Remember
the day we all went down to the lake? Remember
how we heard the sound of the last ice in the water?*

Minnie Bruce Pratt lives
in Washington, DC. This
poem is from her forthcoming
book, *Crime Against
Nature (Firebrand)*, which
is the 1989 Lamont Poetry
Selection from the Academy
of American Poets.
Her other books include
two volumes of poetry,
The Sound of One Fork
(Night Heron Press) and
*We Say We Love Each
Other (Spinsters/Aunt
Lute)*, and *Yours in Struggle:
Three Feminist Perspectives
on Anti-Semitism and Racism*
(*Firebrand*), which she
co-authored.

About the artist:
Tobe Melore Correal is a
Black and Female artist
currently living in
Oakland, California.

Pat Parker 1944–1989

Each generation improves the world
for the next.
My grandparents willed me strength.
My parents willed me pride.
I will to you rage.
I give you a world incomplete
a world
where
women still
are property and chattel
where
color still
shuts doors
where
sexual choice still
threatens
but I give you
a legacy
of doers
of people who take risks
to chisel the crack wider.



MARC GELLER

From *"Ernest & Marie" in Jonestown & Other Madness*

Pat Parker once told Judy Grahn she was waiting for the revolution in which she could take all her parts with her—"not have to say to one of them, 'No, you stay home tonight, you won't be welcome, because I'm going to an all-white party where I can be gay but not black. Or I'm going to a black poetry reading, and half the poets are anti-homosexual...' " We would have a revolution, she believed, "the day all the different parts of me can come along." Stubbornly, insistently, she traveled all over the country startling and inspiring audiences, chanting "Where will you be when they come?" calling out "Blackberri" for her young gay brother, challenging lesbians to look past their own fears, to see her as the "Goat Child," and calling on everyone—black and white, male and female, to stop the

"Womanslaughter." She spoke always with passion and humor, once admitting that she was "totally opposed to / monogamous relationships / unless / i'm / in love."

"If I'm advertised as a black poet, I'll read dyke poems," she once said, and all those among us who have ever been told to leave some part of ourselves at home laughed out loud. On June 17, 1989, Pat Parker died of cancer in Pleasant Hill, California. That we will not see her again, not hear her voice at rallies or poetry readings, not finally look up to tell her how much she gave to each of us, how important her voice was for all of us—that is almost impossible to imagine. The only thing left to do is make that revolution, take all our parts everywhere.

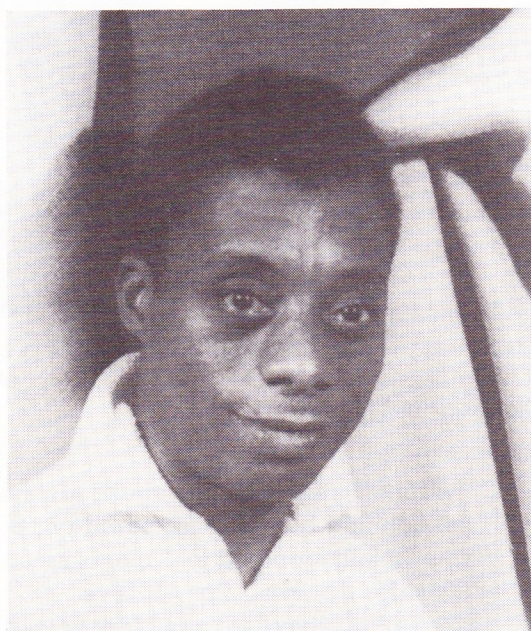
—Dorothy Allison

Books by Pat Parker: *Child of Myself* (Shameless Hussy Press, 1972), *Pit Stop* (Women's Press Collective, 1974), *Womanslaughter* (Diana Press, 1978), *Movement in Black* (Diana Press, Crossing Press, 1978, 1983), *Jonestown and Other Madness* (Firebrand Books, 1985).

THIS LIGHT

J A M E S A R T H U R B A L D W I N

THIS FIRE



ESTATE OF CARL VAN VECHTEN,
JOSEPH SOLOMON, EXECUTOR

THIS TIME

BY MELVIN DIXON

AS A BLACK GAY WRITER, I have found James Baldwin's life and work as essential as air to breathe. In numerous novels, essays, plays, and one book of poems, he created a vocabulary of experience about sexual and racial difference. His articulate protest against injustice and bigotry has helped me and certainly many others come to terms with rejection by whites because we are black and ostracism by blacks because we are gay. Baldwin carried that double burden for us, and he did so heroically.

I read Baldwin for the first time when I was a teenager working in the public library of my hometown. None of my teachers in the predominantly white high school I attended had assigned his books. I discovered them primarily by their titles, speaking from the shelves I arranged, and demanding action. The imperative command of *Go Tell It on the Mountain* and the selfless, ironic simplicity of *Nobody Knows My Name* required my immedi-

ate attention. I knew by then that I was gay, but I didn't know that I would become a writer. What, then, could I ever hope to tell on the mountain but the tremoring cadence and mystery of my own name or identity, which is the most difficult task any writer must face.

Baldwin approached this problem early in his career by writing book reviews. These reviews were actually thinly disguised essays, and they provided opportunities for Baldwin, an impassioned reader, to explore the topics of race and sexuality that he would later describe more fully in his fiction, and argue more cogently in the more mature essays he would write without using the mask of the literary "review." His essay, "The Preservation of Innocence," reprinted here for the first time in the United States, is evidence of things seen and felt in Baldwin's early musings about being homosexual.

Baldwin was just twenty-five when he published the essay in 1949 in a little-known Moroccan journal called *Zero*. The period is important in Baldwin's life, for it was soon after his arrival in France where he would spend the greater part of his professional writing life. The essay appeared four years before publication of his first novel, *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, brought him a large audience. It was a bold attempt to develop a moral defense for homosexuality by arguing against the presumption of "unnaturalness" in same-sex relations. He also made the startling revelation that heterosexual conflict was at the root of hostility towards homosexuality. These were radical statements then, and even today they strike a chord in the way Baldwin anticipated some of the feminist arguments of the seventies and eighties.*

Readers today may be unsettled by Baldwin's language and elusive style, particularly

in his presumptive use of the first person plural to join his voice to that of the larger heterosexual community "confronted" with the homosexuality of others. This ploy is a device Baldwin uses to capture the attention of his readers and lead them to an affirmation, however tentative, of the humanity inherent in his depiction of homosexuality. He presumes to be at one with the readers—going as far as the dangerous edge of appearing to share the readers' prejudices—only to blur distinctions between self and other, heterosexual and homosexual (as he would later do between black and white, categories he regards as social constructs rather than fixed biological entities). In this way, Baldwin shocks his reader into identifying with an otherwise objectionable subject or voice. Today's writers are far more direct in challenging their readers, and it is arguable which technique is more effective.

Technique and style are key considerations when we examine Baldwin the essayist. As a product of the fundamentalist, Pentecostal church, Baldwin takes on the preachers' didactic posture without hesitation. His essays are constructed as sermons that lead to apocalyptic utterances, begging the reader's moral awakening before it is too late. He also beckons the reader to acknowledge the "otherness" within, which becomes the route to a shared brotherhood, if not humanity.

Although he may begin with a specific problem in the essay—and here the question concerns recognition of homosexuality as a sexual alternative—Baldwin continually challenges his readers on moral grounds: their failure to acknowledge the validity of homosexuality leads to a failure to embrace their full humanity. This idea reappeared during the sixties and seventies when radical ideologies for sexual and racial liberation argued that no one is free until we all are free. Baldwin, even in 1949, was an early prophet of this difficult redemption. ▼

*Jonathan Ned Katz, in his landmark book, *Gay/Lesbian Almanac* (Harper & Row, 1983), documents the significance of this essay in terms of developing attitudes of American sexuality.

J A M E S B A L D W I N

PRESERVATION OF INNOCENCE

I THE PROBLEM of the homosexual, so vociferously involved with good and evil, the unnatural as opposed to the natural, has its roots in the nature of man and woman and their relationship to one another. While at one time we speak of nature and at another of the nature of man, we speak on both occasions of something of which we know very little, and we make the tacit admission that they are not one and the same. Between nature and man there is a difference; there is, indeed, perpetual war. It develops when we think about it, that not only is a natural state perversely indefinable outside of the womb or before the grave, but that it is *not* on the whole a state which is altogether desirable. It is just as well that we cook our food and are not baffled by water-closets and do not copulate in the public thoroughfare. People who have not learned this are not admired as natural but are feared as primitive or incarcerated as insane.

We spend vast amounts of our time and emotional energy in learning how not to be natural and in eluding the trap of our own nature and it therefore becomes very difficult to know exactly what is meant when we speak of the unnatural. It is not possible to have it both ways, to use nature at one time as the final arbiter of human conduct and at another to oppose her as angrily as we do. As we are being inaccurate, perhaps desperately

defensive and making, inversely, a most damaging admission when we describe as inhuman, some reprehensible act committed by a human being, so we become hopelessly involved in paradox when we describe as unnatural something which is found in nature. A cat torturing a mouse to death is not described as inhuman for we assume that it is being perfectly natural; nor is a table condemned as being unnatural for we know that it has nothing to do with nature. What we really seem to be saying when we speak of the inhuman is that we cannot bear to be confronted with that fathomless baseness shared by all humanity and when we speak of the unnatural that we cannot imagine what vexations nature will dream up next.

We have, in short, whenever nature is invoked to support our human divisions, every right to be suspicious, nature having betrayed only the most perplexing and untrustworthy interest in man and none whatever in his institutions. We resent this indifference and we are frightened by it; we resist it; we ceaselessly assert the miracle of our existence against this implacable power. Yet we know nothing of birth or death except that we remain powerless when faced by either. Much as we resent or threaten or cajole nature, she refuses absolutely to relent; she may at any moment throw down the trump card she never fails to have hidden and leave

*We spend vast amounts
of our emotional energy
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trap of our own nature.*

us bankrupt. In time, her ally and her rather too explicit witness, suns rise and set and the face of the earth changes; at length the limbs stiffen and the light goes out of her eyes.

*And nothing 'gainst time's scythe
may make defense
Save breed to brave him when he
takes thee hence.*

We arrive at the oldest, the most insistent and the most vehement charge faced by the homosexual: he is unnatural because he has turned from his life-giving function to a union which is sterile. This may, in itself, be considered a heavy, even an unforgivable crime, but since it is not so considered when involving other people, the unmarried or the poverty-stricken or the feeble, and since his existence did not always invoke that hysteria with which he now contends, we are safe in suggesting that his present untouchability owes its motive power to several other sources. Let me suggest that his present debasement and our obsession with him corresponds to the debasement of the relationship between the sexes; and that his ambiguous and terrible position in our society reflects the ambiguities and terrors which time has deposited on that relationship as the sea piles seaweed and wreckage along the shore.

For, after all, I take it that no one can be seriously disturbed about the birth-rate: when

the race commits suicide, it will not be in Sodom. Nor can we continue to shout unnatural whenever we are confronted by a phenomenon as old as mankind, a phenomenon, moreover, which nature has maliciously repeated in all of her domain. If we are going to be natural then this is a part of nature; if we refuse to accept this, then we have rejected nature and must find other criterion.

Instantly the Deity springs to mind, in much the same manner. I suspect, that He sprang into being on the cold, black day when we discovered that nature cared nothing for us. His advent, which alone had the power to save us from nature and ourselves, also created a self-awareness and, therefore, tensions and terrors and responsibilities with which we had not coped before. It marked the death of innocence; it set up the duality of good-and-evil; and now Sin and Redemption, those mighty bells, began that crying which will not cease until, by another act of creation, we transcend our old morality. Before we were banished from Eden and the curse was uttered, "I will put enmity between thee and the woman," the homosexual did not exist; nor, properly speaking, did the heterosexual. We were all in a state of nature.

We are forced to consider this tension between God and nature and are thus confronted with the nature of God because He is man's most intense creation and it is not in the sight of nature that the homosexual is

*It is not possible to use nature
at one time as the final arbiter
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condemned, but in the sight of God. This argues a profound and dangerous failure of concept, since an incalculable number of the world's humans are thereby condemned to something less than life; and we may not, of course, do this without limiting ourselves. Life, it is true, is a process of decisions and alternatives, the conscious awareness and acceptance of limitations. Experience, nevertheless, to say nothing of history, seems clearly to indicate that it is not possible to banish or to falsify any human need without ourselves undergoing falsification and loss. And what of murder? A human characteristic, surely. Must we embrace the murderer? But the question must be put another way: is it possible not to embrace him? For he is in us and of us. We may not be free until we understand him.

The nature of man and woman and their relationship to one another fills seas of conjecture and an immense proportion of the myth, legend, and literature of the world is devoted to this subject. It has caused, we gather, on the evidence presented by any library, no little discomfort. It is observable that the more we imagine we have discovered, the less we know and that, moreover, the necessity to discover and the effort and self-consciousness involved in this necessity makes their relationship more and more complex.

Men and women seem to function as imperfect and sometimes unwilling mirrors

for one another; a falsification or distortion of the nature of the one is immediately reflected in the nature of the other. A division between them can only betray a division within the soul of each. Matters are not helped if we thereupon decide that men must recapture their status as men and that women must embrace their function as women; not only does the resulting rigidity of attitude put to death any possible communion, but, having once listed the bald physical facts, no one is prepared to go further and decide, of our multiple human attributes, which are masculine and which are feminine. Directly we say that women have finer and more delicate sensibilities we are reminded that she is insistently, mythically, and even historically treacherous. If we are so rash as to say that men have greater endurance, we are reminded of the procession of men who have gone to their long home while women walked about the streets—mourning, we are told, but no doubt, gossiping and shopping at the same time.

We can pick up no novel, no drama, no poem; we may examine no fable nor any myth without stumbling on this merciless paradox in the nature of the sexes. This is a paradox which experience alone is able to illuminate and this experience is not communicable in any language that we know. The recognition of this complexity is the signal of maturity; it marks the death of the child and the birth of the man.

*The most vehement charge faced
by the homosexual: he is unnatural
because he has turned from his
life-giving function to a union
which is sterile.*

II. ONE MAY SAY, with an exaggeration vastly more apparent than real, that it is one of the major American ambitions to shun this metamorphosis. In the truly awesome attempt of the American to at once preserve his innocence and arrive at a man's estate, that mindless monster, the tough guys have been created and perfected whose masculinity is found in the most infantile and elemental externals and whose attitude towards women is the wedding of the most abysmal romanticism and the most implacable distrust.

It is impossible for a moment to believe that any Cain or Chandler hero loves his girl; we are given overwhelming evidence that he wants her, but that is not the same thing and, moreover, what he seems to want is revenge; what they bring to each other is not even passion or sexuality but an unbelievably barren and wrathful grinding. They are surrounded by blood and treachery and their bitter coupling, which has the urgency and precision of machine-gun fire, is heralded and punctuated by the mysterious and astounded corpse.

