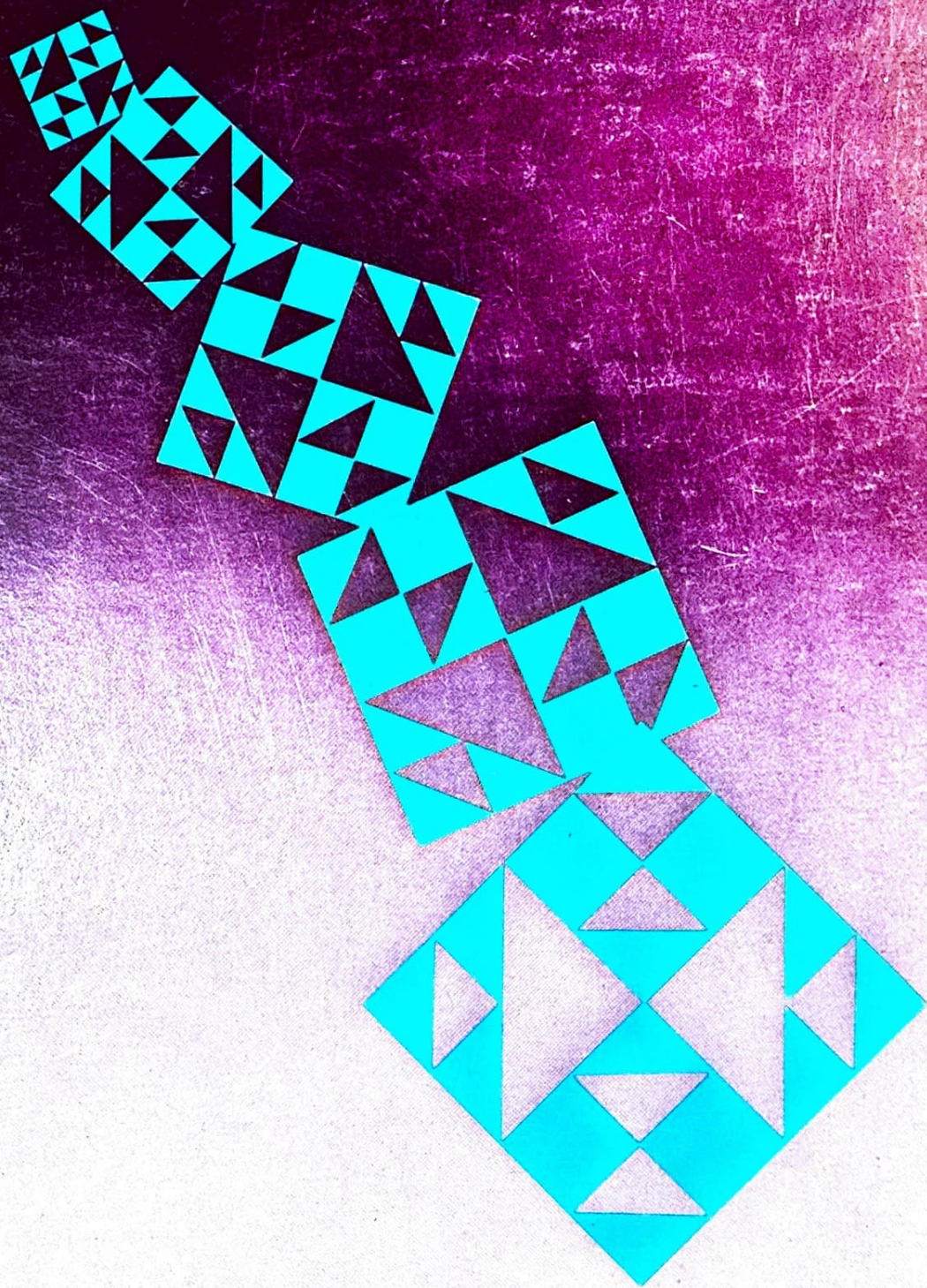


Lesbian **E**thics



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Lesbian Ethics

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2 Introduction

Editor's Introduction

I have particularly enjoyed working on this issue. If it had a name, it would be The Heart of Separatism. I hope you feel the same way.

