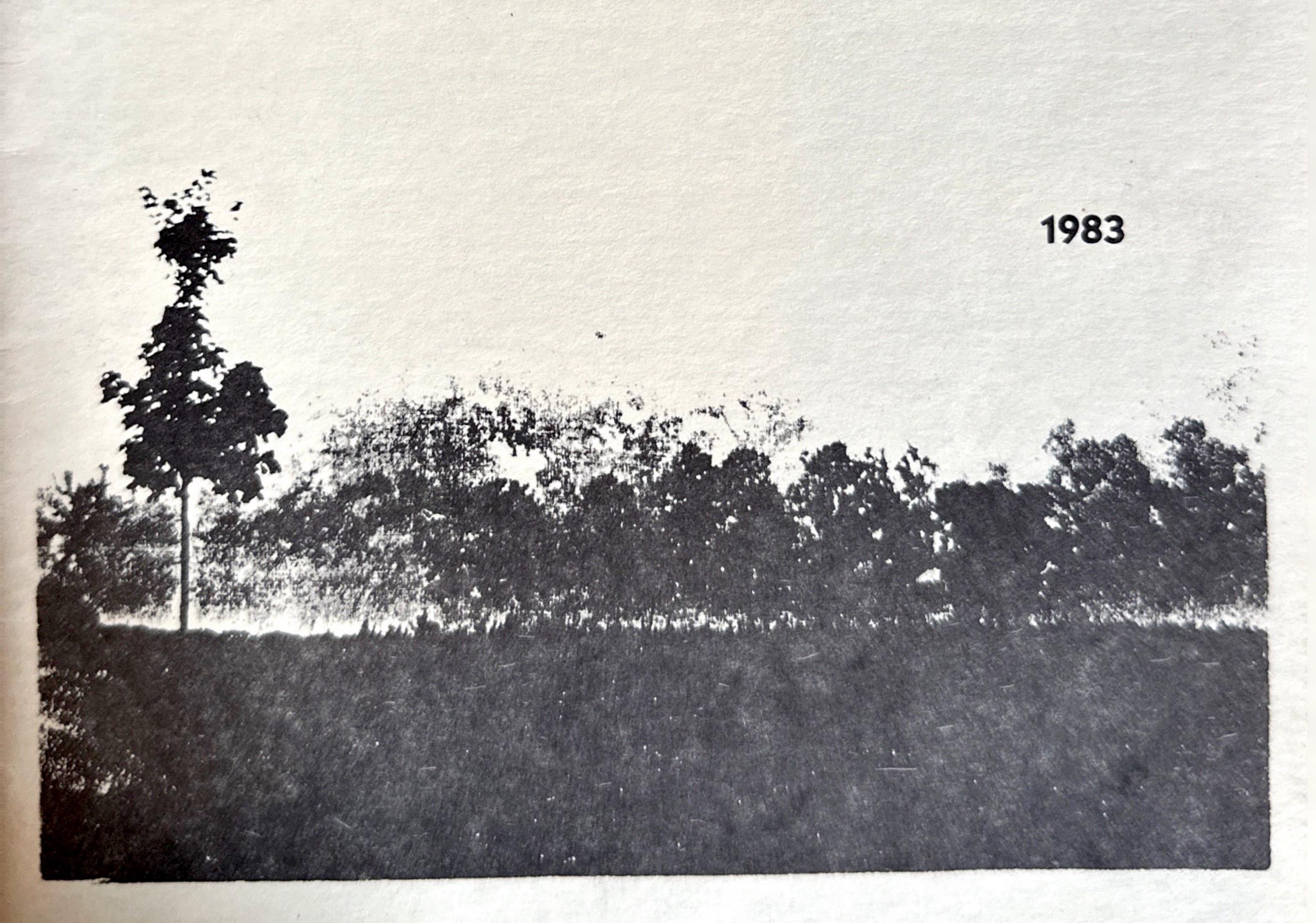
AZALEA

conversations with 3rd world lesbian writers



\$3.00 (more if you can, less if you can't)

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AZALEA: a magazine by and for 3rd world lesbians, is printed and distributed by the Azalea Collective

Afi, Lindal. Brown, Robin Christian, Sandra Lara, Joan Gibbs, Sapphire.

Typesetting: Robin Christian

We try to remain non-elitist, non-traditional, rotating the responsibility of "issue coordinator" among collective members with each issue.

This issue was coordinated by LindaJean Brown.

We print what YOU send—work that is important to us as 3rd World lesbians.

The opinions expressed herein, are not necessarily those of the Azalea Collective, but of individual authors/artists.

Payment is made to each author/artist in copies - a copy of the issue your work appears in will be sent to you.

We readily accept and welcome work from "newcomers" as well as "regulars". One of our committments is to publish 3rd world lesbian writers and visual artists whose work has never appeared in AZALEA. Therefore (in the interests of space and fair chance), it may sometimes become necessary to return material to womyn whose work has already appeared in two CONSECUTIVE previous issues — asking you to hold it for a later issue or to submit something else at another time. AZALEA needs all of your input and support to survive.

All submissions MUST be typed, doubled-spaced 81/2"x111/2"

Send no more than five (5) pages.

All visuals MUST be any black/white medium, 4½"x7½" or proportionately smaller.

A self-addressed stamped envelope (SASE) with enough postage for the return of your work — otherwise it will not be sent back to you.

A brief biography.

A stamped postcard or SASE for notification of receipt of your work and other information.

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If you cannot afford the price of AZALEA, please send as much as you can, and we will send you a copy.

AZALEA will be sent FREE to womyn in prison.



With sincere apology, we have been a longtime in coming.

Snowed under with a barrage of problems (both professional and personal), we are forever learning—conscious of the fact that the idea is sometimes much more simplistic than the practice.

This issue of AZALEA explores what we hope will be a continuing dialogue among 3rd World lesbian writers.

The 3rd World lesbian writer - a new "label", perhaps, as some have suggested - nevertheless, defines a group of womyn, who for the first time in modern times, are giving new meaning, direction, politic and vision to the literary world.

As a guide for this particular dialogue, a leaflet/questionnaire was sent out inviting many womyn to participate in the forming of this issue. I, a writer myself, asked questions I have always wanted to ask of other sister-writers. I tried to raise issues and generate responses to things both familiar and new, dealing with ourselves as 3rd World lesbian writers. And with what that might mean.

The responses were small, arriving slowly at first: As if stepping gingerly onto new ground. Some womyn chose to deal with additional or other aspects of things suggested in the leaflet.

The invitation to, of course, submit actual creative work as a statement, was always left open. And in a few cases, here, that creative work appears, without commentary.

We live in verbal traditions with little theoretical substance. As is common to this kind of society, the talent for explaining who we are and what we are about comes slowly. This 'explanation', at times, proves a difficult task. But it is necessary to do so for our continued survival and evolution. It is for this reason that this issue was a particularly important one for me to work on.

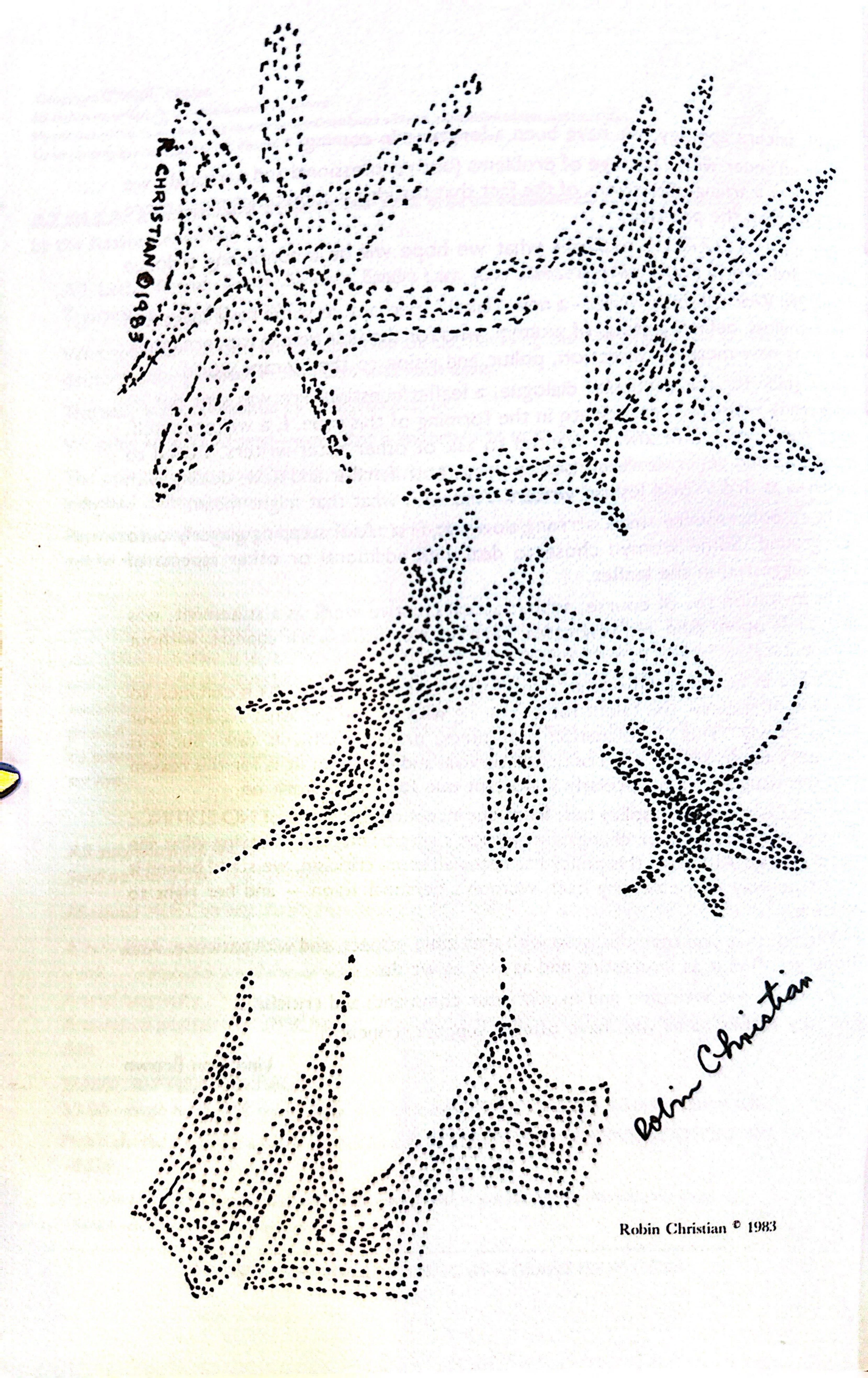
AZALEA's editorial policy has, from our inception, been one of NO EDITING: That is, not directing or changing a womon's way or method of saying what she needs to say. Although this policy has received some criticism, we stand behind it as a true way of respecting each womon's personal vision — and her right to voice it.

We ask that you read this issue with that same respect, and with patience. And hope you find it as interesting and as vital as we do.

As usual, we welcome and expect your comments and criticisms.

Many thanks to all who have offered support, concern.

Lindajean Brown



— how do you write: technically, spiritually, emotionally, etc. ...? what are your theories? your plans? how does who you are (lesbian, writer, 3rd world, mother, musician, carpenter, other?) affect your work?

- choose a piece you are working on (prose, fiction, poetry, plays) ...
- what motivates you? what's the theme? title? where does the name come from? is the piece a part of a longer work? exist on its own? how long have you been working on it? what's the importance? the purpose? who did you write it for? who are the characters? why did you choose their types? what did you name them? why? how do they relate to you?
- how long have you worked on the piece? is it finished? how do you know? do you plan/want to publish this work? how? why do you want to share it? what are your ideas/theories on publishing by 3rd world lesbian writers?
- you may quote from the piece if you'd like.
- say anything else you deem important.

PLANTA YUL 3 NO. 2

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THE JOYS AND SORROWS OF PUTTING PEN TO PAPER

by Anita Cornwell

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How do I write? I write with my heart in my mouth because I know that no matter how many revisions I struggle through, the piece is never going to match that lovely vision I had of it in my head. And as most experienced writers will warn you, the longer you write, the harder it gets.