The woman, in these energetic works, is the unknown quantity, the incarnation of sexual evil, the smiler with the knife. It is the man, who, for all his tommy-guns and rhetoric, is the innocent, inexplicably, compulsively and perpetually betrayed. Men and women have all but disappeared from our popular culture, leaving only this disturbing

series of effigies with a motive power which we are told is sex, but which is actually a dream-like longing, an unfulfillment more wistful than that of the Sleeping Beauty awaiting the life-giving touch of the fated Prince. For the American dream of love insists that the Boy get the Girl; the tough guy has a disconcerting tendency to lapse abruptly into baby-talk and go off with Her—having first ascertained that she is not blood-guilty; and we are always told that this is what he *really* wants, to stop all this chasing around and settle down, to have children and a full life with a woman who, unhappily even when she appears, fails to exist.

The merciless ingenuity of Mr. James M. Cain hit upon an effective solution to this problem in a recent novel by having his protagonist fall in love with a twelve-year-old, a female against whom no crime could be charged, who was not yet guilty of the shedding of blood, and who thereafter kept herself pure for the hero until he returned from his exhausting and improbable trials. This preposterous and tasteless notion did not seem, in Mr. Cain's world, to be preposterous or tasteless at all, but functioned, on the contrary, as an eminently fortunate and farsighted inspiration.

Mr. Cain, indeed, has achieved an enormous public and, I should hope, a not inconsiderable fortune on the basis of his remarkable preoccupation with the virile male. One

The homosexual's debasement and our obsession with him corresponds to the debasement of the relationship between the sexes.

may suggest that it was the dynamism of his material which trapped him into introducing, briefly, and with the air of a man wearing, antiseptic gloves, an unattractive invert in an early novel, *Serenade*, who was promptly stabbed to death by the hero's mistress, a lusty and unlikely señorita.

This novel contains a curious admission on the part of the hero to the effect that there is always somewhere a homosexual who can wear down the resistance of the normal man by knowing which buttons to press. This is presented as a serious and melancholy warning and it is when the invert of *Serenade* begins pressing too many buttons at once that he arrives at his sordid and bloody end. Thus is that immaculate manliness within us protected; thus summarily do we deal with any obstacle to the union of the Boy and the Girl. Can we doubt the wisdom of drawing the curtains when they finally come together? For the instant that the Boy and Girl become the Bride and Groom we are forced to leave them; not really supposing that the drama is over or that we have witnessed the fulfillment of two human beings, though we would like to believe this, but constrained by the knowledge that it is not for our eyes to witness the pain and the tempest that will follow. (For we *know* what follows; we know that life is not really like this at all.) What are we to say, who have already been betrayed, when this boy,

this girl, discovers that the knife which preserved them for each other has unfitted them for experience? For the boy cannot know a woman since he has never become a man.

Hence, violence: that brutality which rages unchecked in our literature is part of the harvest of this unfulfillment, strident and dreadful testimony to our renowned and cherished innocence. Consider, in those extravagant denouncements which characterize those novels—to be more and more remarked on the bookshelves—which are concerned with homosexuality, how high a value we place on this dangerous attribute. In [Gore Vidal's] *The City and the Pillar*, the avowed homosexual who is the protagonist murders his first and only perfect love when at length they meet again, for he cannot bear to kill instead that desolate and impossible dream of love which he has carried in his heart so long. In [William Maxwell's] *The Folded Leaf*, the frail, introverted Lymie attempts suicide in an effort to escape the danger implicit in his love for Spud; a bloody act which, we are told, has purchased his maturity. In [Charles Jackson's] *The Fall of Valor*, the god-like Marine defends his masculinity with a poker, leaving for dead the frightened professor who wanted him. These violent resolutions, all of them unlikely in the extreme, are compelled by a panic which is close to madness. These novels are not con-

It is quite impossible to write a worthwhile novel about a Jew or a Gentile or a Homosexual, for people refuse, unhappily, to function in so neat and one-dimensional a fashion.

cerned with homosexuality but with the ever-present danger of sexual activity between men.

It is this unadmitted tension, longing and terror and wrath, which creates their curiously mindless and pallid, yet smouldering atmosphere. It is a mistake, I think, that this subject matter sets them apart in any fruitful or significant way from anything written by James M. Cain or Laura Z. Hobson or Mary Jane Ward. They are alike in that they are wholly unable to recreate or interpret any of the reality or complexity of human experience; and that area which it is their self-avowed purpose to illuminate is precisely the area on which is thrown the most distorting light. As one may close [Hobson's] *Gentleman's Agreement*, which is about Gentiles and Jews, having gained no insight into the mind of either; as [Ward's] *The Snake Pit* reveals nothing of madness and James M. Cain tells us nothing of men and women, so one may read any current novel concerned with homosexual love and encounter merely a procession of platitudes the ancestry of which again may be traced to *The Rover Boys* and their golden ideal of chastity.

It is quite impossible to write a worthwhile novel about a Jew or a Gentile or a Homosexual, for people refuse, unhappily, to function in so neat and one-dimensional a fashion. If the novelist considers that they are

no more complex than their labels, he must, of necessity, produce a catalogue, in which we will find, neatly listed, all those attributes with which the label is associated; and this can only operate to reinforce the brutal and dangerous anonymity of our culture.

A novel insistently demands the presence and passion of human beings, who cannot ever be labeled. Once the novelist has created a human being, he has shattered the label and, in transcending the subject matter, is able, for the first time, to tell us something about it and to reveal how profoundly all things involving human beings interlock. Without this passion, we may all smother to death, locked in those airless, labeled cells, which isolate us from each other and separate us from ourselves; and without this passion when we have discovered the connection between that Boy Scout who smiles from the subway poster and that underworld to be found all over America, vengeful time will be upon us. ▼

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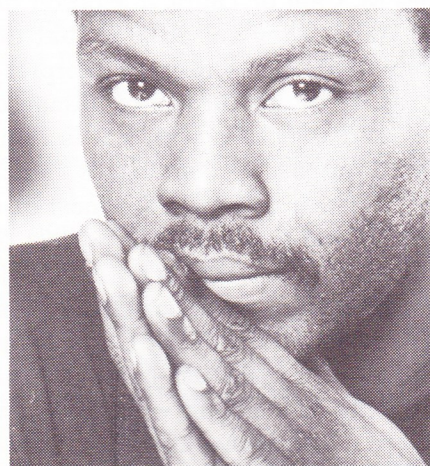
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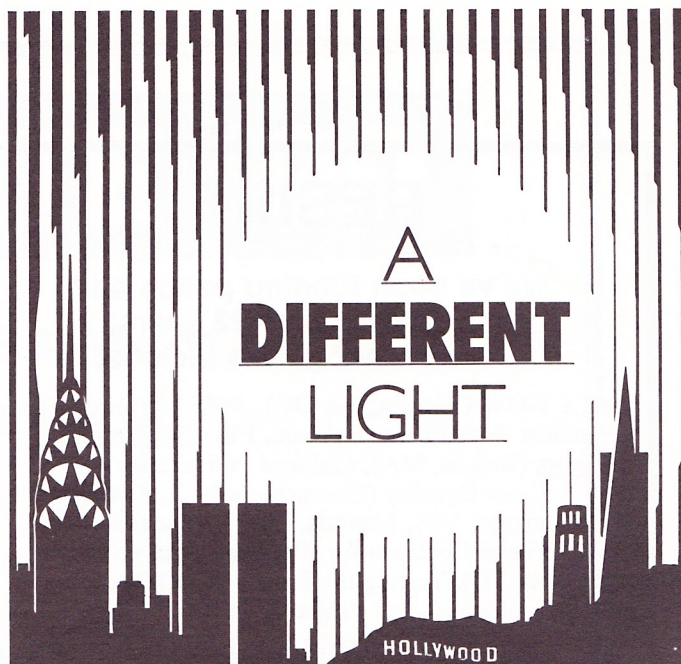
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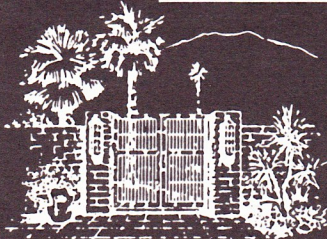
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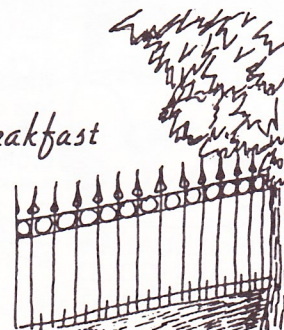
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Incest

and Other Sexual Taboos: *A Dialogue Between Men and Women*

The conversation that follows actually began several months ago at an OUT/LOOK Editorial Board meeting. We had asked a lesbian therapist to write an article on incest and the lesbian community; as we were reviewing the proposed outline, our discussion erupted into contention.

Initially, differences emerged along gender lines. A male editor said he found the "incest awareness" sweeping the lesbian community to be potentially dangerous to gay men—inflaming the homophobic myth of gay men as child molesters, negating the positive aspects of intergenerational sex. A female editor argued angrily that gay men should defend—and join—lesbians in their leadership of the anti-child abuse movement.

Then gender lines began to blur. One woman confessed to questioning whether lesbians were falsely identifying themselves as incest survivors; a man tearfully shared his own family's incestuous history. Other women expressed curiosity about



*Illustrations
by Monica Thwaites*

the "tradition" of intergenerational sex among men; men wondered how young lesbians ever manage to come out without it.

Given OUT/LOOK's mission to give voice to precisely this type of dialogue, we decided that our first article on incest (and it surely will not be the last) should reflect the discoveries of that first conversation on the subject. So we reconvened to explore further a few of the questions that initially had proved most controversial for us. Our names and some identifying details have been changed to reflect the confidentiality of our interchange.

What you read here are excerpts from that round table discussion. We hope it will encourage other gay men and lesbians to talk with each other about this issue...and that you'll share your thoughts and experiences with us.

— Meredith Maran
for the editors of OUT/LOOK.

Is the lesbian incest survivors' movement a fad?

Carol: I have some reservations about whether or not people are going overboard with incest. I've gone to a lot of 12-step Al-Anon meetings over the years and now I'm less interested in going because in the last year so many people who speak say, "I've just gotten in touch with the incest issue with my family." It's just overwhelming to me. I feel like that's not something I relate to personally, and it overshadows discussions about dysfunctional families, sex, whatever. I have a hard time believing all this talk about incest but then I think, well, who am I to doubt it? If people are saying it's true, it is true. Still, part of me doesn't want to hear about this anymore because it seems like it's having a very clamping down effect on our culture.

Liz: I have real mixed reactions too. I haven't dealt with incest personally, but I've seen friends go through the wringer dealing with incest memories and pain.

I've also heard people talk about incest in a way that made me distrustful. Someone I know joined an incest group because her father spanked her, someone else because an uncle kissed her once. I kept thinking, is there something I'm missing here, something I don't understand? And then there are people so inside of their pain that they feel threatened by any discussions about sexual issues, like S/M. It seems like incest





survivors are often the most conservative on sexual issues, associating any issue of sexual power with sexual abuse, and making extremely severe judgments.

Diane: I can understand why you think it's strange for someone to join an incest group because she got spanked. But if her father spanked her because what he really wanted to do was rape her, or because he was sexually attracted to her and he was taking that out on her physically, and that three-year-old child recognized that what was happening was in fact a violent sexual act against her, he didn't have to put his penis in her to accomplish incestuous abuse.

Jean: Isn't it a positive development, though, that we're moving out of the age when we didn't talk about sex?

Alice: Well, I have to assume that talking about incest is a positive development for most people. The question is, are people extrapolating to other experiences where there's been an unequal power dynamic, and labeling that as sexual abuse?

Mark: Within a family, power relationships exist no matter how old the participants are. If I had sex with my Dad, even if he were 60 and I were 40, he'd still be my dad and there'd be a weird relationship there. It's a big taboo and I respect it as a taboo.

John: Another consideration is how immediately the adult and the child are related. In the immediate family, there is a whole history of psychodynamic relations that colors any kind of interaction; sexual interaction is highly charged in that situation. But moving out toward cousins and uncles and aunts, that changes. The kind of power relationship that an aunt or an uncle would have over you is not the same as when it's your father.

Diane: I don't feel that a 13-year-old or, for that matter, a 16-year-old can make what I would consider an informed decision to have sex with any adult in his or her family.

Paul: What about a 15-year-old boy with an uncle?

Diane: There are a lot of decisions that young people make that they would articulate as being consensual. But part of being a kid is that you don't often know what is in your own best interest. If an adult is having physical contact with a child, and the main goal of that contact is to give the adult sexual gratification, then as far as I'm concerned, it's sexual abuse. Period.

Paul: Well, at what point can a young person decide to have sex with an adult? At 18? You're so categorical about it.

Diane: Yeah, within a family I am totally categorical about it. If a father and a son are 20 and 50, it's still an adult-child relationship. In a family, or in any situation in which there is a heavy power dynamic—which includes every situation on the face of the earth—there's no way that a child can make a consensual decision.

Paul: So you consider sexual contact between an adult and a child in a family to be traumatizing even if it was the child who initiated the contact?

Diane: Yes, I do. But let's go back to the original question about incest in the lesbian community. I believe that part of why the feminist/lesbian movements have been anti-sexual is because a very large percentage of those women were sexually abused. Whether they remember it or not. And as far as I'm concerned, that's just another reason to say, let's focus on sexual abuse, let's try to remember if we were sexually abused, let's do go to incest groups, let's do whatever we can to find our own healthy sexuality.

I've asked a lot of lesbian therapists if they think incest work is a fad in the lesbian community—if people are jumping on the bandwagon just because they didn't fit into ACA or AA. Every therapist I asked said the same thing: Who would opt to go through hell? It's just not that much fun to do incest work.

How has the incest survivor's movement effected gay and lesbian sexuality?

Diane: Whether lesbians are just jumping on the "incest bandwagon" is one question. The second question is, is that "bandwagon," that movement, having a negative impact on sexuality within either the lesbian or gay male communities?

"The feminist/lesbian movements may be anti-sexual because many of the women involved may have been sexually abused."

Liz: I think it has had both positive and negative effects. One positive effect has been a re-opening of discussion about sexuality for lesbians, and a legitimizing of the question, did I become a lesbian because of incest? I know people who can talk about that now for themselves, outside of others' stereotypes.

Diane: My theory about why there are so many lesbian incest survivors is that child sexual abuse teaches you from an early age to cross a major taboo and once you've crossed it, it's easier to cross the barrier to being a lesbian. Ellen Bass told me that a woman in one of her groups said, "If I'm a lesbian because I was molested, thank God at least something good came out of it." I think anything anyone can do to have a healthy sex life in this culture, more power to him or her.

Alice: Yes. But I have had people tell me that I am recapitulating the incest experience if I want to spank my girlfriend. And that being in a butch-femme relationship is recapitulating an incest relationship because it is daddy and little girl. And that's having a major impact on the movement. It's splitting us right down the middle, and it's demonizing a large section of

the gay community: men who are into any kind of intergenerational sex or even gaps of more than a few years in terms of the kinds of partners they're attracted to, people who have daddy models, and the whole sexual-experimenting lesbian population. They're all being demonized because of their danger to incest survivors and battery survivors.

Kathy: Yeah, but that demonizing has always been there.

Alice: But it has an ideological support now. And it's a lot harder to deal with.

Jean: There's a way in which it's about disorienting sexuality.