There's one change in *LE's* format you may notice. Author's *first* names now appear at the top of the page. I love it, I can't imagine why it took me so long to think of it. Tell me what you think.

Something I have meant to do before is to encourage you, the reader, to write an author, *c/o LE*, if you particularly like what she has written. (First class mail can be forwarded without additional postage.) So often dykes tell me that they really liked, were moved by, had their lives changed by something another dyke wrote in *LE*, but they *don't tell the author*. (If they like what *I've* written, they don't tell *me*.) Perhaps it is the magic of the printed word which makes the reader think the author hears all the reactions to her work around the world. It isn't so. Most often we feel like we've dropped a rock in a bottomless lake. Your responses matter, communicating your responses matters.

As you may know, the Readers' Forum topic for the next issue (*LE* 3:3) is Radical Dyke Humor. No instructions for this one, except be as wild as possible. Deadline is April 30, 89. The Readers' Forum topic for *LE* 4:1 is Betrayals: When We're Not as Ethical with Each Other as We Oughta Be. Deadline is October 31, 89. Note the "we." The forum is meant to be about our relations with dykes who are, in some way significant to us, part of "our" community. If there was one guideline for this forum it would be: If you describe a dyke's or dykes' betrayal of you, describe too how you've betrayed another dyke. A second guideline would be: Stay real and personal, describe concrete acts and actual feelings. On the matter of less-than-ethical behavior I think there are two common but unhelpful reactions, at opposite extremes of the continuum. One extreme is to remain analytical, abstract, and judgmental, so that the sense of the other dyke(s) as in any way like ourself is lost. The other is silence: denying our own behavior hurtful to another, not talking about our hurts with other dykes nor listening to theirs, not taking sides, ignoring the unethical behavior of others. Many of us, I suspect, have such secret pain, and the secrets block us from doing the important community building work of defining *for ourselves* what nurturing Dyke interactions and relationships are like. I hope this forum can stay focussed on that creative definition.

Jeanette

Separatism: Beyond the Debate

A Readers' Forum

Practicing Separatism

For the last six months, I practiced what my friend Joni calls "psychic separatism." I believed that my mind was full of false beliefs and of weak and defeating images of women, implanted by patriarchy, that my view of history was one of male warfare, that I lacked positive strong images of womyn. I wanted to keep out all patriarchal stimuli, because I believe that they activate:

... the ghostly false images of ourselves which have been deeply embedded in our imagination and which respond like unnatural reflexes to the spookers' unnatural stimuli. (Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology*, p. 409)

I wanted to inhabit what Mary Daly calls the "Background," "the realm of the wild reality of women's selves" (*Gyn/Ecology*, p. 2), inhabited by Amazons, Cronos, Dikes, Spinsters, Witches (Mary Daly, *Wickedary*), I wanted to remember the time that Monique Wittig conjures:

There was a time when you were not a slave, remember that. You walked alone, full of laughter, you bathed barebellied. You may have lost all recollection of it, remember . . . you say that there are not words to describe it, you say it does not exist. But remember. Make an effort to remember, or failing that, invent. (*Les Guerilleres*)

I had leave from my job, and some money. I had just moved to a new city, knew only a few womyn, lived in a 4-woman household, didn't need to work. I practiced as complete a psychic separation as I could manage. Ideally no TV (didn't miss), no newspapers (couldn't resist the local daily, the occasional magazine), no male written books or books that had heterosexuality as a theme (didn't miss), only a couple of

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movies (e.g., *Sorceress, Shame, Big Business*), no male music (missed disco, dancing, but womyn's music worked just as well after a while).

It was hard. I read newspapers and magazines all the time. I felt panicky at the thought of "not knowing what was going on." I had a whole false self that I used in my patriarchal job. I was always "busy."