I think that bears repeating. There is no getting around it, writing is hard work. And the longer you work at it, the tougher it gets. I believe one of the most enduring myths held by many young writers is the misconception that writing is a snap, because "I've been doing it since kindergarten, haven't I?"

The fact is, there is writing done by the lay person, and there is writing done by the craftsperson. Just as there are two kinds of singers. For example, although most of us have been singing since before we learned to crawl, Leontyne Price or Shirley Verrett are not likely to sit up nights worrying about us snatching any gigs from them.

Another great myth held by all too many aspiring writers is that learning the fundamentals of their craft is crass commercialism. "I write for self-expression. I don't want to get into that professionalism," I have heard more than one young writer declare in a superior tone.

Eventually, if they are lucky, they will learn that self-expression is not the name of the game. A new born babe fresh out of her mother's womb can express herself. Communication is what the real writer is about. And take my word for it, you don't learn that overnight. You become a writer the same way Grace Bumbrey became an opera star, by practicing, practicing, and practicing. And then you practice some more.

Learning your craft is just half of the equation, however. The other half is learning who you are. And for most of us, that is harder than learning the technical side. That is what makes writing so difficult and such a joy once you reach a certain level. (At least there is joy the few times things go right).

No matter how well you learn to write, until you learn who you are, it is very doubtful that you will ever have anything worth communicating to a reader. And communication is the name of the game, remember?

I suppose self-study is the best way to find out who you are. Self-observation, I believe the experts call it. And contrary to what many people believe, if done right, self-study will not lead to self-centeredness - at least not in the usual, bad sense of the term.

One thing is certain, you will never really understand anyone else until you first understand yourself. Thus, until you reach that plateau, you will have little that is worthwhile to communicate to anyone, including yourself. And make no mistake, the writer writes first, last, and always to communicate with herself. If what you're writing doesn't engage and excite you, you can bet your last inflated dollar it won't engage or excite anyone else either. And you may as well scrap it.

One of the most persistent questions that young writers ask the experienced craftsperson is, "Where do you find ideas?" Since it's fairly obvious that ideas are everywhere, I believe what the neophyte is really asking is, "How do you manage to work your ideas into the proper form and get them down onto paper?" Ah, that is the question, isn't it?

As I once related to an inquiring apprentice, I believe the problem of discovering who you are and finding out how to get your ideas onto paper in full story form are really one and the same problem. If I may speak personally for a moment, I believe I made my first major breakthrough when I finally discovered that an idea has to grow in the mind before you can turn it into a story.

In addition to all the frustrations that plague any aspiring writer, the Third World Lesbian writer has to cope with the added stumbling block dumped in her path by a white racist homophobic patriarchal society.

Perhaps one of the most important qualities that the creative person can possess is to have the courage to walk alone, so to speak. Yet, to know oneself and to have enough self-confidence to persist in the face of staggering odds are not the qualities that women are cherished for having. The inquisitive woman, like the "aggressive" woman is usually labelled "unnatural" or worse, and is ignored or abused at every turn. Yet inquisitiveness is a must if one is to create anything of value.

The struggle to develop her gift and make it yield the fruits she envisions in her mind is an all-consuming task which most women are unable to even undertake, let alone complete, because of the hostile reaction that almost always greets the adventuresome woman.

I'm fairly certain there must be other professions that are more agonizing than that of being a writer, but, thankfully, I am not a party to them. The thing that I find so frustrating about writing — aside from rejection slips and manuscripts lost in the mail, etc. — is that you almost never come up with what you thought you were after when you started out.

At least I almost never do. Yet, in spite of my many complaints about my profession, I know without question that my work has been my salvation. I have seen too many women my age - and some even younger - who have fallen apart because they had nothing to hold them together.

Of course, I won't (or can't) go into great detail as to how writing - or the long struggle to learn my craft - somehow helped weld my psyche together. But what I didn't know back when I was still battling to make that first sale was that the struggle itself would bear its own reward.

While you are engaged in those early struggles, I believe one of the most useful habits that the beginning writer can fall into is to learn to complete every viable work that she begins, even if it is only to remain in first draft form. And don't get into the habit of throwing your work away. No matter how dreadful you may think that story is, don't tear it to ribbons as I did so much of my early work. True, that story probably is every bit as lousy as you think it is, but it contains the germ of an idea and perhaps other good segments that can be used in later work.

Even if you never use any part of that early work, it can serve as a kind of sounding board. In later years, you can look at it and see how much you have improved. And you will improve if you keep banging away, everyday if at all possible.

If you want to write badly enough, you will make the time to do so. If you find other pursuits more alluring, then so be it. Ultimately, I believe we usually do the thing that goads us the most. So if the desire to write is not goading you hard enough, consider yourself lucky and look into the plumbing business perhaps. I know this for a fact, the average plumber makes at least five times more than the average writer.

So don't fret if your writing drive lacks enough oomph to get you moving. Look for some other creative endeavor. But, if you've got the drive, then get on with it; let those pages pile up. Eventually, you'll discover that you have more ideas and plans for future work than you'll ever be able to complete. That will make you feel rich and productive. And the productive person produces even more work.

Like most writers who have been at it for quite some time, I now find myself working on several projects at any given time, with several more waiting in the wings.

For example, between the time I wrote this little piece in long hand, rough-draft form two months ago and before typing it up to send out, I worked on a short profile of a small-press publisher, finished and sent out a book of humor for the Liberated Woman, wrote three one-act plays and one two act comedy for young people. And worked on a group of prose poems that I hope to publish in chap book form some day.

Also during that time I engaged in a dialogue/interview with another small press publisher via the mails, searched for another title for the volume of my non-fiction pieces that a small press publisher is interested in bringing out, and began work on my first full-length play I hope to finish in time to enter in a competition four weeks later.

Oddly enough, after thinking about it for at least twenty years, I have at last decided that playwrighting is my true calling, and that is what I will probably do in the main for the remainder of my creative life.

Do I regret not having taken up the form sooner? Certainly not. First of all, regrets consume creative energy that one needs for ones work. Secondly, a good story is a good story whether it be fiction or drama. In other words, learn to put pen to paper and you can switch gears whenever you deem it necessary.

Also, might I remind you that the complete writer eventually tries all forms. So don't be intimidated, uncover that typewriter and get with it. As one Nobel Laureate once wrote, the best thing to do is tell yourself each morning that the best work has yet to be written, so you'd better get started right now. And good luck!

On Becoming - or Just BEING by Davine

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Pre enatal clinic examination. The young Black nurse pressing my abdomen queries "are you a dancer?" I want to know from her "which one of us don't dance?" She's puzzled, and probably sorry she stepped out of the formality of her role by initiating a conversation with some kook. "Excuse me?" I repeat my question, but then explain that as far as I'm concerned we're all dancers. She smiles. She meant professionally. My abdominal muscles are strong. I won't have any trouble getting back in shape. I'm surprised...is the dancer's spirit housed in my body working for me? I never contrive exercise. I want to be exercised by life...dancing, walking, reaching, squatting, making love, working, travelling by bike.

In a car. Radio churning some popular tune. Windows closed. Watching passersby. In time. Rhythmic time to the unheard radio. Hip sway. Knee dip. Arms gracefully, dramatically punctuate conversation. They dance. Black people...I know we are all dancers.

There are many things that we do, but because we never get an opportunity to develop or to capitalize on them, we don't call ourselves practitioners or artists. We are artists. When I look at what a Black woman can do with a head of hair, I know she's a beauty culturist...when a slave could take the master's scraps and prepare a gourmet meal, you knew she was a chef...when our herbal home remedies cure, you know you dealing with medicine...when a slave could take the croker sacks food was stored in and design party outfits and be pressed down, you know you dealing with a designer and master tailor...lurking somewhere in me is the suspicion that the patchwork quilt originated with us too... who else would know what to do with scraps? It takes genius to make something from nothing. And you, when you hear a rhythm in the racing wheels of a subway train, you know you a musician...and everyday, all day, how many times do you have to act? Most times to perform? If there's anything we are truly, naturally, it's artists. Most times the problem or drawback is in the inability to identify and the lack of acknowledgement. It is true, identifying don't pay no bills, but it will salvage and nurture your spirit and our culture.

I look at some Black people and see how much work it is, how stressful it is for them when they refuse to identify as Black. I am aware of how beautiful Black folks started looking once we decided we were beautiful...once we identified as beautiful for ourselves. Something that can definitely interfere with functional ability is waiting for someone outside yourself to tell you who you are, and how to be. To legitimize you. You must decide first and go with your convictions. If I had listened to my guidance counselor in high school, I would have taken home economics and sewing because I was not "college material".

This is not only a pep-talk, a talk of encouragement, it is a re-affirmation of self. I am not saying we don't need constructive criticism, or that we don't need instruction. I'm saying what's often available is destruction. We need to put ourselves in the company of those who are doing; surround ourselves with positive influences and encouraging people; those who will not only teach us, but help us gain confidence.

AND JONE WAS EXCIDENCED A SUMMARY OF THE SECOND SEC

A writer. My life as a writer blossomed when I took the gargantuan step, the courageous or maybe foolhardy step of being public and identifying myself as a writer. It took flight when I stopped saying "I want to write" "I would like to be a writer". I finally said - when people asked me "What do you do? (a question that often offends me, depending upon how early on in an exchange it is posed), "I'm a writer". I knew once I made that statement - that affirmation, I would have to deal, because people would say give us the goods. It's a mistake to only identify yourself with your means of income. I have friends who are on welfare, but who are dancers, writers, mothers and don't say, "I don't work, I'm on welfare". So if you are a janitor and you sing, "What do you do?" So what had I been waiting for? The touch of academia's wand? I took one journalism course and hated it. Running an "A" "cum for two years, I got a "B" in journalism. A "B" in the subject I thought I'd be best at. Another english instructor who loved my writing told me my sentences were "abominations". The ongoing struggle between form and content. I told her that my thoughts then, are abominations.

Well now. Unpublished until my 30's, what kind of writer can I say I had been all along? Because I know I didn't just start writing. I remember being a little girl when my mother's Aunt Ruth from Jamaica was filing for citizenship and needed me to write a composition. I remember junior high school, and my girlfriends' boy-broken hearts, and how I'd be enlisted to write the scathing letters to "read" the boys " bout they shit". High school - writing term papers already a day late, under the desk on my lap, in the class before the class where I'd turn them in and get a "B" because the teacher dropped me a grade for being late. College - my mother calling me to fill in the blanks with words she couldn't spell. Viet Nam war era - writing letters to unknown soldiers. When people ask "are you a poet?" "what do you write?" I look back and see I'm a necessitist. [Yes it is a word, I made it up]. A Get-Over writer. I write because there is a matter to address...an issue that needs attending to. Setting out to do something and being effective at it. Trusting myself. Trusting somebody else to show the way; just as my Grandaunt could trust me - as a child. Still, writing well does not a WRITER make. O.K. What is this being, A WRITER made of? (A question one should ask oneself and have the answer to, in order to identify as one.) Well, as an insatiable reader, I've found that writers were either highly imaginative and wrote from their imaginations, or that they had great memories and gleaned materials from the combined observations of their experiences and those of people around them, or they were people who felt and thought a lot, and needed somewhere to put it all. The approach (humourous, philosophic, etc.) is a matter of the author's personality, and who s/he wants to appeal to.

I came through the public school system before anything was "progressive" or "liberal". Education was still very formal and traditional, which meant white European and Euro American Primarily male-focused. There was no place for youth, or Black or woman, and certainly not for what would be considered a bastardization of the English language. (although what we speak in these United States is simply that, Ethnocentrism can serve as a strong form of denial). English grammar was the order of the day, and I remember my innovative and challenging deviations receiving crushing blows in the grading system.

A college professor who liked me told me I was "off-beat", and I remember asking him who the drummer was. It was only after I had survived and escaped from the system, did I then explore bookstores where I found all the previously unavailable "off-beat" literature. I have

I'm a talker, and after more years of talking than writing, I look at my writing and realize that I write the way I talk. Conversational. Intimate. Rhythmic. Stream of Consciousness. Free association. Asides. Humour. Reminiscences. Confidences. Flowing. My essay on mothering ["Mothering: The Romance is Over", GAP TOOTH GIRLFRIENDS: AN ANTHOLOGY © '81] is actually transcribed from an extemporaneous oral presentation. I don't write speeches although I've given many. And as for my writing, I have never done an outline. Maybe I'd be a better writer if I did, but I'm still learning. I'll always be learning.