Diane: I wondered if some of the men would like to speak, because I've heard gay men say that this focusing on incest and child sexual abuse is somehow having an inhibiting effect on gay male sexuality.

Paul: I think the power imbalance issue is just too categorical. You have to look at the context, you have to look at the situation, you have to look at the meaning people attach to it. Even among older people there's always a power imbalance. Between men and women it's endemic.

"I'd rather have been sexually molested by my father than have been forced to play Little League."

Diane: How do you perceive the power imbalance issue as harmful?

Paul: Because it completely rules out any kind of consensual multigenerational sexual activity, whether it's within the family or outside the family. I can think of the sex that I was involved in when I was 11 or 12. Some of it was with people older than I was, and there was absolutely nothing abusive about it. A lot

of it has to do the fact that I'm a man. If I was a woman at that age it would have been very different.

Kathy: What's the difference?

Paul: Well, the difference is that in this culture, men are just allowed to be more sexual. We masturbate, we valorize conquests. Whether we're gay or straight, that's what it means to be a man in this culture. A lot of sex is power, but a lot of it is getting off on negating that power. When I think of a sexual relationship between a black man and a white woman, I think of that. For the white woman, it's negating power; for the man, it's playing with power.

Diane: I make a real distinction between an adult and a child. Adults can make their choices to play with power or even choose to abdicate their power, if that's what they want to do for a limited period of time in a game, or for real, because that's an adult choice.

Mark: That's the question. Where do you begin, and where is that cut off point—12, 13, 14, 19? And you were saying that it wouldn't matter —

Liz: But we're also talking about being gay. The issue affects me in a particular way because I'm a lesbian. Until recently I could not be affectionate with a little girl without the thought running through my head that I might be perceived as a lesbian who desired that little kid.

Mark: I think it's much more a strain for gay men because the cultural image of gay men molesting children is so much stronger.

How does the incest taboo affect the development of sexuality?

Alice: It seems like a lot of the damage incest does is because it's such a taboo, combined with the fact that we live in a society that doesn't like sex altogether.

Liz: It's like dealing with rape: half the problem is how people react to it, and the other half is the actual physical act. Any act isn't necessarily harmful; it's how everybody reacts to that act, how everybody treats the person. If people treat a little girl who's gotten abused like something's wrong with *her*, if she's not allowed to talk about it, the trauma is magnified.

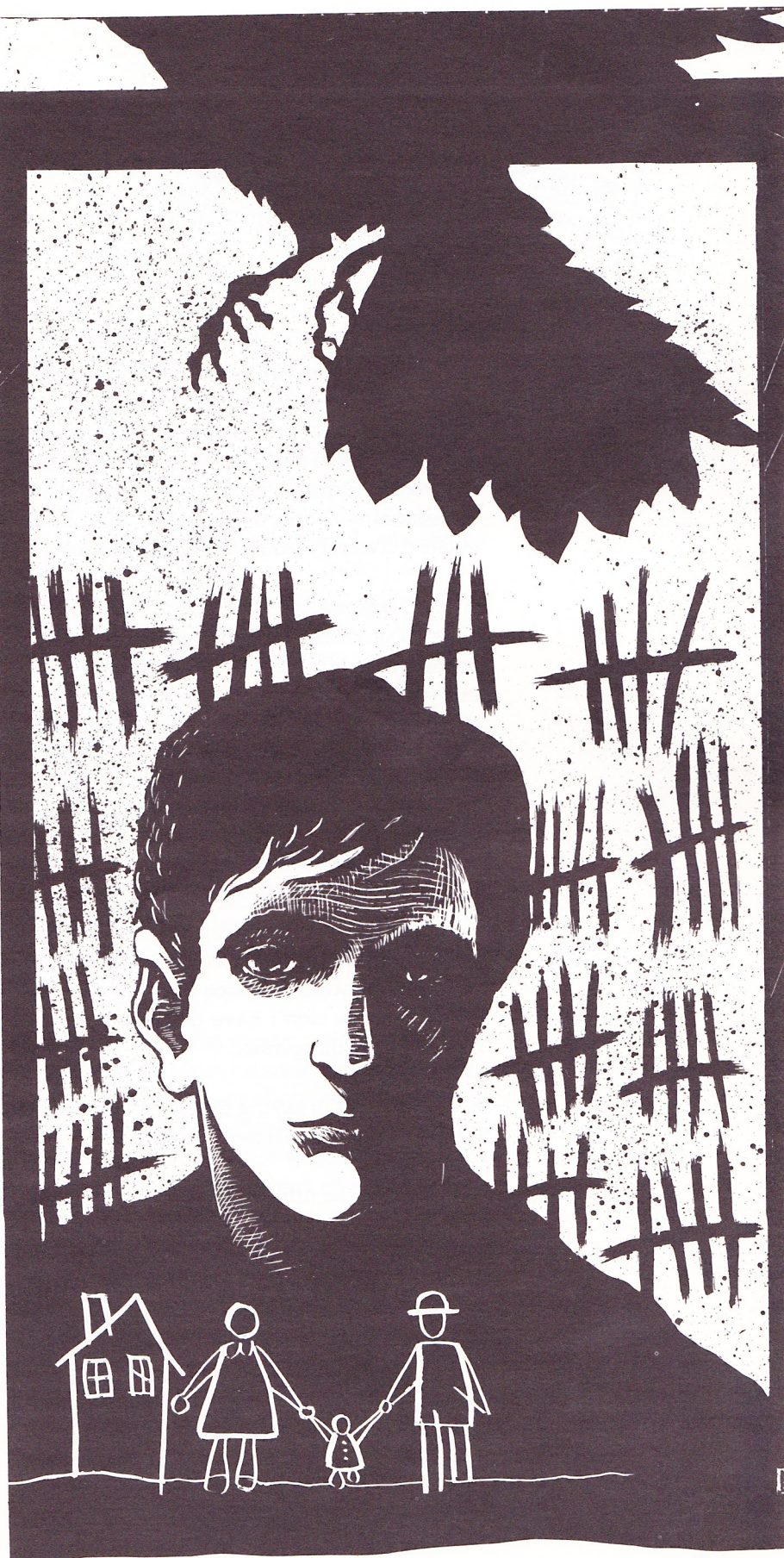
Alice: It seems to me that the nature of a taboo is that it prevents any real discussion. Because when you say that this is impossible and not allowed, it does not stop it from happening, it stops us from talking about it. It stops any kind of radical reconsideration of it.

When I was 11, 12, 13-years-old I wanted to have sex with my uncle, and I tried. He would not cooperate, and it was extremely frustrating for me. But my mother made it clear to me that if anybody ever found out that I was sexually touching my uncle, that that would be even more dangerous than the fact that I had been raped by my step-father, because then I would be seen as somebody who was mentally bad, because I was a sexual aggressor. I think what happens with the taboo is that it prevents looking at what we do with it. And what we do with it mostly is define children as non-sexual and without a right to sexuality, especially where adults are concerned.

Liz: The other side of this is that my father *stopped* relating to me shortly before puberty, and to this day if I stand next to him, he moves away. I'm sure his behavior is directly related to the incest taboo, and it's been harmful to me.

Kathy: I wish my father had done that.

John: I think part of the problem is the fact that in our society, sex is treated differently than other forms of power abuse by parents. For instance, I would rather have been sexually molested by my father than have been forced to play Little League, because I feel like the Little League kind of coercion, which is a very gender-based kind of thing, was very damag-



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ing for lots of young men who were victimized by their fathers' desire for athletic success. That's a power abuse. And it's one very much related to gender socialization. It's confusing the matter to mush that together along with the sexual question. Why do we treat sexual abuse differently from Little League abuse?

Alice: I believe that the human family is an abusive situation. The problem is that parents protect you, but what they're mostly protecting you from is them. It's not that sex is so dangerous for children, it's that everything within the family is dangerous. I really believe it. When I was a kid, if there had been any outside institution that I could have gone to for protection, I would have.

Liz: Parents get to define what is sex, what is permissible. I believe that it is possible for an adult and a child to have consensual sex if the child has an outside source of safety and definition. But we don't have that. And without that, it's very dangerous.

Kathy: So you're saying that if people viewed it differently, it might be okay.

Liz: It would be different.

Alice: The thing that's missing when we talk about incest and child sexual abuse, what's missing within the lesbian movement, is the fact that very young girl children have a right to sex and a right to seek it out. And it is shocking to me that radical feminists and lesbians could believe what the greater culture believes: that children don't have sex, or sexual desire.

Diane: Does anybody in this room think that children aren't sexual, that they don't have the right to have sex?

John: You said that children are sexual, but that doesn't say anything about how children's sexuality interacts with the whole socialization process. For instance, I have always been involved with men who are younger than me. And there are men who are 15, 20 years younger than me who are interested in older men. Now where does that come from? Why does that arouse, emerge? And how is that rooted in the child's history of sexuality in his family and his relationship to his father? It used to be dismissed as pathological. I don't think it is pathological anymore, but I have no idea how that relates to the dynamic of childhood sexual development and socialization in the family.

Do gay men and lesbians perceive intergenerational relationships—and child sexual abuse—differently?

Carol: One of the things that I have always been jealous of gay men for is that when you are a young boy and you realize you're a faggot, it's acceptable to go looking for an older gay man to learn from. When I was a kid there was no way to find an older lesbian, even though I had fantasies about finding one and seducing her. I think that because lesbians don't have that experience, we can't imagine how powerful it is—which makes it difficult for us to get behind intergenerational sex between men.

Jean: I become jealous and outraged when I think of the way in which gay men eroticize difference. I'm amazed when I read the personal ads or talk to my gay male friends who tell me that there is, for example, a term for white men who like Asian men—"rice queens"—and people can get off on that and structure relationships around that, and it can be meaningful. I'm frustrated at what I perceive as male privilege to institute taboos and then violate them in the same breath. Flaunt-

ing that power becomes part of the sexual charge. When white women look at me, a black woman, I get offended when I feel they are objectifying me, reducing me to some sexual fantasy that they need. Yet, the taboo signals a danger that's alluring, I must admit. But whether it's because I've been socialized as a woman to deny my sexual appetites or because as a black woman, I know that certain desires are white fictive constructions, I can't acknowledge the eroticism in that moment, being caught in that gaze as...

Paul: Other.

Jean: Other. The question of legitimate/illegitimate attractions across taboo lines—like race—is problematic for me. It's problematic for me to defend sexual fetishes, attractions, and interests which reflect political differences, imbalances, and hierarchies in other realms. White people can defend those choices more fully than I can, because I also have to concern myself with issues of race and class. I have to. I have no choice in the matter. My survival depends on it.

I also can relate to being jealous of gay men, and that kind of cross-generational access they have. It's legitimized. I have a friend in New York, a black man, who when he was 14 or 15 years old, was a hustler. And he is very clear that his education and his position now derive in large part from his relationships with older wealthy white men who supported him, gave him access to education, and to experiences he couldn't have gotten any other way. What happened to him within his family as a very effeminate black man was horrible, and what happened to him on the streets was a positive experience. I don't have that same kind of experience. I could have used it.

Carol: This conversation is making me realize that I don't have as many qualms about the concept of intergenerational sex between gay people as I do between heterosexuals because I know it can be a harbor from the outside world that can help some people come out. Yet I have a different standard about incest, or about sex between adults and teenagers who

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aren't the same sex. I'm more willing to assume it's consensual when it's people of the same sex.

Diane: I feel like the way it's played out among gay men is really different. And I wonder if it's possible that an experience that might be illegitimately construed as abusive to a girl child might not feel as abusive to a boy child, or an intergenerational sexual relationship between a man and a boy might genuinely be a different kind of experience.

Kathy: Our time's about up for this discussion. How should we wrap it up?

Diane: I think the the differences we had at the beginning are still there. I still think adults should not be having sex with children. But what has changed for me is that I'm more open to exploring—at least intellectually!—the meanings and permutations of intergenerational sex.

Carol: The thing I'm most struck by is the newness of this dialogue between men and women about this subject—or about anything related to sex. I hope this encourages people to go out and grab their opposite-gender gay friends and find out what they think of all this.

Liz: Yeah, I've never been in a room with men and women who were talking about this before. I think a discussion like this is one of the most magical things that lesbians and gay men can do together. ▼

About the artist: Monica Thwaites is a Vancouver glass and graphic designer who also owns a children's mural painting business.



PHOTO ESSAY BY
SAUL BROMBERGER
& SANDRA HOOVER





Saul Bromberger and Sandra Hoover, Bay Area photographers, have photographed the San Francisco lesbian and gay parade for six years.

LESBIAN PATIENT

by Sharon Deevey

Illustration by J.E. Randall

DURING THE SUMMER of 1987, I took care of a thirty-five-year-old suicidal patient named Sandy. With my six years of acute psychiatric nursing experience, Sandy's admission assessment sounded familiar: "An overdose with pills after the end of a love affair; a history of childhood incest; five years sobriety in AA before her recent relapse." When I read the psychiatrist's notes in her chart I recognized another relevant piece of information: "borderline life-style...confusion about sexual identity."

When I met Sandy on my first rounds, I doubted that she was "confused" about her sexual orientation. Like many other professional lesbians, I wear clothes in public that are feminine enough to pass for straight. Sandy, though, was unmistakably a dyke. She wore jeans, boots, and a plaid flannel shirt. Her hair was cut in a punk Mohawk; a labrys earring dangled from one ear. Sandy was a formidable woman. I knew, as a lesbian nurse, that I would find caring for Sandy to be a complex and challenging experience.

Lesbian communities where I have lived are like small towns. And I have rarely cared

for an in-patient lesbian whom I didn't either know or know of. During my closeted years early in my nursing career, I sweated out a lot of lesbian admissions wondering which would be the one to blow *my* cover. As a new nurse, I read medical articles about "homosexual panic" and dreaded the day when I'd have to lock a psychotic lesbian in seclusion while she screamed homophobic obscenities at me, by name, in front of all my straight nursing colleagues. That nightmare never happened. Fortunately, by the time I was assigned to care for Sandy, I was "out" as a lesbian nurse.

Sandy's hospitalization turned out to be complicated for me anyway. Her out-patient therapist was Una, the local lesbian incest-recovery specialist. Una was also my on-again-off-again lover, the last remaining non-monogamist east of the Rockies. She had the power of an old-style butch, and spoke with the emotional eloquence of a healer.

It was the first time I had cared for a lesbian inpatient who was also my lover's client. I told Sandy vaguely that I was a friend of Una's. I never mentioned the connection to the other nurses, with whom I shared few

✓

details of my personal life. Sandy herself turned out to be the most hostile, militant, openly-lesbian dyke my unit had ever seen.

I worked with Sandy on seven or eight shifts during the next three weeks. As a part-time nurse, I was not the primary coordinator of her care; but both Sandy and the staff turned to me (as the one openly lesbian nurse) for support. As the days passed, Sandy's anger and resistance intensified. She continued to express suicidal fantasies and had a chip on her shoulder the size of a redwood. By the end of three weeks, I was very tired of my role as the lesbian "expert," and of bearing the brunt of both Sandy's rage and the staff's bewilderment.