I spent my time reading womyn's writings and doing research in the library on ancient societies. I read about goddesses, witchcraft, womyn's lives over centuries, political theory, rape, pornography. I found it all fascinating, and infuriating. I developed whole new understandings of how patriarchy developed, how really there are and have been other ways of doing things. Over time I heard more and more clearly men's lies, their double think. How many tricks they play not just to lie to us but to avoid themselves seeing what is really happening.

I started going for walks. Meditating. Reading tarot and looking at images. I began to think about and focus on psychic abilities, healing. I lay on the bed and drifted along, stared into space. I only played womyn's music. I filled my mind with new strong images of womyn, memories and stories of womyn's lives, lesbian lives.

I had surges of creative energy that enabled me to imagine and create new time/spaces. Literally, my mind would take an idea and go on a "what if" journey—what if we really had a womyn-centered society. I imagined what it would have been like in ancient gynocentric societies. I imagined whole new ways of being, involving different sense perceptions, ways of relating.

I realized how cut off I was from nature—the trees, earth, wind, and developed a very strong and positive sense of interconnectedness with the rhythms of nature, and with plants and animals.

I became incredibly sensitive to male violence against womyn. As soon as I turned on the TV I saw it. As soon as I left the house and entered the "public world" (street, grocery store, public transport), I saw it and felt it. Men policing my behavior, womyn's behavior, threatening us, beating us, raping us. And violence not just against womyn, but against the earth—pollution, exploitation.

At a personal level, separatism served three major functions for me: 1) protection from male rapaciousness, 2) withering of "the ghostly false images," 3) elimination of countless distractions which prevent me from seeing what is going on and sap my energy. I think the fact that separatist writers keep their attention on womyn and lesbians is vitalizing.

But I realized that separatism, defined as the exclusion of men and heteropatriarchy, is not enough. I'm still left with internalized patriarchal

patterns, e.g., domination-subordination. *Separatism* doesn't name the paring away from my Self of all that is alienating, the separating from that which separates me from my self (Mary Daly, *Pure Lust*).

Separatism also lacks a constructive connotation (*Pure Lust*, p. 364). It doesn't name the womon-centered world building that I want to do, because the reference of separatism is patriarchy. Yet the real motive behind separatism is the desire for womyn-centered being, the desire to construct our own, womon-centered ethics, language, sexuality, culture.

I want to read what other separatists, e.g., Black separatists have said about separatism. I'm not sure I agree with total disengagement as advocated by Sonia Johnson (*Going Out of Our Minds*). It is not an option that all women can act on. And it prevents us from seeing what is really going on in patriarchy. I think we should be smashing patriarchy as well as building womyn-centered worlds.

I am a radical lesbian feminist who practices separatism, and I think the practice of separatism is essential for personal and political being. I wonder, would a word like *Amazons* work better to name what separatists are doing?

Geraldine T.

Genuine Desire

Dear White Lesbian Separatists:

Why don't white lesbians have a genuine desire to learn from lesbians of African descent?¹

By genuine desire I don't mean probing curiosity that fuels distanced study. Nor do I mean a form of cultural acquisition that leads to stealing values, art, etc. and owning them through lies and misrepresentation. I am also not addressing that certain "kindness" that white lesbians give to African descent lesbians which inevitably leads to a power-over relationship, e.g., teacher/student, mentor/protege. Genuine desire doesn't include that special brand of liberal chauvinism that allows white lesbians to accept, indeed expect, inappropriate behavior on the part of African descent lesbians.²

What I am addressing is a relationship of equals where it is recognized that each has something to bring to the relationship. Where the differences are *truly* welcomed and not just given lip service. And where growth and lesbian cultural development is acknowledged as coming from many places within and around us.

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I have been a member of some form of women's/lesbian/ lesbian-separatist community for 10 years. In those years I have heard these values espoused without genuine desire backing them up. What I don't understand is why.