My writing is about life. Real life. I've never had an active fantasy life, or that vivid an imagination. There was always so much activity and excitement in the immediate environment that I had to deal with the here and now. No time to make anything up. The absence of fantasy and fiction, however, doesn't necessarily leave one with dull material. Fiction has some basis in reality, and is often a blend of fact and...but in recording reality, one can often approach the same material in a number of different ways: humourously, tragically, philosophically, politically... Reality completely absorbs me, and I write about it because I'm interested in people and what's happening to us.

As a tribal woman, my writing is first of all a sharing. It's through sharing that we see our commonalities more clearly...perhaps even clearly enough for us to begin to abandon the need to secret ourselves from one another...to see that in banding we survive, conquer, renew, advance. I'm about spreading the word on whatever is gonna get us to the place where we are not so taken out by life's basic necessities and how hard it is for us to get to 'em, that we have the time and energy to create beautiful things, to devise new plans; methods of improving our lives, time to enjoy the world and each other. We have been quite deliberately led into a maze of the petty and limited visions. In my struggle to expand my way out of it, I'll even write about why we should join food co-ops!

My sharing is not simply ventilation...an acknowledgement of crisis. It is not defeatist. It offers some direction. Some ideas on how to proceed. It's Up-Tempo. Writing can be a cleansing, but we must always deal constructively so that the powers outside us don't keep us focused on anger and despair to the point that we are undone. We must remind ourselves, and whoever listens or reads, that there's always something to be done. When I write, all I hope for is that it provides inspiration or teaches and stirs up some activity that may help get the "what comes around" for us all.

The process for me is undisciplined and spontaneous-energy in flashes. I'm looking to develop discipline. I've struggled against unnatural outside restraints for so long and tried to be free in so many ways within myself, that I now have to train myself, discipline myself in my own interests. I guess an overriding factor in my not being a disciplined writer is my lifestyle. I have a full-time spiritually draining job. I am also the mother of a six year old boy, and have a host of family and friends who command my attention and demand a certain amount of interaction. The additional life-time jobs of shopping for food, doing the laundry and cleaning the house, interfere with the time away from my "work" often erroneously referred to as "sparetime". My spare time is minimal, and I have to split it up between going to the laundromat, getting the cultural exposure essential to my well-being and being out in the world to keep my finger on the pulse. The time I have left over is for writing!! Which is crazy, because I need at least 3-4 hours sleep. So although I established a writing space for myself, (I bought a desk, desk lamp and file cabinet) I write anywhere

I can. This here piece is a bridge and tunnel piece; written while friends drove me to art exhibits, meetings, shekere class; on the bus to work, on the subway while trying to keep a defensive eye on the craziness there, and rounded out during blocks of time liberated in my office. At home, my beautiful desk is piled high with mail, newspaper clippings, bills and old magazines, while nothing is filed, and I write in bed. I'm advancing to the point, however, where my need to write is pressing, and so I am prepared to sequester myself with that focus. I'm willing to give something up. I wish it could be the laundromat, because I find it impossible to write there!

The good part about my lifestyle, though, is that although it impedes my process, it is the stuff of which my writing is made. Since my writing is primarily socio-political commentary and analysis, I even see interactions between people at the laundromat that warrant discussion. I'm interested in how people function, why they do what they do, and why somebody's always doing us! Since I come from a family that seems to have made struggle a tradition, and has demonstrated a phenomenal ability to survive, I've had a whole barrel of "whys", and as a Sun-Gemini, Mars-Virgo person, I aim to get answers. Meanwhile-in the process of breaking all this shit down so it makes sense to me, I want to share my findings, get feedback on whether or not it makes sense to the rest of us, and then do something about it. For me, writing is about making connections: between the isolated personal and the universal political...it's about demystification of all the institutions that the ruling powers use to control us. It is not a mystical or inexplicable process for a woman to "go crazy". There is no such thing as a Black teen-age boy being inherently socially deviant and no, it is not a given that because I am Black I have a lower intelligence quotient.

My teachers have been excellent: reading, listening and watching. Re-cycling. My advice to anyone who's thinking about jumping out here as a writer is the same I offer myself. Write your thoughts, feelings, angers, hopes, observations, experiences, fantasies. It all matters. And write in your own language...whether it be New Yorican Spanglish or Black english. After years of having Black english taught out of me, like the modification of a negative behavior, I'm trying to recapture it as something definitely very precious, that speaks to the integrity of my history. Write about whatever ole folks always be talking about. White folks do. Why should Joel Chandler Harris compile and publish Uncle Remus tales and collect on it, and not one of us?!!? If there's a market for the Diary of Anne Frank...A Mad Housewife...and I Never Promised You a Rose Garden, then they ought to be kicking down the doors for tales of our experiences.

If it seems too overwhelming to sit down and just start writing-do like I told my mother when I handed her a tape recorder on Christmas and she (a very glamorous lady who likes personal glamorous gifts) looked at me like I had lost my ever-loving mind - "Mama you said you wanted to write, well, start talking about it. Reminisce, reflect. Put it on tape and we can transcribe it - piece it together bit by bit."

However, and this personal, beware of "editors". Now I don't mind, I even very much appreciate someone's helping me by re-arranging the words in a sentence, or keeping me from repeating myself, or helping me say things more succinctly, but I very much mind leaving this and that out, or saying it this way instead of my way. What I write, how I write, is who I am, and I refuse to permit anyone in the editorial process to try to edit my life. Back to trusting.

Meanwhile-all along I was saying "I'm not a 'creative' writer." I approached writing very matter-of-factly, as opposed to, poetically. I very much enjoyed other peoples' creative writing, but didn't think I could be creative in the standard sense, until the heat was on. (What's that they say about supply and demand?) After "Gap Tooth Girlfriends: An Anthology" was published, the group of us whose work was included received numerous requests for readings. It became clear that I could not keep reading my same couple of poems over and over, so I started writing for the occasion. And since I had to produce quickly, the form was always poetry. Poetry for the People. And that's how I also produced my short story, "Nana" ["Nana... A Piece of Nostalgia... A Piece of Me", GAP TOOTH GIRLFRIENDS: AN ANTHOLOGY, © 1981], included in the same anthology. The group of us, pre-publication, were giving a fund-raising event and "I didn't have a thing to read". I didn't think poetry readings were the occasions on which I should present my essays, so I wrote my first short story. Overnight. As it turned out, that short story was so enthusiastically received, I took something else earmarked for publication out of the book and substituted it. The response was favorable. People could identify with the experience.

Since then, I have felt more encouraged to be "creative", and when questioned about what I write, I can say "everything!"

Recently, I have been jotting notes to myself to develop: a short story (completely fictitious, wish me luck!) a treatment for a documentary, a treatment for a feature film and various essays. I haven't had time to develop them because I have been looking for a home for 2½ months. That is another reality that has interfered with the creative flow. But such is the plight of a Black lesbian single mother, searching for a cheap, decent apartment with lots of space, air and sunlight. I say it's related to my identity because the combination of features puts me on the bottom rung of the ladder of the socially acceptable, or the politically powerful, which gives me little money, ergo-not many choices of choice housing.

But about lesbianism and my writing. Thus far, I haven't had alot to say because I'm lesbian...but what I experience is as valid a lesbian experience as any other given that that's a fact of my life. But what I believe is that anything I have to say is valid, important enough to be said to the world, because I know what I have to say has foundation, and I believe in myself. I don't think I have to qualify everything I say by sexual preference, but my sexuality is a fact I'm quite comfortable with and so don't deny. Since I have spent my whole life being Black and female prior to any lesbian lifestyle, most of my writing is from the perspective of a Black woman regardless of sexuality. Whenever there is an issue that should be addressed from a lesbian perspective, I do that, but even when I was actively heterosexual my perspective on most things was the same. I was brought up around many women. My mother provided shelter, support and direction for her women friends. My orientation was one that demonstrated positive relationships and love for women even though it was not sexually expressed. It was also always demonstrated how independently capable women are. I do feel that regardless of one's sexuality, if one is an artist actively creating, the product should be available at large. I want to see lesbians welcome our heterosexual sisters' work, and vice versa. My sister, who is heterosexual and an artist, has no problem performing for audiences of Women. Sometimes it's a challenge, but it's nothing we can't take on. Even though heterosexual is what one is assumed to be until declared otherwise (in-

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nocent until provén guilty?) I didn't talk of being heterosexual to support anything I ever said, and found it nothing in particular to be proud of. Likewise. I don't feel there's anything about my being a lesbian, in and of itself, that should make me proud. The talk is of being "out". Well I don't think anyone should be ashamed of her sexuality one way or the other. I also think that we women have to get beyond letting our sexual preferences separate us. Whether or not one is a good craftsperson, dancer, carpenter, does not have to do with one's sexuality, unless inhibited or denied sexuality is blocking the creative process. Then by all means it is crucial to get "out" of that. Otherwise be renowned for what it is you do. If the creative process is influenced by your sexuality (if you write love poems to the woman who inspires you-I have), then it is relevant. People in positions of prestige and power who are homosexual should use that power to assist someone else who may be denied because of sexually "out". When the issue is political, (which in that case it is), then it is crucial for one's sexuality to be made an issue of.

Just as I feel some things are special for Black people, I feel some things are special and should be reserved for audiences of women, but then I always felt that way. I am, however, very much concerned about not becoming too narrow because I'm in a comfortable space...By that I mean of restricting myself to being "public" in a safe place...only writing for, being published by and reading to women. I want one of my strengths to be that I can hold my ownregardless. I want as many people to be exposed to whatever it is I create, because it is one way I refuse oppression, suppression. By being boundless. I refuse ghettoization. I want to live with my people by choice...but then, the world is ours. As far as I am concerned, if I have something to say about anything from a lesbian perspective, then there's no reason why men shouldn't

hear it. I can back myself.

My audience is the world as much as, if not more than the white male writer primarily because Third World people and women populate the world in larger numbers, which makes my experience as a poor Black woman an experience that is much more universal in reality. I am never writing, creating for white people, but they damned sure gonna know I said, I meant it, and fuck them.

Of course Black women, particularly lesbians, are not going to be heatedly pursued by publishers, because as a large oppressed group, the projection of our voice, our protest, is too threatening to the system of things. Black men are less threatening - they don't produce the labor force. Black lesbianism is something that threatens the very foundation of the capitalist world. But that still doesn't mean that we cannot publish! Gap Tooth Girlfriends didn't ask nobody. We said-damn-this work is good...it would be a shame not to put it out there for folks. We didn't have no money. So we did what Black people (in this country) have done since time immemorial...we cooked some food and gave a party, and got supportive women to come, have a good time and contribute to the cause. Then we sold advance subscriptions to friends, loved ones and the last couple of people we bought school raffles and candy from. We had 500 copies printed, sold out, and still have people trying to get copies (including me!). You can do it. Give yourself a pre-natal examination...you may find you too are surprised by the muscles, the strengths you have. Then deliver your product. And at some point, somebody's little much handled, dog-earred copy will wind up in Africa, South America, Australia, who knows, but they'll love it because they'll know it's speaking to them.

Yes. I'm a writer. A mother. A lover. Spiritualist. Chef. Healer. Craftswoman. Dancer. Storyteller. Interpreter of dreams. Politicist[is that a word? I gotta call it something-I'm not a politician.] And I'm expanding all the time. Once we decide to be all that we want to and can, they can't stop us. We are spoon-fed their "wisdom". Wasn't it one of their philosophers who said "I think-therefore I

am"? Well I think-so I know I am too! And

OUT OF MY OWN VISION: From A Writer's Journal by Becky Birtha

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Sunday, July 23, 1978

I'm in a strange, wispy, romantic sort of mood ... We've been reading the last Marge Piercy novel, and I think it does that to me. In spite of the faults I can find in her novels ..., her books can still do to me what nearly all the books I read in my childhood did, and very few of those I've read since I've grown up. Make the story real. Make the people real. Make me want to be them or be like them, or know them or be in the same book. And at the same time, make me see my own life differently, make me feel as if I'm in a book, too. And they make me want to write and write. Sometimes I worry about that. Sometimes I'm afraid I want to write about life as much as I want to live it ...