One evening was particularly intense. The nurses were already stressed by several manic patients: a mentally retarded young woman with cerebral palsy (who stumbled down the hallway masturbating despite all efforts at behavior modification), and a floridly psychotic 23-year-old man named Sam, whose detailed delusional descriptions of being the "only 10-year-old Captain in the Vietnam war" offered the most remarkable saga of blood and treachery this side of all *Platoon* movies he'd seen.

Sandy sat in the back corner of the smoking room, surrounded by her card-playing dyke visitors who talked loudly about lesbian life, chain-smoking as recovering alcoholics sometimes do, and staring with hostility at nurses making rounds. Several of Sandy's friends shouted "Hi, Sharon" as I approached; like Sandy, they were clients of my lover, and we'd shared space many times in Una's waiting room. God, I thought, it's lucky I'm "out" here. The staff seemed to assume that all lesbian women know each other, and laughed when I joked, "the dykes are restless tonight," guiltily trying to manage my conflicting feelings.

Between delusional war stories, our young man Sam made the mistake of making sexual remarks to Sandy in the close quarters of the smoking room. Sexual harassment was not something Sandy could tolerate, and on my next rounds she told me intensely, "Sharon, you'd better do something about this guy. I'm an incest survivor and I don't let no man say this shit to me!"

Una had taught me most of what I knew about incest recovery. I had learned that Sandy's right to a safe space was just as strong as Sam's right to the "least restrictive

LESBIAN NURSE



environment." In the nursing station, we debated how to manage the conflicting needs of these patients. Sam's self-control deteriorated, however, despite extra medication and our best efforts at milieu management. After putting Sam into seclusion, the nurses and security officers walked past the smoking room toward the nursing station. Sandy and her friends were making loud remarks about "prisons" and "the bunch of cops running this place." Jesus, Sandy, I thought, give me a god-damned break. Aloud, I murmured something about the challenges of psychiatric nursing care.

I remembered when I, too, had thought of psychiatry as the enemy of the people—before I got hooked on nursing in this environment. I still distrusted many of the doctors, but they were easily avoided by working evening shifts. It was the patients I loved, people who needed safety and intelligent caring at a vulnerable time in their lives. I, too, had been depressed at times (what lesbian hasn't?) and could cajole and love and count the sharp objects of acutely suicidal people with great patience, until the impulse to die passed, and the strength to face the morning returned.

I often remembered individual patients, like a woman I cared for who was too depressed even to wipe herself, who smiled again after shock therapy, and returned to work; we joked, with relief, that she was "living better electrically," and I therefore no longer believed that electric shock therapy was universally barbaric.

I often helped women, and sometimes men, bring to consciousness their hideous memories of childhood abuses, teaching them to cope, to communicate, to heal. And I liked the teamwork of physical crisis intervention with out-of-control psychotic patients. On a tense unit, we were united, constantly alert to the pacing, eye movements, and verbal oddities that warned us when hallucinating patients were beginning to lose control. With the assistance of hospital security officers (who were under nursing direction), we used our combined emotional and physical power to keep everyone safe. I had learned early in my career as a psychiatric nurse that family and friends preferred not to hear my work stories over supper. But I felt proud of my skills, pleased with the chance to use my emotional, intellectual and physical energy in this work.

ON THE LAST DAY before I was to begin my vacation, Sandy was still on the unit. She remained on suicide precautions, fretting and hostile to be denied privileges she saw more recently admitted patients getting. One of my lesbian friends also was working that day; hearing the change-of-shift report of Sandy's continuing rage, we made brief eye contact, sharing a special anguish for the pain of lesbian patients. Because my friend is closeted at work, I had to wait till the nursing station was empty to talk with her about Sandy. "I want to confront her," I said, "even though I'm not assigned to her today, and even though I'm not sure exactly what I hope to accomplish."

"She's so stuck," my friend replied, "it probably can't hurt." Encouraged, I checked first with Sandy's primary nurse and asked

I MAY SEEM LIKE AN UPTIGHT
NURSE IN MY DRESSED-FOR-WORK
DRAG, BUT YOU AND I ARE PART
OF THE SAME COMMUNITY.

permission to chat with Sandy that shift. The primary nurse agreed, and so did Sandy.

As I closed the conference room door, I said, "Sandy, this is my last shift here for the next two weeks. Before I go, I want to have a dyke-to-dyke talk with you." Her eyes widened and she grinned. It startled me, because like so many fierce women she was suddenly lovely as she smiled, like the sun coming out on a blustery November day.

"Listen, Sandy," I said, trying to regain my personal and professional equilibrium. "I may seem to you an uptight nurse in my dressed-for-work drag, but you and I are part of the same community. Una tells me she's worried about you. I'm worried about you. You seem determined to kill yourself—or stay in this hospital in a rage forever. You have years of sobriety. You're a fine looking dyke. If you die it will be a terrible waste. I want to know what the hell is going on with you."

It was hardly the way I had practiced the "helping interview" in nursing school. In a way, though, I was following one of the guidelines of empathetic communication—to respond in the tone and intensity of the patient.

I WAS ANGRY AT HOW FREQUENTLY NURSES USED OUR LIMITED POWER TO BLOCK RATHER THAN TO PROMOTE PROGRESS.

She was silent for several moments, and I waited. "I've always bullshitted," she said finally. "I'm sick of bullshit. I know how to do it. I could tell them that I'm fine, easy, and get my privileges. But I won't, because I'm *not* fine. I'm depressed. I'm pissed."

We made progress from there. Sandy talked about how Una had helped her face her own self-destructive behavior in clinging to a rejecting partner. "I'm used to mixed messages," she explained. "I grew up in a dysfunctional family. Una tells me to look at how my lover *treated* me, not just that she kept *saying* she loved me." I flinched, hearing Sandy repeat advice which I knew applied too accurately to my own deteriorating affair with Una.

When Sandy and I finished talking, we hugged, as lesbians do when parting. When I returned to work two weeks later, Sandy had been discharged. The nurses reported, when I asked about her, that "nothing changed. She's just a typical borderline."

A couple of months later, I was surprised to see Sandy in the patient dining room. She waved and came over to talk. After attempt-

ing suicide again, she had been readmitted—not to the locked psychiatric unit but to the alcohol unit. I visited her there a couple of times—and was surprised to see her laughing and relaxed among the other recovering alcoholics. On my last visit, she wore the silver pin of the "wing leader" and reported with great pride her success in the program and her acceptance by the other patients as an open lesbian.

She thanked me for talking to her on the psych unit. "It helped," she said, "to see another lesbian around. I remember that you said you cared what happened to me." "Can I see you after I leave the hospital?" she asked. "Maybe we could get together for dinner?"

"No," I answered a little too quickly, and was glad I had rehearsed the same lines with so many lesbian patients before her. "No, Sandy. I keep a strict division between my work and my private life. When we run into each other at community events, as I'm sure we will, I'll always be glad to see you. I'll want a hug, and I'll want to know how you are. But we can't be friends."

I said goodbye, and as I stood waiting for the elevator, I thought, Sandy, Sandy, how did we miss the boat upstairs on the psych unit? What has finally helped you?

In fact I knew, or at least suspected, what it was in the 12-step AA treatment program that had helped her. I knew that psychiatry and 12-step programs have conflicting explanations of, and treatments for, emotional and mental distress. Psychiatrists believe a combination of biochemical and pathological-parenting theories of causation; they treat the most acutely "ill," and their biochemical and psychodynamic interventions often help.

Twelve-step programs see addiction as the cause of the mental and emotional "unmanageability" of life. Sobriety is the first step toward mental and emotional recovery, and sobriety sometimes heals those whom repeated psychiatric hospitalizations have failed to help. Psychiatrists and psychiatric nurses often, in my opinion, overlook the symptoms and devastation of addiction in patients and their families, considering alco-

holism a different disease, someone else's specialty, or a self-help fad. That's what had happened with Sandy on my unit.

I too had several years of sobriety, which I rarely discussed with nursing colleagues, having found that admitting to the stigmas of both lesbianism and alcoholism seemed more than I could bear. Nor do I share information about my recovery with patients, believing it countertherapeutic to report years of sobriety but admit I had left AA after six months. I knew it would not be helpful to a patient new to sobriety to hear me admit I had always been too afraid of letting go to put my trust in a sponsor. When I recently joined a 12-step co-dependency group, I realized that my own primary addiction is not just to alcohol but rather to relationships and to people. Sometimes I "need a meeting" as desperately as other recovering alcoholics describe needing an AA meeting.

A couple of months after Sandy was discharged from the alcohol unit, I came across a book by D.G. Finnegan and E.B McNally, *Dual Identities: Counseling Chemically Dependent Lesbians and Gay Men*. There I found a description of the stages of lesbian identity development in alcoholic lesbian women. I was amazed. Stage Two (when lesbians drink to deal with their internalized homophobia and isolate themselves in closeted couples) sounded painfully like my own life before I decided to be open as a lesbian. Stage Three (self-protecting arrogance, and rage at homophobia) described Sandy in remarkable detail.

I was so excited by my discovery that I stopped on my way to work the next day to share the book with Joann, the head nurse on the alcohol unit. Joann was technically my supervisor. I told Joann how pleased I had been to see how much progress Sandy had made after transferring to her unit. I showed her the book, and as I started to describe how much it sounded just like Sandy, Joann interrupted me. "Sharon," she said, "this hospital is not ready for this kind of literature...."

I heard my own quick intake of breath, feeling anger and fear rush through me. Joann was someone I had considered an ally. She knew about my sexual orientation and that

she had praised the workshop on gay and lesbian issues I had given in the hospital.

"Oh," I said, gathering my wits, "are you saying that this book wouldn't be helpful to your staff at this time?" "No," she said forcefully, "the hospital is not ready to deal with these issues."

Her firm repetition scared me, and I made a quick prayer to my higher power for serenity and the wisdom to know the difference between what can and what can't be changed at a given point in time. I was angry as well as frightened, and I marveled at how frequently nurses use our limited power to block rather than to promote progress.

Maybe I *am* naive, I thought. Maybe Una is right when she tells me I'm foolish to hope that heterosexuals will grow beyond homophobia. When she teases me about being the "Mighty Mouse" of lesbian advocacy, I know she cares about me. I know she's afraid I will get hurt, in situations just like this.

I fled upstairs to the locked psychiatric unit where I was scheduled to work. I thought about how we really hadn't been able to help Sandy on the psychiatric unit, with the important exception of keeping her safe. Despite the resistance of the head nurse on the alcohol unit to lesbian recovery theory, Sandy had made progress under the nursing care she received on the alcoholism unit—and I wanted to know more about why. Someday, I resolved, I'd get clearer what helps lesbians move toward sobriety and serenity. How do we—Sandy and I and all the great variety of lesbian women in our bar-centered community—recover from chemical dependency? How do we grow from shame and self-hate to joy and self-affirmation? Someday, I resolved I'd study the lesbian recovery theory more fully. Someday...one day at a time. ▼

Sharon Deevey has lived in Ohio since 1977. She has been a nurse for nine years, and is currently completing a Ph.D. in Nursing at The Ohio State University.

About the artist: J.E. Randall is an artist/musician working in Baltimore and tooling around on her purple scooter.

Coming In

by Robert John Florence

9/18 (1:30 PM) —

"Dear Dad,

Looking forward to your visit!

Enclosed is the brochure about the motel. There's no restaurant connected with it, but there are places within a few blocks for breakfast, etc. I think it might be advisable to keep the car, at least for a few days. The bus system is not the most pleasant way to get around & the cabs are pretty expensive.

I sure know what it's

like to be surrounded by people who are sick & dying, as you mentioned in your letter about the mobile home park. Several friends have died recently & my intimate friend of five years has been in the hospital eight times so far this year. He's there again now, in fact, & the strain of trying to be there for him has taken its toll, both during the time of my own illness & now. If you wonder why I wasn't more of an optimist, that's the reason!

I saw the chemotherapist last week. He says I look healthy & symptom-free, so he's not going to do another scan until November.

I'm having a small get-together on Friday the 30th for the friends who were most sup-

portive during my treatment, so they can meet you & you can meet them, so don't plan something else for that night.

Love to Gen. See you soon. Bobby."

9/18 (4:15 PM) —

Sitting on a cliff at Land's End, near a sign that says "Dead Man's Point—People have fallen to their death from this ridge—please keep off." Ten feet behind me, a sweating bicyclist (helmet, yellow spandex) exhausts his Bic trying to light a joint or a cigarette. Just the two of us here alone at the summit of the world.

Yesterday I mentioned to Tim that Hal had probably arrived in Greece by now. "What's he going to do?" he asked.

"Tour the country," I answered, "maybe a few of the islands."

His eyes rolled back into his head, so that only the whites showed through half-open lids. "Am I on an island?" he asked.

"No," I said, "more like a peninsula. Or maybe an isthmus."

Suddenly he was back in his body. "What the hell are you talking about?"

"Greece," I said. "The land of Greece."

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He's on oxygen again. The Hickman catheter has been removed, a Foley catheter implanted. Fevers are down. Would it matter if I said fevers are up? I no longer care about these details. I go to the hospital each night to sit with him, to be with him as he slips in & out of sync. The substance of our lives no longer matters to me. All I know is that the time I spend with him is the closest I ever get to anything like peace.

9/26 —

Under the bay to Oakland, Tim back at his dad's house. Getting him into a wheelchair for the ten-foot journey to the bathroom, where his stepmother had filled the tub. Inching his legs along the sheets toward the precipice, the wrinkled wince of pain. Then from the porcelain throne, he starts giving me orders for preparing a sitting bath; Lois from the bedroom, straining to change the linen, continuing to shout directions for the tub. I'm kneeling on the tiles following both sets of commands. Lois discovers the change in plans: "Honey, you need a bath, you're starting to smell."

"Cold day in hell," he says.

Lois loses it, starts screaming for Jack, makes a hasty exit out the front door: "I'm going shopping."

So Jack & I wash Tim's body with several antiseptic soaps, then gently rub him dry. Agonizing return to the bedroom, hefting him up on his side to change the diaper. Jack notices two dark purple lumps the size of oranges at the base of Tim's spine: "Jesus Christ, what're those?"

"You guys weren't supposed to see that," Tim says.

Jack stands there trying to put on those paper-thin sterile plastic gloves to apply the zinc oxide & can't take his eyes from the two lumps. He loses it. He rips the gloves from his hands, sits for a few seconds sobbing in the wheelchair, then jumps up & runs out. A few minutes later, we hear the earthquake sound of his chipping machine. I look out the window. He is shredding the back yard. I call through the screen but he can't hear, he's wearing huge black plastic mufflers, he looks like Mickey Mouse.

I finish cleaning Tim, attach the diaper, get him settled into position on his side, then go & sit in the wheelchair. A pause, then he says, "Honey, you all right?"

"Of course not," I say.

"What's the matter?"

I go & sit next to him on the bed. "You know what the matter is."

"I'm getting pretty close, huh?" he says, & I nod.

I say, "But really, could it be any worse than this?"

He closes his eyes. "Let's watch TV," he says.