I have observed a certain degree of contentedness white lesbians feel among themselves; they feel at home and quite comfortable with little or no racial diversity in their communities. Of course, I never really see this contentedness in its true state as my presence always changes the dynamic. I wonder why they don't realize that they are missing something. Why don't they see that their view of the world is limited and that by accepting those limitations they are accepting the mandate of their white fathers?

It is true that some white lesbians do recognize the absence of African descent lesbians. Too often, however, this recognition comes from guilt or an attempt at political correctness. Most acts that are performed out of guilt are experienced by the actor as forced and contrived. She is neither convinced of the value of the act nor clear that it will have any intrinsic worth for her. This attitude will never properly facilitate the development of a genuine desire to learn from each other. It will only promote a missionary/convert posture, an obvious power-over dynamic.

I know that most of us agree that racism is a form of collaboration with the patriarchy and that the false divisions created by patriarchy work to weaken us individually and as a community.³ However, these divisions still manage to run rampant in our communities.

African descent lesbians have called white lesbians on their racist acts and attitudes, in many ways and in many arenas. Indeed some progress has been made, in that white lesbians may not engage in some of the commonly criticized forms of overt racism. However, the racism eventually manifests itself in other ways. If white lesbians address the "exclusion" of lesbians of African descent, then they usually turn around and force their cultural values on those "included" African descent lesbians. For example, the format and language used at a meeting will reflect white cultural values, alienating those not educated or skilled in these arenas.⁴

Although many white lesbians have good hearts and sincere intentions they still appear infected with racist attitudes and actions. Even when they care deeply for African descent lesbians in their lives, they still appear unable to keep racism from poisoning these relationships. Examples are emotional withdrawal when an African descent lover desires or seeks the company of other African descent lesbians, or

deliberately coming between two African descent lesbians creating an either/or situation—either white lover or African descent friend. Encouraging isolation of an African descent lesbian from her cultural and ethnic roots is an act of genocide, as the African descent lesbian is only weakened thereby. I just want to know: Why?

Given that I am not a white lesbian, I can only extrapolate from an outside perspective. I note that I have encountered a great deal of fear from white lesbians when they are congregating and a few lesbians of African descent enter the situation. I experience this fear as a cold wall made of impenetrable stone screaming, "KEEP OUT, KEEP AWAY." In nature fear has a particular smell which animals recognize. To me, fear is a passive aggressive force keeping the numbers of African descent lesbians to a minimum. Only the most determined and stout-hearted of us would be able to withstand the freezing temperatures of this pervasive fear.

I assume that this fear is a culturally learned attitude. What cultural contract is being respected by radical white lesbians? Possibly the cultural fear is of annihilation. If not, then what is the fear or, even more basically, what is the systemic root of this racism?

As an African descent lesbian I experience racism as a poison gas. I cannot allow myself to be exposed to poison gas too often or I will end up debilitated and weakened. This, therefore, limits my contact with white lesbian separatists, as I have long ago become weary of tracking the latest racist manifestation.

I believe that some of you have thought about this and even discussed it among yourselves. If so, I hope you will have the courage to bring your discussion into a more open forum. If not, I hope that my comments here can take the discussion of racism into a deeper arena, one that allows the systemic reasons to be named, examined and eradicated.

I have written this letter from a place of genuine desire to come together as a real and whole community. I have my doubts concerning the possibility, but this letter is my attempt to bridge some of the differences, with honesty rather than perfunctory gestures. I hope that it is heard from those places of genuine desire present, though possibly dormant, in most lesbians.

Vivienne Louise

¹ I don't use the popular term of *color* because I believe that this encompassing reference to Brown and Black peoples around the world renders the cultural differences among us invisible. See my, "Of color: What's in a Name," *Bay Area Women's News*, Jan/Feb 1988.

As an African-American I only address the issues from my perspective. I don't pretend to understand or address the myriad racist attitudes that are exhibited towards other Brown and Black lesbians.