Now it feels like a piece of a novel. We're on the porch and the sun has just gone down. The wind doesn't stop blowing — blowing the pages of this book, blowing Becky's hair back, blowing the skirt of the blue and white sundress I'm wearing. My legs and feet are bare. It's been over ninety for two days. Becky is playing her guitar — not singing, just playing — Freight Train and the blues song I wrote, tapping her feet on the little stool to the rhythm. She's in her perennial blue jeans and a t-shirt. She's drinking coffee. I fall in love with various images of her — over and over again. I think it is my capacity to perceive my life as art (a novel, or a movie) that makes it possible for me to love. Even in these quiet times, my life is fuller than the most exciting novel.

We have been recovering, all week, from a series of devastating heavies and quarrels, about time we spend together. We have aggreed on a solution and are trying it to see if it will work. I am scared, although not right now. I know the pressure is my writing, which has always been there in my life, more permanent and more demanding than the most faithful and persistent lover ...

Monday, January 1, 1979

... Last night, at Natalie and Terry's, Becky and I looked through a book of pictures by Maxfield Parrish, and I realized I want to be able to write the way he painted ... to create whole new worlds that were never there before. When I look at his pictures, I see places that are true enough to be familiar, as if I've been there sometime in my life or in a dream. And yet they are more extraordinary, more delightful, more inviting, more exciting than any place I could have ever been. But he made them real enough to be convincing, so that after I look at the pictures, I've been there, too. There is one picture in particular that has that effect on me. It's called "Daybreak", and it used to be, co-incidentally, hanging up on the wall near my little room in the house ... in Berkeley. California was, to me, the place in the picture — someplace strange and new and wonderful that I knew I'd never been before, yet somehow one day [i] suddenly woke up to and found ... so familiar, even though I'd never been sure of its existence until that moment. [Then] I suddenly knew it had always been real, and maybe always within me.

Anyway, that's the feeling I want to convey, the kind of places I want to create, with my words ...

I don't know how to go about doing this. Don't know what kind of people need to be in such a story, what kind of place the story needs to happen in, what the story will be about. Only that it will be purely fanciful, fantasy. I don't know if it will be my next story or ten stories hence. Right now, I feel so grounded in reality with my content, in tradition with my form. I will have to transcend that. Allow my mind to play like a child ...

Saturday, June 30, 1979 Provincetown, Massachusetts

We have been here since Wednesday night. Three long days and all of it has been beautiful ... Everywhere on the streets we see women with their arms around other women, men holding arms ... They recognize us and smile... Is this what it could be like, after the revolution?

... Yesterday morning we made love. For once I felt like there was plenty of time for that, nothing more important we had to do. We ate breakfast in the cottage we stayed in — English muffins and fruit ... I liked the cottage — rustic, blue willow cups and plates ..., one room for everything and yet it seemed big enough for us. It's hard to believe we really need that whole apartment full of stuff we have at home.

...We ... rented bikes and rode on miles of trails through the sand dunes to the ocean. And spent a long time walking down the beach in the sun; and Becky found the prettiest shell, and I found one to string on the leather that goes around my sleeping bag.

Last night we went out to dinner and then to the women's bar. And watched women dancing together, disco dancing, for a long time ... Drank rum and coke. And came home and made love again, last night.

One of the things I like so much is the spontaneity — that we could start out looking for a motel and end up by the ocean picking up shells ... At the same time, I'm a little disturbed by how easy it is to be here. ... The day before [yesterday], I walked down the bay beach ... and started remembering my "transcendental experience", when I tripped in the New Jersey pine barrens eleven years ago, and could understand suddenly and wholly, the meaning of everything — could see and feel "god" in everything and knew the equality [between] myself and any grain of sand ... I also remembered the time I collected the fragments of moon snail shell that time in 1975 ... And how I was writing a poem about them.

I've been reading Sinister Wisdom and thinking about politics and art ... I thoughts, on Thursday, of writing more poetry about grains of sand and pieces of shells. Even though those things are meaningful and important to me, it seems such a luxury. That is the kind of stuff men write. Abstract poems about inanimate objects. Transcendental experiences. How can I make that meaningful, translate it into something that has meaning for the women I want to reach? What is real is the struggle. And there is so much that needs to be written ... that has not been spoken before. I feel a sense of urgency, a hunger, even for the fiction. I can't justify myself writing about anything else right now It seems everything I write has a purpose, beyond just being art, even if its purpose is only to create a space where art by lesbians or about lesbians can exist for art's sake alone. The poem I wanted to begin, on the beach two days ago, could only end with the question: what does a woman who has reached nirvana say, when a man insults her on the street?

At the same time, Provincetown is sparking my imagination, as a writer ... I'm ... entering into that kind of fantasy place in my head where characters get created and where the best stories begin — the kind of stories in which I get intrigued enough by the character that I finally want to write about her and find out more about her, ... get to know her, ... make her mine.

The character is called "Curlytop". ...If she has another name in the story, I don't know what it is yet ... I see her in white — a white shirt, overshirt, no buttons in the front, white slacks. And flowers in her hair. I think she loves to dance ...

I never saw anything like those women dancing together last night. It was so overtly, explicitly sexual. More than anything in Cedar and Nelly's book. If I'm going to write erotica, that's how I would like it to work. The way watching those women dance is probably more enticing than it would be to watch them making love.

I'll live with my character with her silly, secret name, a while longer — until I know enough of her story to begin to write it.

Thursday, August 30, 1979

Today I read Zora Neale Hurston's autobiography ... I also read parts of her biography — the introductions. I read that after she'd died, penniless, in a welfare home, the janitor came to burn her belongings, including a manuscript she was working on the last seven years of her life. I was outraged. In her own autobiography, she mentions by name every book she owned as a child. She tells about stuffing her suitcase with newspapers so her clothes wouldn't rattle around, about picking a copy of Milton out of a trash can, about memorizing "Elegy In A Country Churchyard" in one night, because she was afraid she would never see it again. It seemed an outrage that she should have died in the same state she struggled so long to get out of — without money, without friends, probably (and worst of all) without books.

It seemed unfair that I grew up with all the books I could read and more, available to me, that I could sit here even now with her book in my hands, while she never made as much from the sale of any one of her books as I make in a year. I couldn't stop crying for a long time.

I'm not sure what this means to me as a writer. I think there is some kind of legacy sense here. ... I want to read all her works. ... I want to think hard about who I write about and for. Maybe find ways to communicate about her to sisters who don't know. I'm overwhelmed by her story ...

Saturday, August 9, 1980

...I've been reading Tillie Olsen's Silences ... The book raises questions, One of them is around some things she said about Willa Cather. That Willa Cather was ashamed of her stories, lacked faith in her own vision, was seeking "validation that her 'reality' was material for art." It made me think about the attitude I seem to have, a lot, about my stories, the way I sometimes talk about them: "The stories ... aren't attempting to be great literature. They're just romances, ... simple, unambitious, unpretentious little stories. I write them because they don't exist ... For very ordinary women out there (lesbians!) who want to read stories like that. I don't write them for poets, critics, academics, scholars of literature, straight white men."

Why do I feel a need to put down the stories, to belittle them? Who is to say what is literature and what is art?

That's the other thing in the Olsen book that gets me thinking. She talks alot about the work of Rebecca Harding Davis. Goes through her whole life story. And says that, by the end, what Davis was writing was not art anymore. That is very frightening to me — the setting up of that dichotomy — art or not. So there is a reason to be worried about one's own judgement, one's own visions. Someone out there, some Tillie Olsen, is going to be judging: This is art. This is not. This is literature. This is not. Or do you know [that], yourself? Olsen implies that Davis knew, that she worked in frustration, her books never amounting to what she had hoped they would be, not deceiving herself. So do you know, intrinsically, based on how close the product comes to expressing the original vision? But how do you know that your vision is the stuff art is made of? Willa Cather's question, apparently.

Of what does my vision consist?

Thursday, August 14, 1980

I have just reached the end of the first draft of the story I started in Provincetown, "The Gray Whelk Shell". Story I started pursuing in Provincetown a year ago. I feel really high. Writing the first draft is always the best — the fun part. It's only after that that it becomes work. Right now, the story is completely pure. The way I would tell it. Unadulterated. As pure as I can get my vision to be, now, at age 31. It's just my fantasy, written out, without regard for the level of mushiness and sentimentality (probably far too high for anyone else). I think my dream is to write as close as I can come to the way I wrote when I was in high school. Everything was very sticky and sacchrine, but I was so uninhibited; I felt so free when I wrote. I could just stir up all that pathos and didn't care a bit. It was what I liked — what I wanted to read — and it was fun to write. That was all that mattered ...

Wednesday, September 10, 1980

All week I have worked on the gray whelk story. I have fallen in love with it ...

I don't think I can be subjective about the story. I'm too attached. I can't imagine now to deal with taking it to the workshop. I'd be afraid... I hate to start working it over.

For some reason, I find the story tremendously erotic.

These are two things about it, that I'm trying to do differently from other stories. One is to write it in the style of a study for a story, the way that artists make studies and drawings and sketches for paintings they are going to do. I saw a sketch like that once, for a series of posters, and the sketch/study was framed and hung as a work of art, as if it weren't necessary for the whole series to be done, to convey the idea...

The concept is easier to understand when I think of drawing or painting, than writing. I remember in Saturday morning art classes, struggling with the challenge of doing a drawing of a brick building, while the art teacher kept insisting that I didn't have to draw every brick. I couldn't grasp, then, the concept of being able to suggest something the audience can't see, suggest it so well that they are satisfied that they've [seen it].

The other ... concept I'm trying to deal with is a little bit more difficult to work with. It's mushiness, sentimentality. What feels like a challenge is the at-

tempt to legitimize their existence in the story. I want the story to be sentimental. I do not want the story to be trite, or cliched, or dependent on stock phrases and predictable emotional reactions on the part of the audience...

What if people feel embarrassed by it? Is that something to be avoided? People feel embarrassed by the style in which Kate Millet writes. She knows it. I don't think I want people to feel embarrassed, but does it really hurt if they do?

I want people to identify. With the mushiness. I would like readers to feel comfortable to indulge in feeling mushy, and feel good about feeling that way ...

Monday, September 15, 1980

... This morning I type it. It is only the third draft, but seems so close to finished.

There are two other things I'm trying to do in this story that are different from other stories. One is incidental. That is telling the story through more than one character's voice ... The other is much more important, and very intentional — I'm trying to write about a black character, a black woman, as someone with whom it is possible for a reader to fall in love. I've always had a block about this. In my reading, somehow never felt I could fall in love with the black women characters ...

I used to think the fault was in the way the books were written. Now I think alot of it was me. At any rate, this task emerges that I seem to have set myself some time ago — to create a lovable black woman character. One I can feel the kind of excitement for that I feel when I fall in love.

I think it works with Gabriel. I am in love with both her and Piper, and Piper is in love with her ... I want it to work for people who read the story, too. So that's another way that it becomes a significant story for me, and makes me feel very vulnerable. I feel I've invested alot, I've alot to lose if this story doesn't work ...

Wednesday, October 15, 1980

What's most important is that the group liked my story. It works. All of it. All of the things I was trying to do they mentioned, without my even asking. They found it erotic; they wondered if I was so close to the story from identifying with Gabriel (...I inferred that they liked her). They thought the "pencil sketches" idea worked, that the relation of the author to the two characters worked. And the ending. And apparently the sentimentality wasn't too much. I feel really good. They had lost of specific small criticisms, and I think I can work on it ...

Thursday, November 21, 1980

...I have finally gotten to the end of the current non-fiction commitments...the San Francisco stuff. I am not a journalist, a reporter — that's one thing I learned. (On the other hand, neither was Lorraine Hansberry, or Zora Neale Hurston — I suppsoe everyone does it at one time or another. When there's nobody else to write what has to be said...). I will probably go on doing book reviews and being a "critic". But I think there's a danger, for me, of letting that kind of work take over...

There's a tendency to invalidate the work I really want to do doing — as frivilous, indulgent, "sentimental", not practical or functional. It feels like I'm only justified in spending the whole morning writing...if what I'm writing is serious, "revolutionary" work. Not stuff that meets my own needs so much.