So we spend the next hour & a half watching old movies on the Nostalgia channel, Laurel & Hardy, Zasu Pitts, Coney Island adventures. Tim lies on his side, watching through the full-length mirror on the closet door because he can't raise his head enough to see directly. He dozes, he swoons, he listens. Then I notice he is counting pills, arranging different-colored pills in little piles on the bed: Percodan, Dilaudid, Valium, Halcion, Dextran Sulfate,

AZT, the antibiotic for the pneumonia, the Naprosyn for the fever, the Reglan for nausea, the Lasix for urination, several others I don't recognize.

He is counting on his fingers. "What time will it be in six hours?"

"Ten," I say.

"And how many hours is that?"

"Six," I say.

"But what time will it be, goddamit?"

"Ten," I say.

"You're no fucking help."

"What's wrong with him?" she asks. I am struck dumb for a few beats and then I say, "AIDS." That monstrously liberating word.

Later, Lois returns from the mall, Aunt Julie pulls up in the Mercedes, the attorney arrives in a cream-colored Cadillac, the chipping machine falls silent. I kiss Tim's forehead & tell him I'm leaving. "I won't be able to get here before next week," I say, "my dad's coming in tomorrow."

He squints up at me & says, "Does he know about me?"

"More or less," I say. "I wrote him a letter, I'm sure he'll know what I mean." He makes a short grunting sound & turns his head toward the window.

"Does that bother you?" I ask.

"I don't know," he says. "Let me think about it."

9/27 —

Up early to launder sheets, blankets, towels, upholstery covers, Mom's afghan, try to eradicate the cat hair & odors. A little desk work, can't sit still. Nervous lunch & then off to the motel. Third floor, Room 23 at the back. Knock knock. "Who's there?" says my stepmother.

"Bobby."

Dad is sprawled on the bed in his long flimsy undershorts, watching game shows. He giggles, we hug, skin touches but no pressing. I sit down at the table & three hours happens. For a while, it is wonderful to be with him; he is jolly & wacky; he makes me laugh in spite of myself. He is older but not softer. I have the *Village Voice* with me, he starts leafing through it. "Oh yeah," he says, "this is that left-handed rag that censored the Pentagon Papers, only printed the stuff that made the government look bad."

He's functionally deaf without his hearing aid. They've told him he needs another angioplasty, he's blocked again, he's got fluid in his lungs. "But I can't believe those arteries have filled up again so quick. I think the doctor's wife needs another fur coat. So I'm going to another specialist, see, & not tell him what this one said, & just see what he says." Power games, I think. Strategy. What time will it be in six hours, & how many hours is that?

We never make substantial eye contact. As with the touching, words are launched in

either direction, but only generally, nothing is aimed with precision. It is as though we were side by side in a wind tunnel. I am overwhelmed with boredom. I tell them I have work to do, I'll meet them later for dinner. He drives me home, I come in & fix some coffee, then call Oakland for a status report.

Julie answers in tears. "The ambulance is here, they're just putting him in, oh RJ, it must be the end," & her voice trails off in static. I guzzle the coffee, call the motel, Dad's not back yet. I tell Gen my friend is being taken to the hospital, I won't be able to make dinner. "What's wrong with him?" she asks. I am struck dumb for a few beats & then I say, "AIDS." That monstrously liberating word. I tell her I'll see them tomorrow. She seems to understand.

Lois meets me in the ER & takes me up. He is conscious but turned almost completely inward; he knows who we are but doesn't seem to care. Lois breaks down, heads for the smoking area, tells me to try & feed him. I place a piece of meat in his mouth, he chews for a few seconds & then zones out, the meat lies on his chapped lower lip. "Listen," I say, "you don't have to eat if you don't want to. I don't care what anybody says, if you want to stop eating, you stop eating." He focuses briefly, nods his head, then he's out of it again. "Brave boy," I say, stroking his cheek.

Incredible procedures to change his linen, insert a foam pad under the sheets. To weigh him. How tall is he? Does he live in a home or an apartment? Are there stairs? We need some blood. We need some urine.

Meaningless activity. Nurse calmly giving instructions for better home care. Jack arrives. Tim comes around, demands more painkillers. Jack takes a walk, returns. Lois takes a walk, returns. White antiseptic insanity. I am nearly crazed with frustration.

After they leave, I reach out for his hand but he pulls back. "You shouldn't touch me," he says, "you might get it." He's never been afraid of this before.

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I realize he is talking in code, talking to himself & not to me. He is trying to break free of all the hands he thinks are reaching out to keep him here, including his own, & this is the only way he knows how. His right brain is trying to tell his left brain to let go. I'm watching the two halves of him struggle to make contact in the face of insuperable obstacles. In all the world, there is no beauty such as this.

I sit with him until midnight, then unfold the cot & climb in.

As I lie in the semi-dark listening to him breathe, I clearly see what is necessary. Jack must tell Tim it is OK for him to go, that he, Jack, will be all right, he won't come apart. Because each of them has been hanging onto this charade to shield the other: the son must continue to live for his father's sake, the father must be strong for the son. They touch but do not touch, as if they were side by side in a wind tunnel. If Jack could bring himself to do that, I am convinced Tim would be gone within a day.

And yet, the mystery must be wider than my left-brain philosophizing. Maybe I see it this way because it is something like what I need, have always needed from my own father, spread out on a motel bed watching "Jeopardy" & cursing the ACLU. Maybe I think by acting as the binding force in Tim's family, I can somehow work out my own salvation.

9/28 (7:15 AM) —

I lean over & kiss him awake. His eyes shoot open & he says, in a voice brimming with equal parts of pride, frustration & surprise: "I'm still here."

9/28 (4:45 PM) —

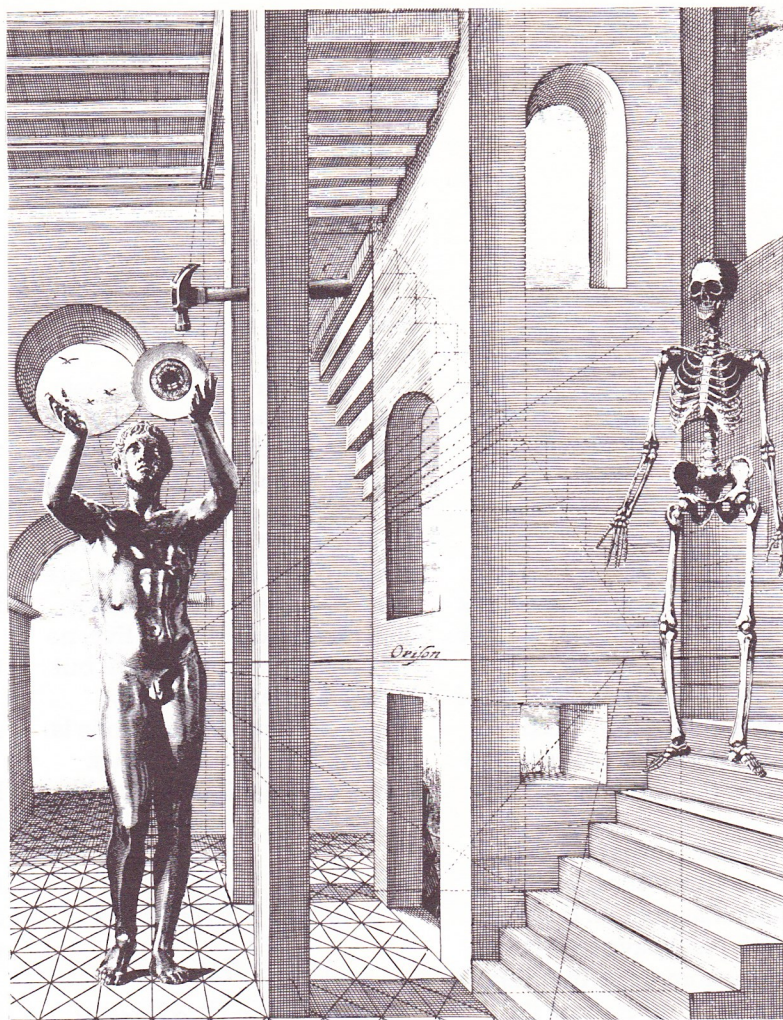
Dad & I are taking pictures of each other, smiling grimly into the wind, on a cliff just the other side of the Golden Gate. He looks like an elf in his little beige golfing cap. Back down the path, Gen is huddling against the locked car. The fog spills over the bridge, blocking the city as well as the sun. I feel incredibly heavy, weighed down by everything I know, everything I remember.

All the times we've been together like this, one or the other forcing himself to stammer out some painful truth. Secrets discovered or divulged, things that could have brought us closer but instead pried us farther & farther apart. Scenes of anger & confusion in the living room, Mom cowering in the kitchen, reciting her mantra: All my fault, All my fault.

Good moments, too. Staying up half the night to watch the first TV pictures from the moon. Planting geraniums on Mom's grave one beautiful May morning. Sitting with him in the basement as he worked out the specifications for a shoe that would make it possible to walk on water.

And then ten years ago in Florida, driving aimlessly through the town waiting for Mass to be over. "She's worried about me," I said, "I want to tell her about Hal, that I do have someone, I'm not alone." Slamming on the brakes: "You mention anything about your abnormal way of life out in California & I guarantee it'll be a long time before you ever see your mother again." And so keeping silent, embracing the silence, in fact, all through her long dying & his quick remarriage, my breakup, the years lost in drug limbo, the recovery, the months of gentlemanly courtship with Tim & finally the question popped a few minutes after midnight one hope-filled New Year's, & then the years beyond. All the pain, all the joy. Not denial exactly, but as though a part of me simply didn't exist, a blind spot at the exact center of who I am.

Silence: an abnormal way of life.



As I watch Dad snapping his camera, I think maybe I've judged him too hard. After all, he always said he'd never come to San Francisco because of what he might find & now here he is, here we are. Here we are again. But the habit of silence is too ingrained, the fear too deep. It's not what I'd say that scares me, it's what he would hear; not what he'd say in response, but what he wouldn't. It suddenly feels as if all my life, we have been standing on this wind-bitten cliff taking pictures of each other, waiting for something to happen that won't, something which only seems to have something to do with love. "So this is where they make all those commercials," he says, gesturing toward the bridge & the patches of city visible through gaps in the fog. "I always thought that was a trick."

9/28 (7:45 PM) —

I walk in to find my lover surrounded by his blood: two aunts, a mother, a brother making his first appearance at the bedside. Kathryn is wetting a washrag & placing it on her son's lips so he can suck the moisture, he's unable to swallow more than a few drops at a time. He seems angry, his eyes are moving from one of us to the other with an urgency I haven't seen before. "There's a big bug on the wall," he says. "Look at that big old bug."

Aunt Julie takes me aside & says she thinks he doesn't want so many people around, he's fidgety & uncomfortable. I agree. The aunts, the mother & brother gather up their jackets & purses, one by one lean over his gleaming face, goodbye Timmy, sleep well, see you tomorrow. Kathryn starts to write her

phone number on a piece of kleenex but she can't remember what it is, she has to look at one of her checks. "Please call me," she says. "They never tell me anything."

The blood files out. We are alone.

He wants to watch TV. I tune in the Olympics, then a pep talk on tomorrow's shuttle launch & then suddenly we're in Germany in the 1930s, thousands of people heiling a foul-faced Hitler. Scenes of breadlines, the *Luftwaffe*, the bombing of Warsaw.

"You can't turn it off, can you?" he says. "It's that machine that goes on & off all by itself. We'll have to fix that first thing tomorrow morning." I shut the TV off & draw the curtain across the screen but he keeps watching, his eyes locked in fear & wonder on the movements of some indescribable pageant. He asks me which lights I see, the red or the green or the yellow. I tell him all the lights are off & everything is quiet, though I know that's not true.

Now he wants to hold my hand, he whispers, "Come up here, honey, lie down with me."

"I can't fit," I say, "but how's this?" as I lean over the side of the bed & put my head on his shoulder, kiss his neck, it's so cold.

"That's just fine," he says, "that's just what I wanted."

We lie like this for half an hour, gradually his breathing grows shallower & more even. I try to breathe along with him, get in sync; after a while he says, "Yes," long & drawn-out, & I answer, "Yes, yes," barely audible, "yes." We are almost

there, almost home, when Jack walks in.

I go out for a smoke so they can have some time alone. As I come back into the room, I see Jack is holding a wet washrag to his son's lips so he can suck the moisture. I sit down on the other side of the bed & then we are just there, we three, no rosary, no banished children of Eve, no fires of hell, no sound at all but his short breaths. It slowly comes over me that someone is missing. It is my own father. I imagine what it would be like

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if he were to walk through the door & sit down next to me. For a split second, I have the strong urge to run & call him in Room 23, demand that he come over. It passes, though; it is not to be in this lifetime. He & I both bear responsibility for his absence, but it's no one's fault.

Jack asks Tim if he'll be all right. "Snapping out of it," Tim says. "See you tomorrow, Dad." Jack looks at me, says to call

him if I need him, & then he's gone. We are alone again at the summit of the world.

"All right," he says a few minutes later. "Sleep now."

"I'll sit here with you, is that OK?"

"No," he says, "over there," & turns his head toward the cot in the corner.

"You want me to get in bed & turn the lights out?"

"Yes," he says. "Everybody sleep."

I bend down to kiss his forehead, but then I see he is offering me his lips, which he hasn't done in months. I hold the kiss for what seems like a long time; as I finally break contact, a few of my tears fall on his gown.

"I love you," I say. "I'll always love you."

"Love," he says. "Sleep. Tomorrow."

9/29 (1:30 AM) —

I am lying under thin blankets listening to his increasingly soft & shallow breathing. I want to get up & sit with him but something is stopping me. It's not fear, not this time anyway. I realize now it was me he needed all along; I'm the only one who could be in this room & yet give him the freedom to say goodbye the way he has to. Not getting out of this cot is the hardest thing I've ever done, but since he has loved me enough to ask this of me, I must find it in myself to love both of us enough to do what he asks.

I can barely hear him. Seconds of utter silence between the in & the out.

Now I don't hear anything.

I sit up in bed where I can see his face silhouetted against the streetlights beyond the curtains.

He breathes a few more times, the same long pause between. Then, slowly, he sits almost upright; there is one long, deep, amazing intake of breath but there is no out-go, he slides back down just as slowly. Then there is nothing.

I sit for a few seconds numbed by the stillness, then get up & dress, flip the light switch, lean over him. His face is like paraffin, his eyes huger than ever, his mouth open wide in what seems like a satisfied yawn. I brush his forehead with my lips, look up at the ceiling & blow a kiss. I stand there for a few minutes to make sure, then open the heavy door & step into the hall.

The nurse & young intern go in with their stethoscopes, return shortly, phone for the medical examiner. I call Jack, then go & sit in the family counseling room to wait for him. Half an hour later he arrives, calm but teary-eyed. We go back into the room. Jack stands over his son, I watch his eyes, he is scanning every inch of Tim's face & body, as though trying to memorize every detail: the way his hands are folded, not as though in prayer but as though just finishing a prayer; his tiny shoulders; his shining face on which still sits a look of peace mingled with great surprise.

Jack signs the requisite forms, gathers up the missal & rosary,

an unclaimed woman's sweater, then drives me home through the empty streets. "We'll be in touch," he says, "we need you to help us work all this out."