By "African descent" lesbians I mean those lesbians commonly designated as "Black" in the USA today. African descent as a cultural identification goes beyond skin color. However, this larger meaning does NOT include the anthropological theory that all life sprang from Africa and therefore we are all of African descent.

²A friend (an African-American lesbian) is convinced that white lesbians help Black lesbians stay "sick" by maintaining a double standard of behavior expectations. The white double standard allows African-American lesbians to act in ways that would not be tolerated by other African-American lesbians. The African-American lesbians are never pushed to change unacceptable habits.

³Classism, ageism, physicalism, anti-semitism, etc., are just some of the other divisions imposed by patriarchal values. This paper addresses only racism.

⁴I use the term *white cultural values* to denote the cultural values of middle class U.S. WASPs. Many "white" lesbians of working or poor classes, descendants of the darker European countries, and Jews find a certain amount of alienation in these circles also.

joyous separatism

joy. after nine yearz of be-ing a separatist ii ahm only beginning to find joy ihn mii life. ii do not know if separatists everywhere were az sad, depressed, defensive, angry, hostile, isolated az ii waz but the 1/2 dozen ii have known felt so to me.

it iz hard to rite thiz letter, to beeh critical of uz, of mii people, of meeh, when ii know that weeh have not been open to criticism. ii ahm afraid separatists ii have loved for long timez will turn away from meeh, that dykez who don't like separatists may use mii letter to fuel a very dangerous fire, that ii will be isolated from mii people. ii ahm also afraid to take responsibility for what ii know to beeh truths.

ii know separatism to be the only freeing way to live mii life. to define what ii mean bii separatism iz hard. ii mean knowing who the enemy iz—men—and how they live ihn uz—discourage-ing uz from truth integrity simplicity groundedness gentleness loving reality openness. ii mean creating a world for dykez to love each othurr, to live with each othurr, to create joy with each othurr.

the separatism ii have learned—and the separatism ii encouraged for yearz—waz grounded ihn either/or; ii and every one else waz either a

separatist or they were men. mii world waz divided in 2: if uu weren't a separatist, uu were one of them and ii had to protect mii self from uu. there were a lot more themz than us'z, so ii used almost all mii energy defending defining protecting, all mii emotion being frustrated angry overwhelmed depressed.

ii have come to believe that anything that iz either/or ii must distrust. it keepz meeh sohh defensive that ii have no energy left to beeh creative. if ii ahm living an ethic that createz no joy for meeh, then men have meeh. there iz still a place ihn meeh that believez anything othurr than a defensive miserable separatist isn't a separatist. az ii moved mii self into this place of knowing, ii had to question how ii waz living mii ethics, whooh waz benefitting from mii misery, whooh would benefit if ii allowed miiself to beeh happy, and who waz really doing mii defining. ii think whooh really benefitted were men and the patriarchal system that ii sohh want away from.

for most of theze last yearz, ii have had mii hair short—a hair cut ii associate with being a separatist, a dyke, a butch, a dyke out about whooh sheeh iz.

cutting mii hair short waz not an eazeeh decision. ii traded one kind of sensuality beauty and creativity for anotheer form of sensuality beauty creativity and outness. ii loved it. ii loved mii prezence az a dyke so out front to the world. ii loved the strength ii felt politically and ethically.

mii politics and ethics have changed. ii feel stronger and clearer about mii separatism and how to live it. ii feel happiness. joy. celebration. ii feel less a part of a dyke or separatist community yet ii don't feel alone.

ii want to grow mii hair and sometimez ii ahm afraid. afraid othurr separatists will no longer honour mii knowings/no-ings. afraid ii will feel sohh ashamed ii will retreat away from mii self. ii mourn giving uhp mii sohh vizable dyke-ness. ii ahm excited to reclaim the strength and energeeh ii feel ihn mii hair—it's sensuality, it's beauty and it's ability to be braided, straight, tangled, tied, alive. ii wahnt to again feel it ohn mii back az ii lay in mii bed reading. ii wahnt to seeh it catch and carry the sun. ii hate that people will no longer assume that ii ahm a dyke. ii cut mii hair for ethical/political reazonz. ii grow it for personal/sensual reazonz.