I know that's a mistake. I know I have to write out of my own vision and my own dreams and my fantasies. Not to censor myself. I have a whole world of characters in my head who are crying to have their stories made, and told. It has been that way ever since I can remember. And some of the characters have been with me for a long time... There are certain characters, images, prototypes, fixed indelibly in my mind like paintings, who stay with me and grow with me and whose reality goes way back, in mine, in my life. And they have to be written about.

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Tomorrow morning, I will work on the gray whelk story again.

"AFTEREFFECT": Genesis of a Story by Michiyo Anne Fukaya

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I wrote "Aftereffect" in the heat of discovery, discovery of the true racist/sexist nature of American society while I was in college. Up until I was in college, the history that I learned did not explain the role of Asians and Asian Americans in American society. It was a blank hole for me that I tried to research in junior high school; I knew enough to know I would not have been born except for the Korean War and the occupation of Japan after World War II by American soldiers. I also knew that Japanese Americans had been jailed in concentration camps during World War II but knew nothing of economic, social, and political underpinnings of the internment, much less that it was inspired by racism.

Concurrently with discovering my racial heritage and connecting it with my individual herstory, I was developing my writing skills. When I was younger, I wrote of my life issues in veiled form or wrote lyric stuff about nature, especially wolves, dogs and horses. Then I began to fuse political and social issues into my short fiction and poetry. I was especially drawn to primary historical information, that is, first hand accounts of what it was like for the Asian people to come here and what they faced once they got here. I wanted to produce realistic characters facing authentic issues and concerns of their time. Part of it was curiosity to see how my characters developed and part of it was wanting to see my people in the North American landscape. I had talent and knew I could do it, if I would. At that time, I thought I was straight and so was not well acquainted with lesbian issues.

I felt I needed some sort of "hook" in "Aftereffect", something that would catch the reader's attention and draw her/him into the story. (Since my class was mostly composed of whites, I knew I had to spin a good yarn to hold their attention; my political/social motivation was to expose the tensions within the Japanese American community by the concentration camps). Basically, I decided to use a flashback technique to frame the telling of Martha's story. Since I had experience working as a nurse's aide, I set the opening of the story in a hospital where Martha was a nurse's aide. Martha's first name came from the issei, or first generation custom of giving their children Anglo names, so they could fit in as "Americans". "Itoi" and "Okada" are fairly common Japanese surnames, so I decided to use them for Martha and her old woman patient, who also happens to be Japanese.

Martha's patient, Mrs. Okada, is dying of cancer and her sedation is wearing off. I'd like to quote my opening paragraph to give an idea of the flavor of the setting:

The pattern was so familiar that Martha cursed inwardly. Sure, Old Lady Okada had cancer and had to be heavily sedated for pain. But did she have to start groaning every morning at 5:30 during the final "checkout" round of the night? Then Martha softened. The woman certainly couldn't help it if the sedation wore off just before the next shift.

So Martha goes to check on Mrs. Okada and finds that the old woman has confused past and present and thinks she (Mrs. Okada) is back in the concentration camps of World War II.

'Martha tries to comfort Mrs. Okada with present reality but it doesn't work, so Martha switches to hesitant Japanese to tell Mrs. Okada, "Shikata ga nai", or "nothing can be done about it". Mrs. Okada slumps against the hospital bed, clutching Martha's hand. Martha unwillingly remembers when she was six (American citizen by birth) and her alien father barely escaped being arrested by the FBI; he was a leader in the Bhuddist church. All the Japan born or issei were held suspect of espionage or sabotage by virtue of race immediately after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Japanese bank accounts were frozen and no Japanese person could withdraw funds. Japanese farmers and tradespeople found that no one would do business with the "enemy".

I emphasized the unwillingness to speak of the camps, because even thirty years after the camps, I found few Japanese who lived through the experience who would talk about it. The most I could get was the place they were interned; my eagerness to know our story seemed an intrusion on a private space of suffering for the older generation. I began to realize that it was a question of betrayal. Most of the nisei, or second generation, felt betrayed by the government. The nisei were aware of racial prejudice but most thought they just had to be "good citizens" and prejudice would give way before their determined optimism. The camps showed that the government did not consider American born citizens to be citizens. (The immigrants were kept from being naturalized by immigration laws; no matter how long Asian aliens held residence in the United States, they could not become citizens).

Martha was too young in my story to realize the full implications of the camps for her generation, but Martha's brother was older and bitterly aware of what the camps meant. He cursed the government and Chinese people who tried to disassociate in any way from the Japanese who became the "Enemy" overnight. Finally, when a recruiting team came to the camps to enlist nise into a proposed all Japanese battalion, Martha's brother chose to enlist with the battalion to "prove" his loyalty to the government. Martha's father tried — not to disuade his son from going to war — but to convey a realization of the full implications of going to war, that his son would have to be aware that he could die fighting for the government.

Martha's brother misunderstands and explodes in rage at his father: "So, I'm your only son. I'm sick of being cooped up and treated like the enemy. The only way the hakujin will believe our loyalty is if we prove it." He clenched his fists and glared at his parents as if he hated them. "I got this face from you — this Japanese face! You came here and had me."

The major communication barrier between Martha's father and brother was the lack of a common language. Japanese American children, by necessity, had to learn English, which soon became their primary language in school and with each other. Their parents, on the other hand, used Japanese as their primary language and barely knew any English. Plus, the nisei learned to value hakujin or white standards above "Japanesy" values. The lack of a common language and value system caused severe damage to family communication.

For Martha, that argument marked her parents' loss of authority. The Japanese family at that time was sexist in that males were given primacy over females in the family, but the family also provided a framework of discipline and togetherness. Her parents became like children in the custody of the state;

they could not even conduct elementary business because English was the main language of the camp. This reversal of the generations allowed Martha to run free and enter whatever mess hall she was near to eat, instead of eating with her family. Her family's solidarity broke down under the stress of the concentration camps.

Martha suddenly realizes that her personal memories and care for Mrs. Okada took up a half hour and that she has other patients to tend to. She returns to her chores but her mindmulls over the camps and their meaning. Her brother came back from "proving his loyalty", only to find that racism still blocked his way to full acceptance in American society. Her parents lost their farm to Anglos and received no compensation for the loss of their land. The story ends with Martha thinking of the third generation, Sansei, outside of the hospital. The sansei discovered the camps and a whole legacy shrouded in shame and silence. Why not let the past be? But the sansei insisted on talking about the camps and studying them.

I ended with my generation because we are the ones who questioned and talked of the camps. It wasn't hard to make the connection with the Vietnam War and statements like "Orientals don't value human life." Even Americanborn and with no accents, we are still considered foreign by other Americans. And we are now pushing the government, forty years after the camps, to pay reparations to our elders who unjustly suffered from the concentration camps. It's a way of saying racism cannot be allowed to shape the public policy of our nation.

"Aftereffect" is still a work in progress; I would like to publish it but have no idea where I could publish it. Even, in its present unfinished form, I feel its theme or central impression call to me. A short story, as far as I'm concerned, gives the reader one central image or idea as completely as possible. "Aftereffect" has yet to convey that impression as fully as I would wish it to, and is not yet ready for publication.

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I write best from a spiritual level. The spiritual part of me is something I've only recently discovered over the past three years or so. I have since allowed myself to keep in touch with a part of me that is sometimes quite surprising in depth. I am able for the first time in my life to relax my mind, to rid myself of my mental inhibitions enough to get in touch with my spirit. Writing from this level, I find that I have insights that intellectually I am not always aware of. Sometimes I wonder where I must have been for so many years; probably on some cloud, not thinking, not being aware, barely conscious of being alive.

I am an emotional writer. If an incident, a sight, a smell touches me, I am able to write about it immediately. I am inspired emotionally and spiritually by smells - fresh air, clean hair and skin, the smell of water (ocean, rain, faucet), clean sweaty skin, the smells that fill a room after love-making.

I am inspired by the mundane occurences of everyday life. Things that we take for granted appeal to me. Being in a crowd of people, I notice the features of everyone, the texture of their skin, the expressions on their faces, the way they walk, even their eyebrows and eyelashes. Features that are accepted as part of being a human being impress me: the fact that people walk on two legs, the way they smile, the fact that they DO smile. Certain smiles amuse me while others make me uncomfortable, but at no point do I take a smile for granted; it always means something.

If I am on a subway, bus or out walking or riding along in a car, I observe people. I wonder where they are headed, if they are headed anywhere, whether they came from home, work, a friend's house, what happened while they were there. Oftentimes, I feel as though I'm seeing people for the first time, and this adds more depth to life and widens my perceptions.

Animals fascinate me, especially domestic animals like cats and dogs. I find myself wondering what they feel about their captivity. I have started writing a piece for children which is from the point of view of a dog. I feel that as human animals, we take for granted that nonhuman animals have no insights other than the ones we allow for in our own minds. We think because we cannot understand what animals are saying that they are saying nothing. This is another manner of showing our limited mental consciousness.

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I am a mother, teacher; I am Black, southern. My writing is controlled by those particular aspects of ME. As a parent, I find my time very limited, not because it is necessary to spend a great deal of time with my son, but because the emotional energy of being a parent sometimes makes it difficult to have the energy to do anything else that requires a lot of time.

lam a teacher, a counselor and an assistant coordinator of an adult training program. This requires a tremendous amount of time and energy, however, just as with my role as a parent, it contributes a lot of material for stories. I am motivated to do writing because I have so many subjects to choose from.

by being a Black woman, I am often accosted on the streets by our so-called 'brothers'. I find I can go through many weeks being extremely angry with Black men. If they even look at me I get very 'colored' with them: rolling of the eyes, sucking of the teeth, etc. I am still of the naive frame of mind that Black men should not harass Black women, that they should have respect for us. The anger I sometimes feel is very personal for I believe in male bonding. I feel that no matter how many times my son sees and hears that I and other women dislike being called on the streets by men, he will grow up to do that just to be one of the boys. I have enough faith to realize that he probably won't be as ridiculous or ugly as a lot of men are, but I'm sure not sure that he won't do it at all.

I have written many poems out of anger at not being able to walk the streets that my tax money helped pay for. In my mind, I feel that women, especially Black women, should not even be paying taxes for after all is not there something in the constitution or one of those founding documents that says there will be no taxation without representation?

As a southern woman, I have a background filled with incongruities. The strength that Black women show in raising and protecting their children does not fit in with the weakness they have for their men. I was raised around the concept of respect. This is translated "don't get caught", at being infidel, sneaky, spiteful or two-faced. I feel even today my idea of respect means not that one should be sexually loyal to one's mate, or totally committed to doing the right thing. Respect means to me not rubbing in anyone's face the fact that you are totally self-centered. My writing evolves from the need to reconcile my selfulness with my selfishness and the need to accept other people's self-centeredness. I also, within my writing and my life, deal with my inability to accept the same characteristics in others that I have within myself.

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Currently, my pet project is a novel tentatively named Molinka's Kingdom. I have been working on it intermittently for three or more years. God! that seems like a long time to have something hanging in one's soul. For me, this novel is important and always in progress. Whenever I think of things that would fit into it - conversations, situations, etc., I write them down and add them to the story. The novel is basically centered around two women who are struggling for an empire. One does not realize the importance of the struggle while the other does. One woman feels this power struggle is a political issue while the other woman knows the struggle is personal.

The characters are derived basically from my imagination. There are only two characters that are composites of 'real' people, and even they are mixtures rather than true representations. I have taken types of people and compiled them to fit the theme of my story. The theme involves opportunism, love-hate, power struggles, aging and a questioning of goals.

The novel is not complete and is nowhere near complete for I have no goal for the end, I think more than likely it will just stop rather than end. I want it published because I feel it is good. However I do find it very difficult to tailor it to suit the needs of major publishers. There is really no sex in it and very little violence which seems to be the most important components that any novel must have in order to be successful these days.

I cannot recall what inspired me to begin the novel. I was quite into science fiction and fantasy at one time and felt that the theme of the novel would be very good for that genre. After I started the novel I realized that I was writing about many of my own struggles with living among women. I had begun to realize how destructive women could be toward each other even within love relationships. Thus Molinka's Kingdom came into existence. It is my attempt at making some sort of sense out of my observations and feelings.