"I've got the last version of the will at home," I say, "I never had a chance to type it."

As I'm getting out of the car he says, "You know, Tim was born premature & he died premature. When he was born, I could hold him in the palm of one hand, & even then he only reached to the first knuckle of my fingers." I slide back into the seat, put my arms around his neck & pull him close. "You're a good man," I say. "A good father." He starts to cry, makes himself stop. I get out, slam the door, & he drives away.

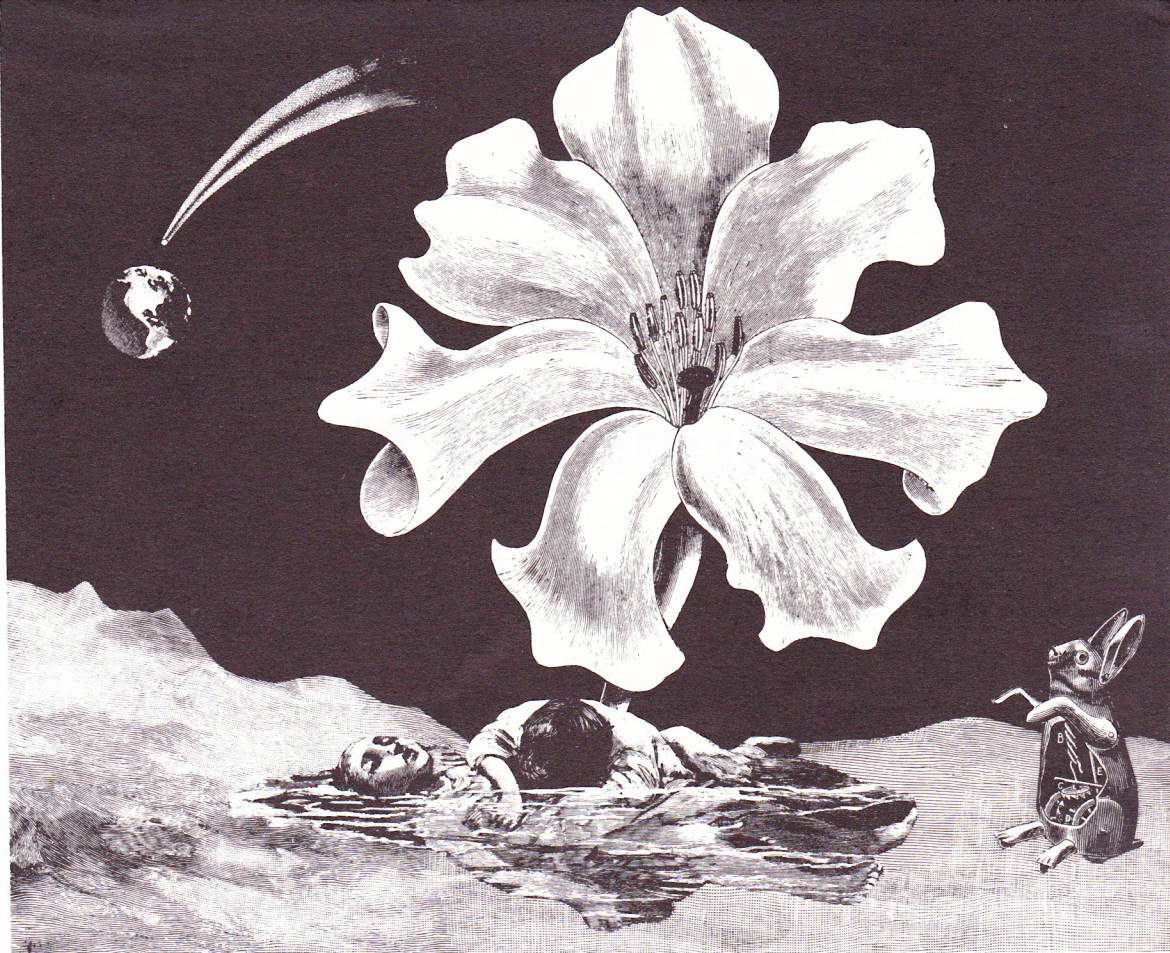
I go into the all-night supermarket & wander the aisles collecting stuff for tomorrow night's party to celebrate my recovery from cancer & my father's singular visit—napkins, paper plates, plastic glasses—then walk the half block home.

9/29 (6:25 AM) —

Dawn has broken me out of a short fitful sleep. I've thrown some water on my face, fed the cat, mumbled a few incoherent prayers & now I'm out on the street, the city coming alive all around me. Right on Polk, left on Pacific, middle of the block, third floor at the back, Room 23, my trembling hand poised to knock, held back by the fear, the old companion of my years, but knocking anyway, knocking through the fear, in spite of the fear, in harmony with the fear, my knuckles making a deafening noise against the wood, half of this tremendous force coming from a new companion, my friend Timmy, strong as an ocean. ▼

About the author and artist:
Robert John Florence is a court reporter who spends his evenings and weekends working on his book-in-progress, *Brotherhood*, from which this piece is excerpted.

His father died on February 23, 1989. "He was at peace with me," Florence says, "& I with him."



read 1st page



Roots in the S A

THE SAND of the Anza Borrego is good soil for two dykes who are growing old. Here the act of surviving is a celebration, a kind of joyful defiance. Like our aging, like our lesbianism, the desert doesn't meet men's needs, and so is defined in terms of lack, as barren, and even unnatural. The word "desert" itself is a stigma, like "old bag" or "dried-up lezzie." They don't see our abundance, our passion, our beauty, our ingenuity.

Like an aging dyke, the desert thrives by stripping off what's unessential, merely display for others. Maybe we feel shame when we first turn away from the hetero voices that say, "You're too pale without your

makeup" or the youth-worship that insists, "You look ghastly with your scalp showing through your hair." But seeming loss gathers excitement and erotic power from its insistence on truth, from inventing new definitions.

Away from the plastic, glass, and asphalt world of San Diego, the process of aging shows itself more clearly as an affirmation of life rather than a "failing." The creosote bushes that cover the desert have a history far older than the giant redwoods. I can't read the lines on the face of Whale Mountain or the swirls of rose, gray, orange, and green on the boulders of the canyons, but they talk of geological time.

More: this is a country where, to our eyes at least, differences of age, or even between the living and dead, are muted. Young or old, the quail, rabbit, road-runner, coyote, kitfox, beetle, mourning dove, antelope squirrel, bobcat, raven, cricket, and lizard, choose gray or grayish brown or black to please themselves and others. Their earthy colors are signals of survival,

Cynthia Rich, born in 1933, is co-author with Barbara MacDonald of Look Me in the Eye: Old Women, Aging and Ageism (Spinsters/Aunt Lute, 1983). She has lived in a trailer on the Anza Borrego Desert since 1983 with MacDonald, her partner and co-dreamer.

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Growing Older in the Desert

endurance. A bush next to our trailer looks like a mass of dead twigs, but close up, we can find dozens of mauve flowers. You have to have lived the seasons through to know which smoke tree or hedgehog cactus is old or dead and which is just resting between the rains.

And then—as if out of that tenacity, just as the new barrel cactus pushes forth from the body of the old or dying one—come the remarkable bloomings.

I'm much more tuned in here than I used to be back East to the fact that spring isn't a date, it's a mix of conditions. After a rain at any time of year, the ocotillo sprouts green leaves along its gray stalks and even sends out its huge Chinese-red blossoms to the end of its branches, so that when you look across the desert you see red fingers waving at you. And while it's true that back East some springs are more heady than others, this is the first place I've lived where, if things aren't right, spring decides flat out not to come.

But when winter rains have been heavy enough, spring on the desert is a wonder. You can't see most of it from the window of a car; you can't begin to take the measure of it in a day snatched from city life. Every half-acre has its own blossoming shrubs and flowers unfolding at different times, mixing in different ways from those of its neighbors. It goes on for three or four months and you can walk every day and still see flowers you never saw before.

It is flashy and bold: the golden brittlebush covering the mountains; the purple verbena mixed with dandelions spreading out across the desert floor; the brilliant reds and pinks of beavertail and hedgehog cactus; the intense purple-blues of smoke trees and indigo bushes aswarm with bees; the great gold tassels of the fifteen-foot-tall agave that look like asparagus, growing almost as fast as you can watch; the scarlet chuparosa bushes named for the hummingbirds that are drawn by the color and stay for the sweetness. There are hillsides of

by Cynthia Rich



LYNN WITT

blue and purple lupine, desert poppies, and bright rosy-purple monkeyflowers.

But that's just the beginning, for there's more to discover more slowly: the white desert lily which may have five crystalline blossoms open on one stalk; the pale pink and lavender primroses and bottle-brushes; the rarer purple five-spot with five scarlet dots in its cup; the tiny white tidytips that mass themselves between the rocks; the tall pale bushes of the desert lavender where birds love to build their nests; and the creamy ghostflowers with their purple dotted throats, which are so hard to find until you see one and realize they are everywhere.

Baba Copper came to visit in springtime and later sent us a jeweler's glass that used to be one of the sacred objects she kept for her meditations. It brings me another world of amazement, as if I could dive down like a fish to explore coral reefs. Instead, I re-enter the desert through the eyes of a bee or butterfly. The least showy flowers, or ones no larger than a

pinhead, undergo the most powerful change. Spanish needles, whose tiny flowers look like pale dry clumps of grass, inflate into huge lavender starflowers with great deep purple stamens.

In spring, of course, the migrating birds spend weeks with us. Rosy-breasted finches and yellow tanagers and orioles perch between the thorns of the ocotillo, and sometimes we are startled to see a pair of stark white egrets standing in the roadway or to hear the cry of a night heron.

THE FLOWERING of the desert in spring unfolds with that mix of the inevitable and unexpected, promise and surprise, that marks all creativity. It is wildly beautiful, but short-lived. It is not the desert's message.

We watch the petals, purple and red and gold, dry in the washes and the ants collect them into downy soft mounds at the entrance of their homes. The winds drive the seeds into



the sand. Thousands of bees siphon up the nectar and hoard it in caves at the entrance to Moonlight Canyon, where it hangs like heavy bags through the winter. Without that economy, those connections, the spring would be one more gaudy show. After all, in cities, each mall is springtime, abloom yearlong with the throbbing of colors, surprising us with patterns that change almost daily, promising endlessly renewed life. And still it disappoints, consuming our lives instead of offering us provision.

We learn the desert message with relief and wonder. We know it from our aging, too, from watching seasons of change in our bodies, in our lives, but it's a lesson not of age but of life.

The animals know it. When we lived through our first season of rains, we were surprised to see that even in mid-August they don't rush to the new pools to grab abundance while it is there. They know that, in desert time, those pools last only a moment and that life is about

the dailiness of survival, not the sudden excess. So deeply do they know this that the roadrunner turns the rock for the bugs beneath, but does not satiate herself with all she finds there; the rabbit nibbles on the salt-bush and loves its tender new sprigs, but leaves enough behind; the coyotes live off the rabbit population, but eat mesquite pods rather than pursue the last rabbit, to space their lives.

In the same way, we take in the abundant beauty that comes with spring, but learn to space ourselves with the deep, daily joys of the dry seasons.

IN THE SUMMER, the light and the heat are one, and become almost a noise as they gather intensity. Even the shade of a dry bush matters.

I am surprised that everything on the desert makes a difference. A few drops of winter rain, barely heard on our roof, turn the air sharp with the resinous smell of creosote. A single cloud spreads a tremen-

Like an aging dyke, the desert thrives by stripping off what's unessential and merely display for others.

dous moving shadow across the mountain and the desert floor.

After all the ways I have been discounted, or discounted myself—in childhood, as a woman, as a lesbian, as a Jew, and now moving towards old—I find myself healing from the desert's measure of life.

Eva, in her red sweater, as she walks along the path to the mailboxes, the raven calling from a utility pole against the sky, both stand out in this uncluttered scene with an odd equality. A family of quail marches, not through a field of grass, but across white sand, and the legs of the tiniest fledgling are distinct in their frail strength.

None of us here need signs like: "I may be a welfare mother, but I am somebody." / "I may be old, but I am somebody." / "I may be disabled, but I am somebody." Here everything is something, and every one of us is somebody.

I SEE AN AD in a magazine for cassette tapes to relax by. A spring meadow, the ocean—so that's where technology has brought us. I laugh and say I'm going to market a tape called Desert Morning, and it will be absolutely silent.

I thought I'd been to silent places before, and I guess I have if it comes to that—but usually some brushing of trees or lake-water blurs the edge. The morning after a blizzard in the country, perhaps—but that silence is more an absence, a suppression of energies. Desert silence is a presence, with a throbbing energy, a sweet passion of its own. It excites the same spot in the cor-

tex as music, and it changes your body in the same way. I spend time listening to it as I would music, coming from a world where it is rarer than music.

Once music was in response to silence, complementing it, a counterpoint to it. Now it is in response to noise, growing louder as every year that noise is harder to drown.

Here we are hundreds of miles from a commercial airport, and except for a navy plane every couple of days, there's no sound of airplanes. I realize, for the first time, how that faraway hum is now part of what we call silence in our suburbs and countrysides. Sometimes, sitting in our deck chairs on the sand, Barbara and I look up to see a tiny plane headed for the San Diego airport, but it's so distant we wouldn't have known it was there without tilting our heads.

ON MANY DAYS, when I wash my hair, it dries before I can pass a comb through it. After a walk, we drink three glasses of water, barely stopping to breathe. In such a world, the tasteless water from our faucet surprises us with its sweetness. The sulphurous springs of the Indian pool are more an acquired taste, though people say they're curative. Sometimes in the evenings, the desert women will climb the hill to fill our bottles with the clear, sharp-smelling water, as women have all over the world for thousands of years.

Our water is plentiful, at least in balance with those of us who use it. Odd to think that here, in

the midst of more than a million acres of desert, these springs keep flowing lavishly—even in summer, while it's Boston and San Francisco that argue about how to keep the water trickling through their taps.

DURING LOVEMAKING, I'm a laugher. The pleasure washes through me and its excess spills out—luckily, so I don't come too soon. I laugh too when Barbara looks at me squarely across our dinette table and says that she loves me. These are not the same laughs as when friends visit and we laugh together about Ronald Reagan or the contradictions in the lesbian community.

Until I put down roots here, I never felt the laughter bubble from my diaphragm just looking out the window at a mountain golden in the morning light, just knowing myself alive and connected to a world that generously includes me.