what ii recognize now iz that ii will never match anyone elsez standard and it is only mii standard that ii must live with. it iz meeh that needz tooh fiind a way tooh live az a dyke separatist with long hair and at the same time not to take ohn the male definitionz and rolez of what women with long hair must dooh.

ii know that for miiself, and ii sense that for uz az a people tooh survive, weeh need tooh stop defining ourselvez ihn reaction to otherz, beeh they men, women, lezbianz, othurr dykez, separatists, and tooh find true-ly our own definitionz, our own joyz and our own people.

lahl sardyke

Lesbian Separatism: What Do We Mean?

It is sad to know that many wimmin never hear the word *Lesbian* in their lives. I was almost thirty, and now at 40 the words *Radical Lesbian Separatist* come closest to describing my personal choice and my political expression. Each time I insist on my Lesbian space, I am encouraged and empowered with confidence and knowledge. Even now while what is left of this once-320-acre communally 'owned' Lesbian land is being foreclosed on, I am strengthened by my experiences here. I have felt what it means to live and love with earth-conscious Radical Lesbian Separatists. I see what it does to us when we stop giving each other that choice. No man has seen, touched, nor set foot into this Lesbian made shed-cabin where I live. I am taking it apart to rebuild elsewhere so that no man can claim this shelter.

The diversity of ways Lesbians and wimmin claim separate space and give it up tells me I need to know exactly what a Lesbian means when she says she is a Separatist. If a wommon tells me that she is a Lesbian Separatist and that she wants no men to enter her space, I believe her. When she allows a friend's boy child into her home or invites her father in order to get her mother to visit, then I know that what she means by *Lesbian Separatist* is not what I mean. We can talk and we can learn from each other what we prefer, and with that understanding we can decide what we can do for each other.

Inflexible labels aren't desirable, but the power of naming ourselves includes the responsibility for clarity of language. In an effort toward clarity I add the word *Radical* (root) to *Lesbian Separatist* for those of us who won't compromise for the male exception.

The cost of the exception is often immediately evident: living trees 'mistakenly' cut down by a local hippy boy hired to chain saw on Lesbian Separatist land, the 'coincidental' appearance of three hunters a few nights after a father's surprise visit, and a late night trespass by an angry male looking for a wommon hiding elsewhere with her Lesbian lover.

A clear strong 'no' and a united front of willingness to act in protection of each other greet the more blatant intrusions, such as the Lesbian or wommon who brings a male (often a faggot) into a designated Lesbians' or wimmin's space to 'prove' that no one is going to tell her where she can or cannot take anyone she pleases (the familiar anarchist trample). But there are also instances when Lesbians don't say 'no' loud enough or long enough to stop intruding males. It is important to thoroughly think through what we would do if a male intruded into Lesbian space. I don't want us to be taken by surprise.

In a recent incident, a neighbor's adult grandson decided to come onto Lesbian land to get water from a spring. His assumed right of access was so quick and deliberate that even though he was not welcome he was not immediately stopped. A Separatist visiting on the land stopped him from entering a Lesbian's home site and with much firm repetition of 'no, it is not ok' he was turned back and sent home. The socialization to always say 'yes' to males is not an easy role to change. The event helped everyone to learn that we must and we can say 'no.' When we support each other then we can have what we want.

So what is 'Lesbian Separatism'? Do you mean all wimmin most of the time or all of the time? Do you mean all wimmin or all Lesbians? If all wimmin, then what is the word for all Lesbians? Recently a Lesbian said she wasn't OK with Lesbian 'elitism' for herself, but it was OK for me because it was needed. A snaggly statement but suggestive of a need for the intensity of our combined Lesbian energies.