Women have tremendous power within them. We are also vulnerable to each other. That vulnerability is exhilarating as well as debilitating but it can be just a day-to-day thing that is not even noticed by most people. Molinka's Kingdom is about that vulnerability among and between women that shares a wide range of emotions. I wrote it and am writing it basically for myself, to purge things held in too long, to laugh at other things too long taken seriously, to see myself complete a major writing task. Here is an excerpt from the story:

When the sun rose, Molinka was not sure whether the night had been a reality or a dream. Whether even now she was not still dreaming as she looked across the room and saw the broken glass, the strewn flowers, dirt scattered on the floor that once nourished those flowers. She rubbed her palm across her face as if to wipe out the view, yet it was still there when she opened her eyes. The chaos, when she looked around the room, was complete. Not only were the flowers uprooted, but the paintings were ripped from the walls and torn into tiny bits of colored fabric like confetti, torn by a methodic but enraged hand. In another part of the room lay the guitar, a gift of love to one thought to be very precious, the strings sticking out like thorns, the brown and gold body splintered, broken beyond repair, like Molinka's heart.

As she rose from the bed, she felt an ache in her body almost rivaling the ache in her soul. But not quite, because slowly the ache was changing even as she walked across the room to the door the hinges broken. It was changing into a fury that was worse than the fury that caused the damage in the room that was once a room of love. The fury was worse because it contained logic, a terrible frightening logic that only one gone mad can possess. And mad she was right now, she wore her insanity like a crown and would wear it for many years until the cold furious logic that gripped her could finally be expressed in one more desperate attempt to win back or destroy the one person in her life that had made her feel human.

Molinka's whole life from this day forward would focus on this goal.

I write true-life fantasy because that is what I live. At no appreciable stretch of time am I totally in touch with actualities. True-life fantasy is the meat of Molinka's Kingdom. The book is about you and me and all people who love-hate other people, who compete with the person they love, who love and live for pleasure, necessity, for lack of anything better to do.

Two women, leaders of their own separate empires, fight for total control. They don't, however, fight in the sense of out-and-out physical violence. Women to me are great emotional infighters. They rarely NEED to get physical with one another, being quite capable of devastating each other with words and emotions. We resort to the physical out of sheer frustrations at not being able to prove a victory over their adversary.

This novel is about two women who cannot get to the level of champion. One cannot best the other. I am exploring why with the intelligence, power, and emotional and mental depth they possess, neither has resorted to whatever ultimate necessity is required to win.

It is a very personal story that has not been completed because it is difficult to analyze and entertain at the same time. However I feel it will soon be finished.

2

What are my theories and ideas on publishing third world lesbian writers? My main idea on this is that I don't like designations such as these. At the same time that I find them important, I think labels are so confining as to sometimes invalidate a person's work unjustly. I would not like to be considered a third world lesbian writer simply because it may limit my readership.

We should no longer allow ourselves the luxury of exclusivity. All over, there is an all-out attack on all that is not white, upper class, heterosexual and conservative. As thinking people, we have to realize that there has arisen a severe emergency in consciousness, a threat to the future of the thinking person. Anyone that does not adhere to the mentalities of the Reagans and Bushes and Haigs and Thatchers of the world will find themselves isolated and harassed at best and at worst killed. By isolating ourselves into sexual and racial groups we are only consolidating our ultimate destruction.

Additionally, we have all become complacent as we flounder in these times of confusion. Divide and conquer has always worked no matter on what group the philosophy is applied. We are becoming divided between classes. When the sexual identification comes up it is those homosexuals with money that are left to themselves while those of us without money are harassed for in the end it is all about the dollar. A rich homosexual is 'eccentric'; a poor one is 'sick'. A rich one can hide, a poor one MUST deal.

My goal as a person involves expressing myself in as free a manner as possible. This is desired when doing soemthing as enjoyable and as exciting as dancing or something as mundane as conducting a staff meeting. When speaking with friends, I like to be open; if I am not, I try to figure out for myself why I am not. In my writing, my basic goal is to acquire confidence in the quality, selling value and messages of my work. With this in mind, I realize my self-imposed isolation and reticence about my talent have to be eradicated. Sending in this manuscript is my first real attempt.

GETTING IT TOGETHER by Rosita Libre de Marulanda

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I appreciate this opportunity to dialogue with other Third World Lesbian Writers and Readers in this issue of AZALEA.

The project that I want to talk about is my involvement with AZALEA. I want to talk about this very magazine that you are holding in your hands. I feel this magazine is a very important one in reaching us and recording our lives, as we live them. To me, AZALEA has been a publisher, a teacher, a mentor, a vehicle, a spawning ground. I feel inspired by the topics and the points of view covered by this publication, and by the issues it addresses; by the writers that respond to it, and the variety of topics that it covers. By the energies the Azalea Collective puts into the production and distribution of this magazine; by the conferences it has sponsored - and the parties it has held. And by the way it stimulates out thinking.

AZALEA is very important as a connecting medium. It is a herstorical record of our existence. Proof that we breathe and we share our thinking - and we have visions.

A dialogue is just what I needed, a space, a forum - a recognition of "the need for communication and feedback between us". AZALEA is just a step ahead of us - inviting us to participate in the opportunities it creates.

So, I'm going to take this opportunity to state the things I need. I miss a conference. I have attended two AZALEA conferences that have been most inspiring. I've been missing the faces that I have seen there, especially now that I feel more of a writer, and now that I can see where this is leading me to.

My involvement with the magazine is leading me to zero in on my identity as a writer, as a Third World writer, and as a Third World Lesbian writer.

AZALEA has also been helpful in getting some dough for my poetry books, Toni, Death, and A New Day. Beth Brant of Turtle Grandmother Books **, says she heard about me in AZALEA. I got some business from Beth. That was a very rewarding sale. The proceeds from the sale felt wonderful. And making that contact made me feel so much richer. I was listed in the Turtle Grandmother Books catalogue - and this, of course, gave me exposure.

I have not been writing for the past year because I have been so busy doing other things. It has been two years since my last article appeared in AZALEA. The topic dealt with a Latina woman going through name changes - Vol.3 No.3, Fall 1980; short stories.

I also want to share with my sister writers and readers, the head processes that are going on with my right now.

During the past year, I have been addressed twice as a woman of color - and this has caused joy within me. It feels so wonderful - nobody had called me a woman of color before. I felt delight because all of a sudden someone was telling me there was this group, and that I belonged to it. I felt ecstatic, because the black and white polarities instantly collapsed in my mind, and it offered me

a much larger in-between group with which I could identify. In always had difficulty identifying with black or white, even though I have been priviledged enough to be welcomed by black and white social groups - but I laways felt as an outsider, looking in. All of a sudden, I feel I am in!!

I was at the 6th Michigan Women's Music Festival las August, where I had the chance to meet with a group of Latinas from many countries. We discussed many issue and one of them was the many skin shades that can exist in a Latina family - and how the skin - color - difference can play a part in maternal and paternal affectional preference and favoritism. We decided that it would be hardest on the darker sister.

So I came home wanting to talk to my sister (the darker sister in my family) and hug her. But I have been unable to. We have an unspeakable law between us. Thou shall not touch. I know this law is white-value oriented, and it is a very powerful force that keeps us apart. White patriarchy is deeply ingrained in us. Touching others is strictly for fucking, and touching ourselves is allowed only to beat our chest in repentance for being who we are.

I am in the middle of the following projects:

- 1. Waiting for the Latin American Lesbian Anthology★ to be published and I'm going to be in that number, too. It is due to be out soon.
- 2. Reading my poetry in public places like La Papaya Bookstore and Restaurant **, and Identity House **.
- 3. Selling my poetry. Three books: Toni, Death, and A New Day are available at La Papaya Bookstore and Restaurant, and also by mail from Turtle Grandmother Books. These books contain poetry that I have written emotionally and factually as I see it, and how I feel it. I deal with issues of life, death, relationships, and new awakenings that open new horizons for us.
- 4. Looking for a publisher. I have written a story as an explanation of some very morbid feelings I was going through, a few years ago. It ws extremely helpful to me in understanding how useless these feelings had become for me. I feel it can be very useful for the reader who walks around feeling she'd rather be dead, and wants to explore these feelings. I feel it would also inspire the general reader because it is an example of courage and determination. Intellectually it is very stimulating, since the reader is allowed into a very private conversation between my intellect and my heart. Emotionally it is very moving. The title, My Dear Intellect, Please Help Me Through These Morbid Feelings. Available from me.*

Additional interests of mine include:

- Making contact with Sisters and Relatives of the Mentally Retarded.
- Organizing a social club, where lesbians meet other lesbians, sharing social, financial and spiritual connections.
- Searching out Latinas Lesbianas.
- I am interested in hearing from other Third World lesbian mothers who would like to share their experiences. Especially mothers of teen-age daughters.

What motivates me is a thirst for excitement. My recurrent theme is "let it all hang loose". Above all I want to connect with others like myself.

My plans are to add financial reward to all other rewards I already get from my writing.

I'll be looking forward to the day this issue appears on the market, and I get to hear the other spectrum of this Dialogue - when I get to read what other Third World Lesbian Writers have to say about their plans and what they are into. I thank my sister writers for their interest in sharing parts of themselves.

* Addresses of people/places mentioned in this article:

Latin American Lesbian Anthology c/o Digna Landrove & Juanita Ramos 170 Avenue C # 4H NY, NY 10009

La Papaya Bookstore and Restaurant 331 Flatbush Avenue Bklyn, NY (212) 622-1926

Identity House 544 Avenue of the Americas NY NY (219) 943-8181

NY, NY (212) 243-8181

Turtle Grandmother Books
PO Box 33964
Detroit, MI 48232 (313) 381-3550

Sisters and Relatives of the Mentally Retarded/Rosita's Club/Mothers of Teen-Age Daughters

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by Raymina Y. Mays

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The last time Delta went home, she went on a Greyhound bus. When she had arrived and bathed and settled in a rocking chair on her mother's porch with a glass of lemonade, was surrounded by her aunts who had all gathered to give her mother and each other some back up for the long list of stories that they would tell, she was told a story about her arrival. The Aunts and her mother sat and encouraged each other, added missing details and supplied the right voices, walks and facial expressions. When her little sister Beth Ann was told she was coming home, she sang a little song called "My sister is going home on a greyhound bus."

"Now I know them songs them babies sing when they jumpin rope," one aunt said, "And that wasn't hardly one of em. Is say, Bell, come out here. I b'lieve this baby out here makin up new rhymes. Don't you know this girl had them kids jumpin rope to you comin home?"

This time when Delta called to tell her sister she was coming home on the bus, she was asked if she couldn't get there sooner. Couldn't she take a plane?

Delta was so caught up in her memories that she didn't realize that she was in town until the bus driver announced "Haytown". The bus stop was still a bench in front of the pharmacy, and the faded Greyhound Bus sign was still pasted to the window. The bus driver put Delta's bags on the sidewalk next to the bench.

Delta saw her mother's Continental parked not far from where she stood. She waved to the figure behind the wheel and waited impatiently for the door to open and her sister, Beth Ann to get out of the car. She walked towards Beth Ann. Almost ran toward her. When she couldn't seem to get to her fast enough, Delta let out a joyful holler from where she stood. People turned their heads, some smiled.

When Delta reached Beth Ann she hugged her hard and then pushed her back so she could eye the changes. Beth Ann was a woman who looked much like Delta. Busy eyes. Cheek bones and nose. All a lot like her own. When her eyes had filled she reached for Beth Ann again. They cried in each other's arms and Beth Ann whispered, "Momma's dead." And they hugged so tightly that Delta forgot where her tears ended and Beth's began.

Once the bags were loaded into the trunk of the car, Beth Ann drove through the town so Delta could see what had changed and what had remained the same. Between questions, Beth Ann would point out different people old and new. It seemed that before Delta could answer one question, Beth Ann had another one.