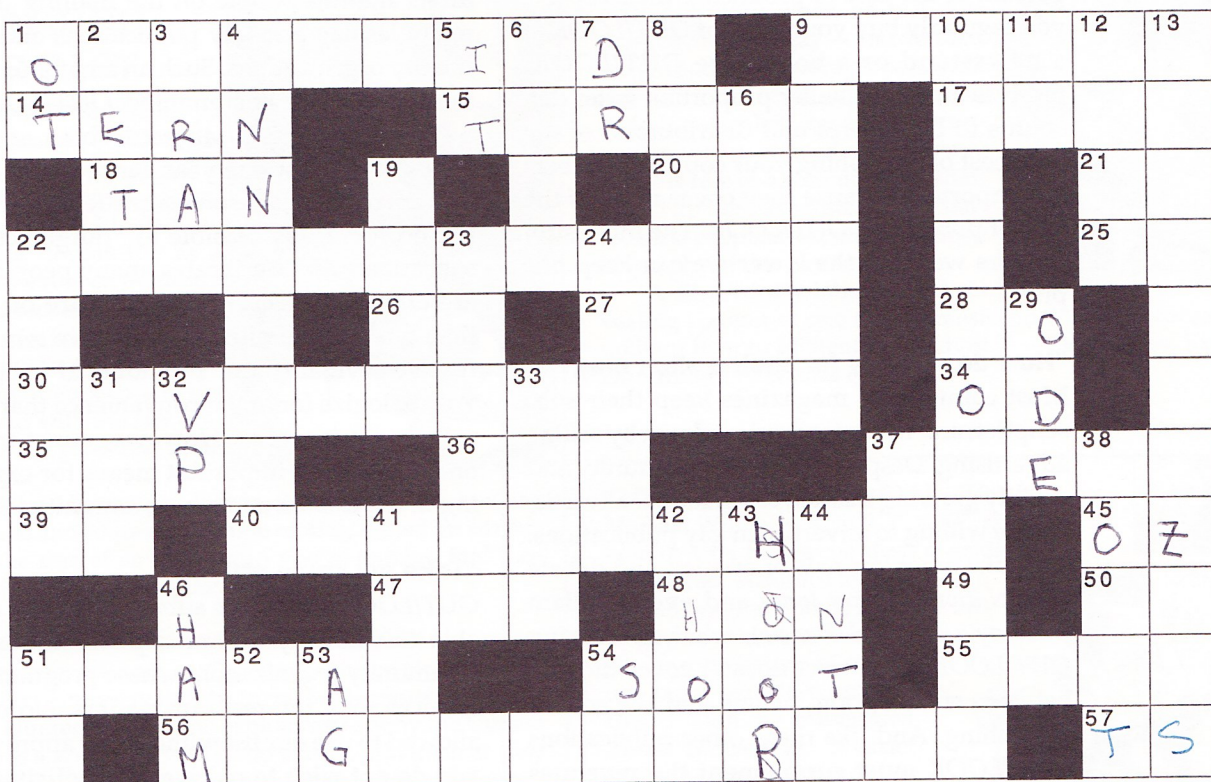
Laughing, I feel purged of the desolation of my childhood in family, of the loneliness I pursued into my marriage because it was familiar.

Joy, not simple contentment, is a revolutionary act. It tells us what power, what rights live in our cells, and it insists that we not settle for less. ▼

"Roots in the Sand" is a chapter from the forthcoming Desert Years: Undreaming the American Dream (Spinsters/Aunt Lute), which explores the personal and political discoveries of Rich's first three years on the Anza Borrego Desert.

Authoritatively Gay!

by Doreen Becker



ACROSS

1. Reading Gaol inmate
9. "Right-on woman"
14. Seabird
15. Face (2 wds)
17. A city in Iowa
18. What you get in St. Tropez
20. Ramone or Jose
21. Short for use up
22. Giovanni's creator
25. Public relations (abbrev)
26. "Mr." or NYC mayor
27. Teenage plight
28. Procedure (abbrev)
30. "Gay pop" novelist
34. Shoot too much
35. Heroic tale
36. Here or now in Dijon
37. Anagram of Maine
39. The shakes (abbrev)
40. Author, minimal decor
45. The yellow brick road will take you there

47. Paul Bunyan's instrument
48. Sweetie
50. ____ deum
51. Balm of ____
54. Chimney dirt
55. Fastened
56. Fruit dessert, author
57. An Elliot

DOWN

1. Overtime (abbrev)
2. Bristles
3. Study excessively
4. Vampire story lady
5. "I found ____!"
6. Put to sleep
7. ____ Kildare
8. Winces (anagram)
9. Shakespeare's forte
10. Poet, surviving partner
11. Post meridiem (abbrev)
12. Rope
13. Those who discriminate

16. Spoil
19. One of Eve's sons
23. Tata in Dijon
24. Hot art in Florence
29. Poem
31. Likely
32. Asst. to President (abbrev)
33. Teen's demise
37. Near
38. Group
41. Fem. title
42. "Western" stop
43. Type of earring
44. "____ it" interested
46. Non-kosher sandwich
51. Electronics Corp. (abbrv)
52. Symbol for erbium
53. Symbol for silver
54. Southern state (abbrv)

Solution on page 86.

Doreen Becker is a chemist who works for a cosmetics company. She lives in Ossining, New York.

What You See Is Not All There Is

"I buy *OUT/LOOK* on the newsstand"

Most readers of *OUT/LOOK* pay less than 80 percent of the cost of producing their copy. If you regularly buy your copy of *OUT/LOOK* at a newsstand or a bookstore *OUT/LOOK* receives an even smaller proportion (after discounts to bookstores and distributors) of the total cost of publishing your copy. Subscribers are important because they cover more of the cost of publishing *OUT/LOOK*. The more subscribers we have the lower we can keep our prices.

"How do you pay for such a slick mag?"

Most commercial magazines keep their subscription and newsstand prices down by selling advertising. Despite a thriving community and rapidly growing market, few national advertisers are willing to advertise in gay publications. And like other journals of opinion and debate (*The Nation*, *Mother Jones* and even William Buckley's *National Review*), what advertising *OUT/LOOK* can attract doesn't cover the gap between subscription income and the cost of publishing. And like these other publications *OUT/LOOK* must supplement the revenues from subscriptions by fundraising. That's why *OUT/LOOK* is published by The *OUT/LOOK* Foundation, an IRS approved (501c3) non-profit educational foundation. Any contributions above the cost of your subscription are tax-deductible.

"Why don't you pay writers?"

One of our most important fundraising goals has been to raise the money to start paying our authors and illustrators. In the last few months we have raised enough to pay writers and artists published in forthcoming issues of *OUT/LOOK*. Up until this issue both writers and artists have donated their work. We appreciate the contributions of the writers and artists who have helped to make *OUT/LOOK* the outstanding magazine it has become in the first year of its publication. We hope that many of them will submit work in the future for the modest compensation we will be able to offer.

"I subscribe, so why send me junk mail?"

Most magazines published in the United States depend on "direct mail" (that's "junk mail" to

you) to find new readers. Since November of 1987, *OUT/LOOK* has mailed 325,000 pieces of direct mail to people on the mailing lists of many lesbian and gay publications and community organizations. Such an ambitious direct mail campaign has enabled *OUT/LOOK* to become the second largest lesbian and gay magazine in just one year. Since many of the lists are not available on magnetic tape and it is not economically feasible to "purge" current subscribers and duplicates, many people who are already subscribers or who are on more than one of the mailing lists that we rent often receive several of our promotional packages. We apologize for any inconvenience that these mailings may cause. However, direct mail is one of the most important means for organizing in the lesbian and gay community.

"Take my name off!"

OUT/LOOK makes its subscription list available to carefully screened publications and community organizations whose programs and services may interest our readers. No one is allowed to use our list without our approval. If you do not wish to receive such solicitations, however, please advise us and we will delete your name from the lists we make available.

If you are moving...

When you change your address, we need your complete old and new addresses as well as a copy of your mailing label, if possible. Please allow us six weeks to solve a subscription problem or to change your address.

Our Wish List

OUT/LOOK is a young and growing non-profit organization. There are many important production and publishing needs that we have not been able to meet. Here is a list of some of our most urgent needs:

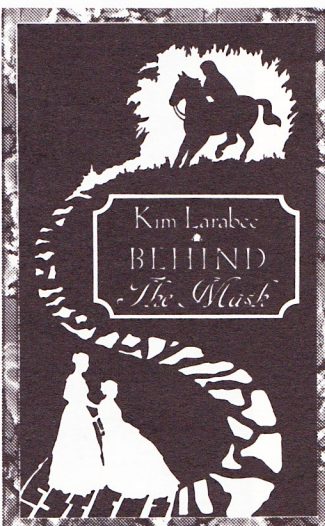
- Electric typewriter
- Laserwriter IINT
- Two light tables
- Fax machine
- Photocopier
- A Macintosh II computer with a 40MB hard disk and a large screen monitor

If you can help us to acquire any of these items, please contact Stephen Smith at the *OUT/LOOK* office. Thank you!

Great new reading
from
A • L • Y • S • O • N
PUBLICATIONS

ROMPING THROUGH OUR PAST

BEHIND THE MASK, by Kim Larabee, \$7.00. Maddie Elverton, a fashionable member of English society in the early 19th century, leads a double life as a highway robber. Maddie's world becomes threatened when she falls in love with Allie Sifton and must compete for the affection of her beloved with the law officer who pursues them both.



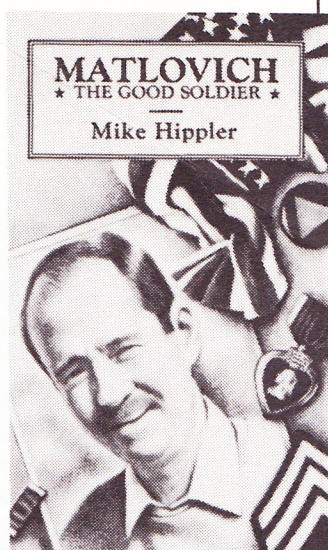
"If you have a yen for vicarious adventure, low-key intrigue and some nicely done erotica, *Behind the Mask* is just the sort of spritely romp you're looking for." Lee Lynch, author and syndicated columnist

THE BUCCANEER, by M.S. Hunter, \$9.00. The pirates of the seventeenth-century Caribbean created history's only predominantly gay society. In this well-researched novel, M.S. Hunter presents the exploits of Tommy the Cutlass and his shipload of randy buccaneers. Join them as they get involved with some of the past's most notorious individuals — and most exciting adventures. This is historical fiction at its swashbuckling best.

A DIFFERENT KIND OF HERO

MATLOVICH, by Mike Hippler, \$9.00 trade paperback, \$16.00 cloth-bound. Air Force Sergeant Leonard Matlovich appeared on the cover of *Time* magazine when he was discharged for being gay — and decided to fight back. This courageous activist did not fit the usual gay stereotype, and his outspoken, generally conservative views created controversy over his role as a community leader. Mike Hippler has written, with Matlovich's cooperation, the definitive biography of this gay hero.

"A surprisingly intimate and revealing account of one man's transformation from conservative military man to militant gay activist." — Cleve Jones, Executive Director of The Names Project



THE GAY DESK CALENDAR, 1990, by Michael Willhoite, \$11.00, 7" x 10", spiral bound. This handsome desk calendar is fun to read, beautiful to look at, and easy to use. Each week is full of bits of gay and lesbian history and includes a caricature of one of our more notable personalities drawn by *Washington Blade* caricaturist Michael Willhoite. *The Gay Desk Calendar* makes an attractive gift that will be used all year long.



OUR LIVES

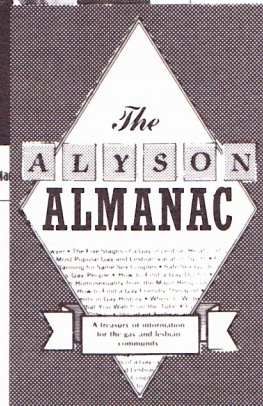
LONG TIME PASSING, by Marcy Adelman, ed., \$8.00. Here, in their own words, women talk about age-related concerns: the fear of losing a lover; the experience of being a lesbian in the 1940s and 50s; the issues of loneliness and community. Most contributors are older lesbians, but several younger voices are represented.

"A ground-breaking, life-changing triumph." — *Women's Review of Books*

THE ALYSON ALMANAC, by Alyson Publications staff, \$7.00. This new almanac for gay and lesbian readers carries the tradition of "Poor Richard" into a new era.

"*The Alyson Almanac* is a lot of fun. This 'treasury of information for the gay and lesbian community' contains just about everything a Gay person could ever want to know about Gay life. Readers are bound to annoy their companions by asking them: 'Did you know this?'" — *The Washington Blade*

Long Time Passing: Lives of Older Lesbians



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The Dark Stuff That Haunts Me

**An Interview
with Dennis Cooper**

by Bo Huston

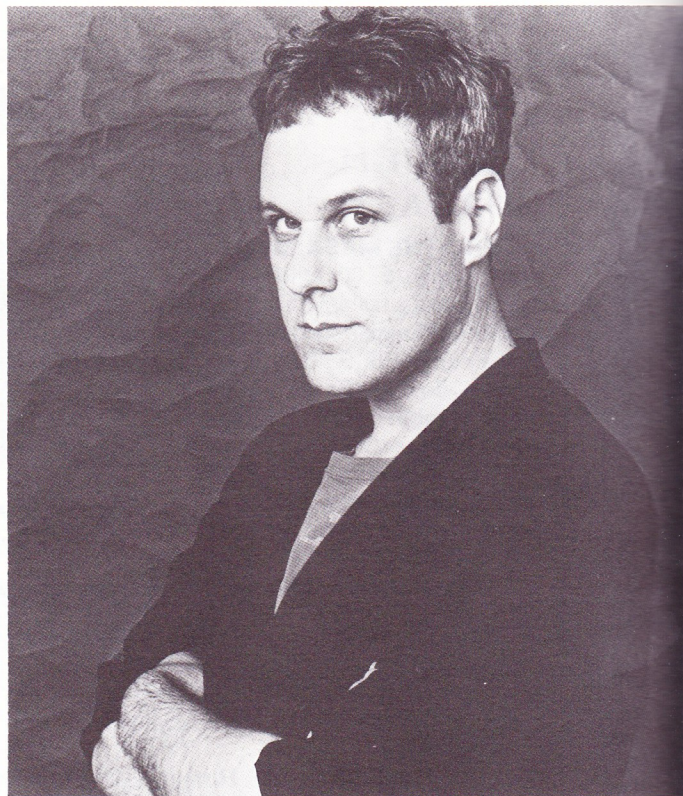
DENNIS COOPER'S newest book is called *Closer*. Closer to what? The edge. A world of gay teenage boys into S/M and punk rock; boys obsessed with each other and art and their own sense of alienation. These kids are outsiders, infused with knowledge and pretense, removed from their own pain and unable to close the distance. Their environment is formed by violent sexuality, dark fantasy and frustrated desire.

Best known to gay readers for his poetry and fiction, Dennis Cooper published his first book of poetry, *Idols*, in 1978; in 1982, *The Tenderness of the Wolves* was nominated for a Los Angeles Times Book Prize. His first novel, *Safe*, was published in 1984, and Peter Schjeldahl, writing in *The Village Voice* called it "a work of ambitious scope, moral seriousness, and innovative style, the sort that galvanizes a literary generation." He has continued to publish poetry and fiction during the last ten years, as well as book reviews and

articles. He also has been involved in organizing readings and performance work, and was the publisher of Little Caesar Press. Most recently, he curated the controversial mixed media art exhibit called "Against Nature" in Los Angeles.

The world Cooper creates in his fiction is confined, narrow, unpredictable; he devises codes, weaves tight myths which are brutal and beautiful, terrifying, yet ever more disturbing for the precision of the writing and its internal consistency.