The efforts of Lesbian Separatists to secure space known to be for Lesbians is so vehemently resisted by males and male-subjugated females that the reasons why Lesbian Separatist space is so vital become vibrantly clear. Sometimes I amuse myself with thoughts of a diminishing male population. Mostly I simply want the option of living with Lesbians and of having others respect my desire not to be subjected to males or to struggles over whether males should be allowed in Lesbian space.

Faux Pas

P.S. Knowing a Lesbian Separatist conference was happening, even if unaffordable, was encouraging. There are more of us out here than were there. Anyone who wants to know more about Whypperwillow Lesbian Land and the foreclosure by the guru Satchidananda can write to me at Route 1, Box 197, Eureka Springs, AR 72632.

about class

my separatist vision is like this: we live in their world, widely scattered. our community is in our hearts, visits, writing, for some of us in a handful of seps nearby, at least half of whom aren't friends with at least half of the others. one of the changes I suggest to what exists is that we talk about money. how do you feel about your money? how do you get it? what do you do with it? details: how much? what kind? why? these are rude questions, and we know enough about secrets to ask who benefits from keeping them.

born second class, variously passing in and out of lesbian class status, downwardly mobile daughters of upwardly mobile parents, lesbians of color, young dykes, traveling dykes, Jewish dykes, daughters of alcoholics, daughters of single mothers, we have a lot to say about class. why the silence? why yours? when you start buttonholing dykes about money, you may find it easier with the ones whose class backgrounds are similar to yours. get down to it. what did your parents do for work? what were their class backgrounds? their values? how did they handle child care? medical care? vacations? clothing? were there toys? books? what magazines?* did they mistrust more the next class up or the next class down? what did they teach you and how do you use it? be creative. the little things make the lights blink.

issues like feelings of entitlement and relationship to rules carry emotional weight. on lesbian sliding scales, most dykes pay the bottom. what are your thoughts about this and what are your feelings? cross-class couples break up saying "I'll never do that again," and go back to our own kind. I'm suggesting we all talk about all these things with all our friends and start from a bolder, better-informed place to figure out what we want to change.

Claudia

*hugs to Irene and Marilyn.

Before Swimming

Old Separatist and Gypsy Dyke were sitting around the universe. "Just how separate are you?" Gypsy Dyke was asking.

"Oh, just as separate as I can get," Old Separatist was saying back to her. "Separate from any authority but my own. Separate from any

desires, definitions, values, or pleasures except those originating right here." She is pointing to herself.

Gypsy Dyke is taken unawares. "Well, that's very interesting, but really it's another kind of separatism I was thinking about."

"Well, of course," sez Old Sep. "My separatism leads rather directly to separation from the other gender, who have a long and deplorable history blah blah of insisting on authority and rules and structures. Anyone who hasn't noticed that hasn't noticed much." . . .

"Well, 'scuse the fuck outta me," sez Gypsy. "Uh, but, like really this separatism of yours sounds like it's off on the wrong track to me. Cuz everything is connected, see? I mean, here we are layin' out on a big rock with a buncha wild bergamont all in the field behind us, and we're sittin' here breathin' it in and watchin' those two hawks: I mean, you're not separate from that, are you?"

O.S. sorta sighs and shifts around to look at the creek down below. "No, not separate, but separated in many ways. Let's face it: it's different knowing everything is connected and realizing it. Like, sometimes I think there's communication going on between me and someone, and then later on find out that we both came away with different ideas of what was said. How much wronger can I be in what I think tree and I are saying to each other? Who knows? All I can do is give tree what tree gives me. Tree doesn't try to change me or judge me or enlist my aid in tree causes. Tree lets me be. I let tree be. Feels like a good start. Mebbe someday tree and I will talk."

Now Gypsy Dyke is getting frustrated. She wants to talk about separatism, and here's this Old Sep who thinks it has something to do with talking to trees.