Did she still live with that woman up in New York? Why didn't she call or write more often? Miss Perry and them still live in that green house. Mrs. Sara still get drunk and cain't find her way home. What happened when word go to her that her momma died of a heart stroke? Did she cry? They only had three Aunts left and not four as before. Aunt Lovie died last year of the same thing momma died of. Delta's friend Sonja Jean didn't ever leave town. She had taken to goin to the Illusion bar, only bar in town. This man come from Chicago and turn a gas station into a bar. And Sonja be sittin up in the bar in the middle of the day drinkin beer out of a styrafoam cup with folk who didn't have no job. Sonja slept with women and her husband nearly beat her to death when he found out and he took her kids away from her. Had she slept

with Sonja? Did she want to go by Sonja's house when she got rested and the funeral was over? Delta tried to answer all of Beth's questions and to save her questions for later.

Delta had wished first that her mother hadn't died. But she wished second that death would have slipped up on her in the flower garden and not while scrubbing some woman's floors. When Beth Ann parked the car, Delta walked in search of her mother's garden. She was amazed at her mother's ability to grow flowers that would grow past a tall person's knees. She picked flowers for the table inside, but dropped them because she didn't want to look at the table.

Delta entered the house from the back porch. She walked through quickly, not looking at the furniture or pictures in the room that she and Beth Ann had shared as children. She made way to the front porch. She heard laughter of her Aunt Beth and Aunt Delta and Aunt Martha. She pushed the screen door open and the laughter stopped.

"Loooooord," Aunt Delta said pulling at Delta's army coat, "If this ain't Bell's child then I don't know who is." Delta leaned over so that the woman whose name she had been given could kiss her. She went to her other Aunts one at a time and waited until they positioned their snuff so that they could say hello. Then she sat in a chair next to her Aunt Delta, and waited for the questions.

What happened to that woman you brought down the last time you was here? Did you feel bad bout being away for this many years? You married? What New York like? You still teach? You still smart?

Delta looked at her Aunt Delta. She remembered her for being good with making her comfortable when she really wasn't. Taking away a fair amount of girlhood pain. Understanding when no one else seemed to.

"Looorrd. Jesus. The girl just got in town and yall tryin to get her whole life story. Leave her lone," Aunt Delta persuaded. "Rean they questionin you so close is cause they think you gonna go to the funeral then leave right away. Leave her be I said."

"You gonna stay awhile?"

Delta said yes, though she told her lover before leaving New York that she would leave when the funeral was over. She could not stay in her mother's house. Her mother had said never come home again and she took her word for it and the fact that she was dead didn't make it any easier to come home.

When Delta looked away from her Aunts, Beth was standing behind the screen door beckoning her from the porch. She excused herself then followed Beth to her mother's room. She looked at the dresser to briefly see herself in the mirror. She was nauseated by seeing herself in her mother's mirror. She was in the one room where she and Beth had not been allowed. If they went in that room when her mother was away visiting or shopping, she always knew and punished them.

Beth Ann hugged Delta. "Stay. It's summer and since you and the woman who you're with teach and schools out, she can come here too." Delta wanted to be with Beth too and she knew that Beth Ann would like her lover.

For a long time she had wanted to talk with Beth about growing up, telling secrets, swimming naked in the pond, getting mad at their momma for being nice to that other woman's children and having the patience as long as a short stick when it came to she and Beth. She wanted to talk about how when their father died, the walls seemed to pick up their mother's grief and places in the floor creaked where they never had before and how they seemed so close to their mother then. Delta told Beth that she would stay for the summer and maybe she could meet her womanfriend.

"Momma kept a Direy," Beth Ann said. "I read it. She talk about you mostly. You probably mentioned on every other page. I'll keep our Aunties company while you look at the books. She wrote bout ten."

Delta couldn't imagine her mother with a journal. The first page was dedicated "For Mrs. Johnson, who told me to keep this." Mrs. Johnson was the woman she worked for.

There was a slip of paper in one of the pages and Delta turned to that one and began to read:

"Today is the day Delta came home from school up north. She change. Her hair is bushy. Her clothes not cleaned or ironed. I am ashame of her to come in here with her Aunties here dressed like that. Her friend look no better. She live bout 50 mile south of here but stayin here with Delta before she go home. I don't know who her people are."

Delta skipped more pages.

"They was in Delta bed like they was married. This is only way I can explain it. Kissing and holding. I don't allow that in my house. If I hadda been able to sleep last night I wouldn't know. Who woulda tole me?"

Delta skipped more pages.

"Delta called. She cried. I told her I would kill myself for making her like that if I did it. I think I did. I hate myself. Queer. Folk in town know. Go to the hairdresser and things get hushed. Beth Ann got picked on in school. I got to watch Beth Ann so she won't be one too."

On another page was a passage that read: "I hate myself. I called Delta today. I tell her to come on home and don't bring that woman. Told her Mrs. Johnson know a doctor for Delta sickness. I love her. I hate myself. She hung up in my face."

Delta lay across her mother's bed consumed by the journal. She was holding a year of her mother's thoughts in her hand. She would ask Beth Ann if she could keep the journals.

As Delta continued to read, she came to a page about Sonja Jean. She couldn't imagine that her mother would write anything about Sonja Jean except that she hated her.

"Melvira's girl Sonja is like Delta, but when she found out she married Ruth's boy. They got babies. Sonja stay in and out of the hospital. Her mind is nearly bout gone. Folk say she leave town to sleep with women. Melvira and them say the girl crazy. If I say Sonja Jean crazy then I have to say Delta crazy and I know Delta ain't crazy. This is the one reason I didn't like Sonja cause she was too smart like Delta and the two of them together was enough to make my pressure rise. I want to call Delta and tell her they put Sonja away tonight. She said don't call and it be about two in the morning so I might call tomorrow anyway. Don't care what she say."

29

Delta's mother never called.

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"They say Sonja called Delta's name one or two times while she was under the needle. Delta didn't go to Sonja's wedding folks say because there was a big fight last time Delta came home. I didn't know nothing bout this show how folk talk behind your back. Sonja must have been the first one for Delta. Why didn't I know?"

Delta wiped away bitter tears. Where was Sonja's house? Beth Ann would take her there. Delta searched for the last journal. She turned pages, though she did not know exactly what she was looking for. Finally she began to read.

"She may not be a mental case. It sure ain't natural though. Someone I brought into the world sleeping with women and doing only god knows what."

Delta frantically turned more pages. She read: "I couldn't accept it. I'll go to my grave not accepting that someone who came out of me sleeps with women."

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JENNY: A REFLECTION by Deborah Louise Allen

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CHILDHOOD

played with dolls until she was thirteen years old. She was a sweet little dark-skinned baby with large brown eyes. Who still liked to dress-up in moms clothes, and make pretend. She didn't like boys that much, a crush here-there, nothing serious.

At fifteen the body of a little girl, changed into a womans. jenny now had breasts-once there was none. Now had curves-once she was straight up-down. Now had secretions of womanhood-that lasted four-five days.

She lay in bed at night with feelings of confusion and wonder, as to, what was happening? She didn't know if she liked it or hated it. She felt she was in a cocoon type glass fixture that set her apart from her surroundings. A fixture that was inside. Outside of jenny. It prevented her from being. Knowing. Talking.

use your eyes jenny... use your ears jenny... search.

began to 'be'-noticed. One minute happythe next sad. Laughter. Tears. Confusion. Strange. Strange??? A whirlpool of isolation. Questions. Wonderment. A feeling once again of isolation.

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centered away from her surroundings.

use your eyes jenny... use your ears jenny... search.

jenny began to check-out jenny as in, mom, aunty, father and friend. She began to wonder about who she was and what her abilities were in order to make it in a grown-up world. The first person she looked at was her mother. She was a decent woman who worked hard to raise jenny.

thoughts about you...who are you? thoughts about me...who am i? where do we come from?...what is happening to me?...why are things changing? dont you see me?...mom you only had an eighth grade education...i dont want that...i want more...i want to make it in this world...can you help me? what is love?...what was love for you momie? i love you...thoughts about you momie... who are you?

- Mom was a single parent-married-but still a single parent. She was the color of cinnamon, a short woman, with keen features and short curly hair. Small hands and feet. About 5' even.
- For as far back as jenny remembers no man ever lived with she and her mother. jennys mom made all the decisions, major-minor. She would handle and control the bills, household and jenny. Mom never trusted men and made no secret of it. Many times she told jenny of the relationship between she and her father; she told jenny of the hurt and responsibility that comes with having a man.
- Mom loved jennys father very much when they were first married, jenny was made out of a deep love that they shared with each other. Father had been in the army and the air force. When he came out of the service he could find no employment. Feeling desperate he began to escape to and in a world produced from inhaling and breathing a fine and precious herb. And when that could not carry him fast enough and for long enough he began to inject into his manhood a solution, guaranteeing fast arrival to dreamworld. But the price of this voyage, cost jennys father his family and life.
- jennys momy love turned to pity and then disgust. The big strong man that jennys mom loved turned into a weak, skeleton of a man. Mom suppressed the hurt of failure and need and directed her energies on jenny. Determined never to be seriously involved with a man again and never allowing what happened to her, happen to jenny.
- She continually drilled into jenny, the fact that she must provide for herself. "Get a good education-never depend on a man-always have a job" were her mottos. When mom would drink a little too much, she would talk about men and gay people. She did not speak about either positively. She would say "men aint shit-men that fuck men were faggots-women who love women, were studs that were jealous, possessive, who could never get a man, and did everything they could to keep a woman."
- Which brought jenny to the second person she evaluated. aunty. She was a Lesbian.
- aunty was very pretty. She had light brown skin with green eyes. She stood about 5'4" and was shapely built. She was extremely bright (smart). She had a good job, with good pay and benefits (blue cross, blue shield). She worked everyday, from 9to5, and was very nice to jenny.
- jenny always remembers aunty with her girlfriend. They were always together, jenny never realized that her aunt loved her friend or that she loved women. All jenny knew was that her aunt loved her and was very nice to her, aunty was the only person that jenny saw as doing something progressive with her life.
- jenny began to closely watch aunty and her lifestyle.
 aunty and her friend both had good jobs and shared an apartment. It did not seem,
 as if, something was wrong with that to jenny. When she would visit there were
 two bedrooms and a pleasant apartment with flowers and pretty pictures on the
 walls. jenny loved to go over and visit with aunty and her friend.

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One day, jennys mom told her that aunty and her friend were lesbians. She told her this because she felt that jenny was spending too much time with them. jenny had heard the word lesbian before, but in a very negative way. She had heard her mom speak about them. Her words produced in jennys mind negative images. Images of lesbianism-a woman dressed like a man-had mannerisms of men-didnt keep themselves clean. Lesbians took women away from men and did everything to keep them. jenny did not see aunty like that. The word lesbian.

thoughts about you aunty...who are you? mom used the word "lesbian"...to you aunty...about you aunty...as if you exist on slime and filth...as if you had bad thoughts, attitudes, actions. it cannot be so...no aunty, it cannot be true... no dark negative lifestyle for you aunty...it hurts... thoughts about you aunty...thoughts about you aunty?... who am i?...

ADOLESCENCE

The first physical feelings that jenny had for a woman was when she was about 16 or 17. She was her best friend-brown skin with a short curly bush.

enny and her girlfriend when to school-shopping and dances together. They spent the night over each others house. They were always together, jenny had never given or had the awareness that what she felt for her girlfriend was more than friendship. Until one summernight they were sitting on the front step.

They were bored and wanted something to do. Even at that early age theyrealized that one could not depend on their boyfriends for company. It didnt matter to jenny anyway-she like her friend and enjoyed being with her. jenny looked at her friend and saw how pretty she was, and felt an impulse-that travelled through every vein in her body. A rushing movement. An impulse to touch. Feel. Kiss. Suddenly aware of her feelings, jenny turned to her friend and asked "if not having a boyfriend around ever made her want to do something that she knew was wrong?"

A great silence fell. She and her friend totally absorbed with each others person. Her friend answered with a flat "no". They never mentioned it again.

little girl, little girl...look what you have here...a deep dark majesty of blacks and purples and passions... forbidden love...forbidden fruit... come taste...commit. little girl, little girl...what have you done now?... but why do i like her?...what have

i done wrong?...i only want to be...
me.
thoughts about you girlfriend...
thoughts about me...who am i?