Closer explores fully the ideas and images with which Cooper has long been associated. The result is a mysterious, powerful vision of obsession, and represents Cooper's most skillful mastering of the material. The publication of this work marks a turning point in Cooper's career, and will certainly lead to a larger public awareness and a greater scrutiny of this important gay writer.



GENE BAGNATO

From Closer...

Bo Huston: With *Closer*, you once again are dealing with a group of gay teenage boys. Do you see these adolescents as victims?

Dennis Cooper: The kids are metaphors. To me, the book is about sophistication. These kids have an instinctual knowledge and curiosity, which is part of being young. But they don't have a language or a philosophy to base their lives on. They don't trust the adult world. They try to form their own understanding of things, but they don't have any role models. They don't believe in God, or their parents. I feel that the adult world is a lie. When you grow up, you either fit into that lie or you become an outsider.

BH: One thing that's so scary about *Closer* is the detachment these kids have regarding violence and sex and drugs. I don't get any kind of a moral judgment from the narrator's voice.

DC: I'm not at all interested in being a moralist. There's a weird kind of intimacy among the kids, which really isn't explained. A sort of coded language. The characters are trying to feel things, but they can't seem to let themselves, or they're afraid. The boys are attracted to each other, but the emotional part is stunted. It's one reason they're involved with drugs; they *want* to feel something.

BH: Quite apart from the explicit sex scenes, what *Closer* has in common with pornography is that unlikely things occur, bizarre scenarios are treated as ordinary.

DC: It is an unreal world. It's made up of all these gay kids, the only adults are evil or incompetent. It has an artificial quality, like in those John Hughes teen films or something. If you read the book three or four times—not that you *should*—you'd see how carefully contrived and intricate it is. In some way, of course, the writing can be considered avant garde, but it's actually very clear, transparent writing. I've established a purposely myopic world. As a writer, I'm fascinated by activities I will never participate in. It's like I'm trying to get as close as I can to the edge, to understand what it means. And now, when vio-

They headed for Dump, a poorly lit gay bar well known for its loose clientele. John dropped George off on a barstool, then felt his way along the walls, squinting. After a few rounds John spotted someone he liked slouched on a gray vinyl couch near the video games. The guy wore his hair in a shark fin straight down the top of his head. It looked as stiff as a saw. His eyes were outlined with mascara. His mouth dangled open. The button he'd pinned to his torn leather jacket read, *I have many brains but I can't think*.

John ordered George to sit down at one end of the couch, and took his place at the other. The punk tried to seem unimpressed by their cruising, but eventually he turned and glared at the worse offender. It took him an hour to stop calling John a fake punk, faggot, scum, asshole.... George fell asleep. John feigned boredom until the punk started to nod out. Then he mentioned the drugs he had stashed in his bedroom. "Sounds good," the punk yawned. They made it home. After a few joints he said John could watch him jerk off.

John had the punk and George lie side by side on the bed. He crawled over their bodies while they masturbated, examining each in great detail and making comparisons. Below the neck they were just about even: smooth, washed-out, skeletal. Face-wise, the punk wasn't much. His eyes were drab, his nose had been broken, his ears were caked with wax, his skull was shaped like an egg. He would have been nothing without punk. John sympathized at first. Then he realized he'd better not care or he'd never get hard enough.

He rolled George onto his stomach then climbed on top, tried to get his cock hard, couldn't, thought he could stuff it up George with his fingers but that didn't work so he rolled George back over and fucked his mouth. The punk sat a few feet off, watching them with a vacant expression that could have meant anything. John tried not to care but it attracted his eyes like a mirror. When he finally managed to come his concentration was so bad he missed George and got sperm all over everything. "Shit."

from *Closer* (New York: Grove Press, 1989)

lence is so pervasive and sex can be so frightening, I believe there's some really important knowledge to be had. About survival, I guess.

BH: Can *Closer*, or your other work for that matter, be said to be about the "gay world"?

DC: I'm gay, but the book is not about gay identity. It's really about being unable to deal with society and trying to form a world which is not based on boring role models. I'm certainly not a spokesman for gay people. It's funny, people think if someone is gay he's speaking for the whole gay culture. That's a real problem. *Closer* makes no pretense to being about the gay community. The characters do not hang around a conventionally gay scene.

BH: How do you respond to criticism which challenges your work for disregarding issues for gay people today, like AIDS? For instance, the kids in this book have no interest in or awareness of safe sex.

DC: My response is that the book is a work of fiction. Just because some people are not now doing certain things sexually doesn't mean we don't want to, or we don't think about it, or we haven't done it in the past. Also, because we need to be so cautious and restrained in sex these days, there's all the more reason to use art to explore things. I mean, in *Closer* specifically, the sex is very terrorized. It's hardly a book that promotes promiscuity.

BH: I want to talk about some influences you have felt; for one, what was the significance of punk to you?

DC: Punk was a revelation. It was the first pop, mass cultural idea I really felt I could understand. I was pretty young for the hippie thing, and I was suspicious of all that fake friendship stuff; it felt contrived. When you connect with someone, it's rare, it's important, it's not this blanket kind of, "Wow, we all love each other." When punk came along it proposed anarchy. Individuals who all know they're really alone in the world, but who can collect our terror and anger and form this band of outsiders. That was important to me.

And the music influenced the way I wrote, also. It was clear but complex, raw but sophisticated.

BH: What about literary influences?

DC: The big one is de Sade, who I've been reading since I was a kid. De Sade is unusual because he had such a massive knowledge, he was kind of like Shakespeare; but at the same time, he always wrote about sex. Genet, Rimbaud, Bataille, all those French guys. And Burroughs, too. The reason I relate to these writers is that they studied their subjects until they were exhausted. They weren't merely picking things to write about, plots or whatever. It's personal. It is writing which comes out of an emotional isolation. I have no interest in conventional fiction. To me, that kind of work is just fake, it doesn't get at any truth. It operates on erudition or pathos, or whatever. If you're obsessed, you don't have to worry about what you write. I never have to think about subject, it explodes out of me. And then I desperately try to form it, and communicate.

BH: Some of the imagery in *Closer*, reducing people to skin, bones, organs, veins—it is so powerful and disturbing. What are you trying to do with such imagery?

DC: Well, that's a really crucial part of my writing. This may sound dumb or pretentious, but I think it's about truth. If you're not religious (and I'm not), and you don't believe there's some higher order to things (and I'm not sure I do), then the truth is we're just a structure of veins and bones and stuff. And what does that mean, what does it tell us? It becomes some weird language or hieroglyphics. It's this incredible mystery. Because I'm a writer, I naturally think about how people are made, what's inside.

BH: And is that ugly or beautiful?

DC: I'm not sure. I guess that's my confusion. Each character has a different reaction to it—for some it's an answer, for some it's just this gruesome thing they don't want to think about. There's a section where John, this kid who's a painter, is in bed with George; and he *thinks* he feels love, but he questions it. If

George is nothing but flesh and a skeleton, how can he feel love for that? These ideas are central to the book. In a way, it's my attempt to find some practical kind of spirituality.

BH: You were co-curator of a mass media art exhibit this year in Los Angeles; the artists were homosexual men, offering their aesthetic responses to AIDS. How did you feel about the reactions to the show?

DC: We got the reaction we wanted. We were not interested in proposing anything. We wanted people to go through our show and *feel* something. Most people seemed to respond well. There are people, though, who think that gay artists have a responsibility to represent homosexuality and gay life in a particular way. I felt the show was really diverse and inclusive. At first, we were under the impression that ACT-UP was against the show, but that turns out not to be the case. There were a few people, who are in ACT-UP, who had their own agenda, a strict, neo-conservative thing, and we felt they used our show as an opportunity to spout their ideas and criticize the work. I sort of misread ACT-UP as a group, thinking they were trying to police gay people and gay artists. ACT-UP is made up of people who are angry, and they want to do something. The people I know in ACT-UP are serious and sensible and committed to dealing with AIDS issues. I believe that activist interests can co-exist with non-activist interests. So, I got confused when the show came under attack. I am very proud about the work and the effect of the show.

BH: You spent a couple of years in Amsterdam? What took you there?

DC: Well, I was cut off by my parents, for one thing, so I had no money. I was losing my apartment in New York. And I have a Dutch lover, Richard, and he had to go back to Holland. I just needed to get away. I wrote most of *Closer* over there, working until dark every day. I hung out at some of the boy brothels and went to a few clubs, heard some bands, but for the most part life was quiet. I got sick, too—a very bad case of German measles. I thought I was dying. My recuperation took

three or four months, and I used that time for working. The Dutch are very hard to get to know, so there was some sense of being isolated.

BH: Did your perspective or ideas change while you were in Amsterdam?

DC: Well, if anything, I got politicized. I realized how self-involved American culture is, and gay culture in this country, too. So, living away really crystallized my feelings about what was going on at home. I had been so wrapped up with punk, which is about apathy and anarchy. I never knew that I was political, and I found that out in Amsterdam.

BH: Your work is graphic and relentless in exploring the blur between sex and violence. What is that fascination about for you?

DC: I'm not sure. Sometimes it gets very depressing. I think people's experiences are very complicated, and it is dangerous to reduce what people do or dream about to moral values. I certainly don't condone violence. But, it happens, and I have this compulsion to reach into it and try to understand. Most people don't want to know about this stuff, this kind of emotional pain, the fear and anger. *Should* they know about it? I don't know. Where does my responsibility lie? For me, it's about developing a language to comprehend it all. You know, I go through these horrible depressions and anxiety attacks. And what I do is write. In my daily life, I try to be nice and sociable and functional and all of that. But, when I'm working, I'm dealing with this dark stuff that haunts me. It has always haunted me. ▼

Bo Huston is a free-lance writer and a columnist for the San Francisco Bay Times. His book of short fiction, Horse and Other Stories, will be published in March, 1990.

About the artist: Gene Bagnato's photographs have appeared in The Advocate for over ten years, as well as most other gay publications.

Who Are You, Anyway? The Results

WHO ARE YOU? Over 300 of you let us know by responding to the Query in the Winter 1989 issue. Database wiz Keith Clark volunteered to code, crosstab, and analyze your responses. Thanks to his Herculean efforts, we now share some of the highlights.

About *OUT/LOOK*

The response was overwhelmingly favorable, coupled with many suggestions of ways we can continue to improve. There was quite a clamor for us to publish more often than quarterly—a prospect which we are now investigating.

Ironically, the article we've published that the most respondents rated the *best* also was cited by the most people as their *least* favorite: Nayland Blake's appreciation and analysis of the work of gay pornographic artist Tom of Finland (Fall 1988). Arlene Stein's "All Dressed Up, But No Place to Go: Style Wars and the New Lesbianism" (Winter 1989) also showed up on both the picks and the pans. Other top favorites were Ellen Herman's commentary on the political implications of the surge in gay and lesbian participation in 12-step recovery programs (Summer 1988) and Debra Chasnoff's analysis of Roberta Achtenberg's campaign for the California State Assembly (Winter 1989).

Lifestyle

You also shared some of your consumption preferences which we intend to make conspicuous to potential advertisers.

The always-uphill battle to convince publishing execs that there is a market for lesbian and gay writing should get a boost from our findings that men who read *OUT/LOOK* buy 30 books a year, while women buy 40! Other facts about your lives and lifestyles include:

	Men	Women
Identify as lesbian or gay	98%	89%
Identify as bisexual	2%	9%
Identify as heterosexual	1%	3%
Parents	6%	11%
Home owners	40%	43%
Renters	60%	57%
VCR owners	75%	66%
Records/tapes/CDs		
bought/year	24	16

(figures don't always add up to 100% due to rounding)

Vacations

OUT/LOOK readers travel a great deal, going out-of-town for pleasure an average of five times a year. The most popular places to escape to are San Francisco (which women cite more than twice as often as men), New York City, and Washington, DC. Other favorites include Boston, Provincetown, Florida, Mexico, the Caribbean, and England. Surprisingly, no one listed Fire Island.

Political Perspective

Respondents identify as:

	Men	Women
Liberal	62%	61%
Radical	24%	35%
Moderate	12%	4%
Conservative	1%	0%

Voting Records

In the 1988 elections, you voted for:

	Men	Women
Jackson in primary	48%	58%
Dukakis in primary	28%	19%
Dukakis in general	87%	80%

Community Involvement

Thirty-two percent of survey respondents are active members of community organizations; 18 percent hold office in them. Women are more likely to hold office than men in athletic, academic, religious, and cultural groups while men hold office more in AIDS organizations.

Solution to Authoritatively Gay! crossword puzzle

1	O	2	S	3	C	4	A	5	R	6	W	7	I	8	L	9	D	10	E	11	S	12	A	13	P	14	P	15	H	16	O	
17	T	18	E	19	R	20	N	21		22	U	23	R	24	N	25	T	26	O	27	A	28	M	29	E	30	S	31		32		
33	T	34	A	35	N	36		37	A	38	L	39		40	S	41	A	42	N	43	U	44		45	M	46	T	47		48		
49	J	50	A	51	M	52	E	53	S	54	B	55	A	56	L	57	D	58	W	59	I	60	N	61	L	62	P	63	R	64		
65	A	66		67	R	68		69	E	70	D	71		72	A	73	C	74	N	75	E	76	M	77	O	78	A	79		80		
81	D	82	A	83	V	84	I	85	D	86	L	87	E	88	A	89	V	90	I	91	T	92	T	93	O	94	D	95	C	96		
97	E	98	P	99	I	100	C	101		102	I	103	C	104	I	105		106	A	107	N	108	E	109	M	110	I	111		112		
113	D	114	T	115		116	E	117	D	118	M	119	U	120	N	121	D	122	W	123	H	124	I	125	T	126	E	127	O	128	Z	
129		130	B	131		132	A	133	X	134	E	135		136	H	137	O	138	N	139		140	T	141		142	T	143	E	144		
145	G	146	I	147	L	148	E	149	A	150	D	151		152	S	153	O	154	O	155	T	156		157	T	158	I	159	E	160	R	
161	E	162		163	T	164	R	165	U	166	M	167	A	168	N	169	C	170	A	171	P	172	O	173	T	174	E	175		176	T	S



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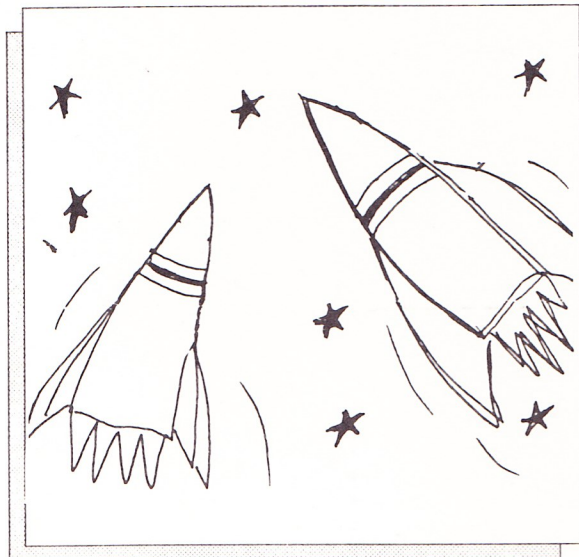
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