With that no, jenny felt as if she had fallen 10 feet inside herself, jenny felt that she had said something wrong. Rejected. The realization that she wanted to hold-kiss another woman. The guilt of having committed a sin and the rejection combined together was an emotional overload, jenny could not handle it. She made a promise to herself that she would never let that happen again.

21

At 21, jenny was attending a community college. Living alone. Sleeping alone. An occasional man over to spend the night. Extremely lonely. Not for sexual companionship or sexual activity, jenny needed someone to reach inside of her and see her beauty. She needed for someone to say "hey you are beautiful, I love you".

jennies mind closed to forgotten dreams-of happiness and gaiety produced from innocents and wonderment. Now filled with daily routines and the fast pace of going and coming.

There was a woman in that class and that woman would always sit next to jenny. She was a plain woman-wore no make-up. She wore her hair in a short afro with glasses and kept a neat appearance. She always wore pants and a shirt-which gave her a masculine look. If she were in a crowd, one would not notice. But because she and jenny would talk everyday-jenny noticed.

jenny guessed that this woman was into and about women. She guessed it by the presence of the woman-the way she carried herself-mannerisms.

There was always a feeling that jenny received when she was with this person, jenny sub-consciously felt a secure, almost serene feeling of companionship and equality. Her friend would listen-talk with jenny.

jenny would find herself daydreaming or thinking about her friend, jenny would wonder how she was doing-who she was with-if she had a woman lover "what must she be like?"

jenny lay in bed at night, feeling, searching, creatingpleasure. Excitement. Explosions within herself-by herself. Thinking of her friend. Alone. Safe. Another secret for jenny. For that moment, jenny could explode in a valley of ecstacy and desire and a dream. This was jennys dark, personal secretthat brought her much safety-pleasure and desire.

thoughts about you, my friend...thoughts about you...what am i doing?...i have been here before...it hurts. i do not see us as being something positive warm and soft...there is just something that you do in the dark-behind closed doors-drawn together curtains-pulled down shades... thoughts about you my friend...thoughts about you...thoughts about me and you... i dont know what to do.

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jenny felt that the woman was after her-wanted her-would make love to her, jenny never dealt with the fact that her friend was a human being. Who had real feelings-was very serious. That if love happened between them-it

would be based upon mutual bonding-understanding.

jenny continued to fool herself and play miss young silly thing, jenny would imagine that if they kissed, that she would never tell anyone about it. It was her dark secret. Because you see, it really didnt matter anyway to jenny. She was only experimenting. The experience would only make her a better woman for that man that she really wanted.

So, eventually, jenny being then who she is now-her friend

being then who she is now, found themselves alone.

It all happened the night jenny went over her friends apartment and it got so late until jenny had to spend the night. They kissed-hugged-

talked-laughed. They were accepting-gentle-caring.

They communicated on a level that jenny never knew before. It was not all like the experience jenny had when she was younger. It was totally different. They sat and looked at each other, jennys friend leaned forward and whispered something in jennys ear.

thoughts of you my mother...thoughts of you my aunty...you made me...what i must be. thoughts of the past are gone and over... no more pain, suppression, isolation... for i am with she and she is with me... and we are happy...free... thoughts of my friend...my love... we are together... i love you.

enny answered with a nod of her head. Then they went to bed. This is the end of this story. to the comment of the second o

by Cassandra Gibbs

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My first love has really been writing. Always. Paper has been there to collect my dreams, thoughts, feelings, frustrations, moods, pains and fantasies. It is a very special relationship outside of any other relationship I've ever been in. I'm there because I want to be. I need to be. It needs from me.

Writing, like anything else, requires commitment and growth. Inner growth, especially. Expanding and unfolding from the inside out. I'm learning who I am, what I am, what I want to do, what I want to write and how I want to write it. As a writer I try to grow with every new piece I create.

Tonica is part of a collection of unfinished short stories that I am working on that can be summed up as: SOME FANTASIES ABOUT LOVE COLLAPSE WHEN TESTED IN THE REAL WORLD - LIFE. There is purposely no dialogue in Tonica. No real communication. No openness. No sensitivity between the lovers, just words. It is not until the morning that Lola expresses the apparent emptiness she feels, though not to her lover, but on a piece of paper. She also expresses some of the beauty that is also apparent in the relationship and the need for them to communicate on a more deeper level. To gain emotional satisfaction that is brought about by learning to talk deeply and honestly, exchanging feelings and leaving out guessing, manipulating and assuming. Then, it's nice to add candlelight - and - roses.

The apartment was filled with the rich scent of red roses, and when the summer wind stirred through the open window, it intermingled with the oysters baking in the oven. The sounds that came from the outside; street noises, cars, buses and children's voices filtered up and through the night air. Spanish predominated above her stereo; a Phyllis Hyman album played low as Lola strode across the room to unlock the door, her silky beruffled nightdress flowing delicately in the humid air.

It was Tonica. The top of her blue shirt stained with sweat. The badge glinted dully in the hall light. The police cap she removed and held in her hand.

Lola opened the door wider. Smiled. And with a push of her foot shut the door, once Tonica was inside. Their arms filled with the other and Tonica noticed the fresh roses that stood on the table in the middle of the room. The lit candles. The sparkling clean plates reflecting the flame. The silken tablecloth. She smelled the oysters and smiled, removing her shirt. Letting the heavy belt and gun drop onto the couch. Lola took her hand and they went off to the shower. Tonight it is like we are back in Santurce and not in New York. Anywhere.

Two bodies, naked. One, the color of walnut. The other, the color of ivory, long-legged. Hands groping in the cool spray. Against the faded scene of birds in flight.

Charles & Anna Carles & Carles

NECT STREET, PROBLEMENT

Tonica kissed the tips of Lola's ears. Closing her eyes, enjoying the soft scented woman in her arms. The last flicker she saw in Lola's eyes was candles even there, in the bathroom. And the scent of roses binding with the steam.

There was a soft towel waiting and shrimp and oysters. Hot tomatoes and tiny biscuits. Chilled Moet et Chandon Brut Imperial. Perrier Joulet. Slivers of red jello in the fridge and light cream. Their mouths opened and words floated out. They talked. Laughed. Made love again. And again. Their lips met and held. Full and thin. Pink and brown. Warmth. Clinging. Pulling. Gently rocking between thighs, abandoning and finding ...

The next morning - A cup of strong black coffee. Maybe some eggs or toast. A promise to call and soon Lola was alone and gathered up the dishes lovingly as one gathered memories and placed them in the sink. From time to time she would sip from Tonica's cup, but it was too strong, much too bitter. She hated when Tonica had to leave. She wiped the lipstick from her mouth slowly with a napkin. Tossing it carelessly into the wastebasket. Stared accusingly at the roses, wilting silently. Bits of red littering the table. At first she attempted to brush them away but instead gathered them into her hands and bending out the window blew them outward into the air. Into the street.

She was fond of writing as that was how she found Tonica -through an ad. Now she wrote: I cannot remember being without you. I feel only the warmth of your body as I sleep. Lulled into ecstacy without effort. Yet I know with the dawn you must always depart. I cannot bear another interruption. Must I pretend to know you not so well when you are at work just smile and continue on my way. Mira, esta mi amor. We must talk.

Lola stopped writing and doodled for a moment, two stick figures holding hands without heads. They must talk.

amouncements

COMPANERAS: Latina Lesbian Anthology. Companeras is a collection of short stories, essays, poems, oral histories and art work by Latina lesbians residing in the U.S. and Latin America. Edited by Juanita Ramos & Mirtha N. Quintanales. For more information, write: J. Ramos/M. Quintanales - 170 Avenue C, 4-H, NY, NY 10009

3rd WORLD WOMEN'S ARCHIVES. The 3rd World Women's Archives is open for use. We have basic collections about 3rd World Women in Africa and Asia as well as extensive files about women of color in this hemisphere. Materials include books, journals, newspapers, posters, and tapes. Hours are by appointment only, every Tuesday. Call (212) 308-5389 to leave a message or write 3rd World Women's Archives, PO Box 159, Bush Terminal Station, Brooklyn, NY 11232.

LESBIANS ON LAND. A book is growing. It is stories of lesbian land, from womyn past and present involved. Visions, goals, realities and process. Write for more info. Joyce Cheney, 78 Monroe St., Burlington, VT. 05401.

LESBIAN MOTHERS. We are producing a film about lesbians who decide to have children after they've come out. If you are involved in a pregnancy (yourself or as a friend or lover of a lesbian who is), please write us or pass this request on to someone who is. Once we hear from you, we'll explain the project in greater detail. All info received will be confidential. Debra Chasnoff/Kim Klausner, 46 Bay State Ave., #2, Sommerville, MA 02144.

LESBIAN HERSTORY CALENDAR. Tracking Our Way Through Time: A Lesbian Herstory Calendar/Journal is coming this fall from Metis Press, Inc. It is a 200-page compilation of Lesbian facts, photos, quotes and graphics documenting Lesbian herstory. Reserve your copy. For more info and prices - Metis Press, Inc., PO Box 25187A, Chicago, IL 60625.

FREEHAND, a learning community of women writers and photographers, begins its second year Oct. I. We seek students interested in an experience of disciplined and unrestrained lust for art and freedom. Resident faculty includes: Olga Broumas, Jane Miller, Marian Roth, Rita Speicher, and Mona Vold. PO Box 806, Provincetown, MA 02657.

RADICAL ROSE RECORDINGS, A Lesbian cassette recording company from Minneapolis, MN, is soliciting audio tapes of Lesbian culture. We plan to release tapes in cassette form from Lesbians only and for wimmin only. Interviews, informal conversations, humor, music, stories, oral herstory, poetry, lectures, analysis, and other sharings are all welcome. Tapes of Lesbians of color, working-class Lesbians, and Lesbians who are not well known are especially welcome. Please write for information before sending tapes. Radical Rose Recordings, PO Box 8122, Minneapolis, MN 55408.

TEA ROSE PRESS, is a partnership of 3 lesbians who publish, edit and do all the production of pamphlets and books of interest to feminists/lesbians. We plan to publish one book, and possibly a pamphlet in Spring/Summer 1984. We want material which will speak to radically, economically and culturally diverse audiences. For info and to submit work: Tea Rose Press, PO Box 591, East Lansing, MI 48823.

LESBIAN INCEST SURVIVORS: Wanted to fill out questionnaire on their experiences for book by Lesbian Incest Survivors. All responses are confidential. For info/questionnaire, write: Susan Marie, PO Box 304, Oakland, CA 94668.

IN THIS ISSUE:

Michiyo Anne Fukaya

"I am a working-class Eurasian dyke, who has written—and probably will write—all her life. I love horses and dogs and plants—and hope to build a 'rep' as a good writer."

Cassandra Gibbs

"Cassandra is a writer residing in Philadelphia. She is the author of Macumbiera, CL/LL. Her roots are African, but her flowering has been in the Caribbean."

Raymina Y. Mays

"Raymina Y. Mays is a Black Lesbian short story writer, and an editor of Feminary. She lives in Durham, NC, with Sue, Mandy, and Bev."

Deborah Louise Allen

"I am aware of and involved in the feminine 'being' and consider myself a daughter in mother's kingdom. I also write poetry—'Sing me a song of wisdom and beauty, and I will give you a poem.'"

Davine

"it has been scientifically determined that energy is the only thing that cannot be destroyed, that means we immortal! that's a long time, with that consciousness we cannot give up—hope or struggle, because in immortality nothing is impossible—and our triumph is certainly guaranteed!"

Ruth Farmer

"Lives in Brooklyn, NY with her son, Jerry. Writes poetry, short stories and angry letters to bureaucrats. Loves movies, plays, bicycling and laughing."

Anita Cornwell

"A freelance writer who turned playwright early last year. In addition to working on several plays at the moment, she is also typing a final copy of a children's book. Her first book, Black Lesbians In White America, has recently been published by Naiad Press."

Rose Marulanda

Rose is a Latina lesbian writer, living and working in Brooklyn, NY.

Becky Birtha

"Is a black lesbian poet, fiction writer, and reviewer whose work has appeared in off our backs, Sinister Wisdom, The New Women's Times Feminist Review, and frequently in Azalea. She is the author of a book of short stories, For Nights Like This One published by Frog In The Well Press.

Robin Christian

"...black, lesbian, visual artist, new yorker...