"As a separatist, I mind my own business," Old Sep is saying. "I'm separate from you and your opinions. I may or may not be interested in hearing your opinions or in telling you mine. In a way, I force you to be a separatist when we are together, for I will not act as an authority for you, and I will not accept your authority over me. I want you to do what you want to do. And I want to do what I want to do."

"But," sez Gypsy, not sure at all where any of this is going, "that sounds more like anarchy to me."

O.S. smiles in acknowledgment. "They are both pretty loose. And neither one has much theory or analysis to speak of. Separatism especially has no serious analysis beyond the here and now. And why should it? My politics as a separatist are in my existence only. But anarchy disap-

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proves of that. Oh, and that reminds me of a kosmik. Wanna hear it? Okay: Some two-leggeds were standing around the universe. 'Don't assume I'm an activist. Don't assume I'm a pacifist,' Slick was saying. 'Don't assume I'm a feminist. Don't assume I'm a separatist.' 'Well,' said one of the standing-arounds, 'can I assume you're an anarchist?' 'Hmmm, yeah,' sez Slick. 'Hah,' sez a hearing-about-it-later-one. 'She wants to be an anarchist, but she doesn't want anyone else to be one.'

Old Sep looks at Gypsy expectantly, "I don't get it," sez Gyp.

"No, neither does Slick," sez Old Sep.

Gyps rolls her eyes. "Why don't you just tell me what you do with boy-uh . . . pu-uh . . . the other gender?"

Old Sep eyes Gyps warily. Is this conversation going to fall into a script with her supposed to play the role of the justifying-herself-one in order to receive some stamp of approval from this other one? She hopes not and decides to persevere a bit longer.

"What do I do with the other gender? Not much, really. Let them be." O.S. pauses. "Look: I have lived on this piece of women's land lo these many years. Didn't even know the word *separatist* for the first three years I was here. But, indeed, it was women's land—and even wimmin's land. This in spite of the candidates for public office who would drive in with their wives asking for a vote, in spite of the electric company's meter reader, in spite of the UPS deliverer, and in spite of the FBI helicopters. There were incidents. They did not and they do not change the nature of this being women's land. Nor do they change what we learn from living here."

"Which is what?" Gyps asks, with a hint of the sullen. She's disgruntled with Old Sep's line.

O.S. pretends not to notice. She is ready to rhapsodize. "Oh, first, there's learning to do and seeing other wimmin learn to do all kinds of things you've never done before. For me that included auto mechanics and roofing and enjoying cooking. The joys of self-sufficiency, to whatever degree it's possible. Tools and skills. Learning to work together without a boss. Stuff like that. And then there's the very long-breaking release that comes from dealing only with wimmin: the release of politeness and coyness and lying and fear and phoniness, all of which have to erode away when the old rocks are no longer there to hold them in place. It's very gratifying watching those potted passions wither and die. Tho I have also noticed that many of the ways I am learning to give up here are survival skills out there, and I have found myself unshielded out

there when flashing about with my honesty and openness. But mostly I revel in tearing the wrappings off this bonsai plant that was myself and in branching out and growing wild."

"Hmmm, yes," murmurs Gyps. She has produced a small pad of paper and has begun taking notes.

"What on earth are you doing that for?" wants to know O.S.

"So I can remember and think about it. If I remember it wrong I think about it wrong. And I can't think and listen at the same time."

"Hmmmph," hmmmphs O.S. "Looks like you went to the university. Let's see if I can say this short: It's part of my interest in our diversity that wants us to be separate. So you can be you and I can be me and tree can be tree, without any of us lying to each other about our histories or our dreams or our relatives. Doesn't that make sense? . . . For example, when my parental unit showed up here, the wimmin did not get all over my case or call a meeting or shoot my father. Instead they were wonderin' about me and how I was doin' and bein' their usual selves. So I felt myself standing on a very solid base, not shiftin' sands that would turn my friends into my judges. We were all just lezzing-be, and that is exciting."

"And that's why I'm doing it: it's exciting, it's alive, it's very free, and it works just fine.

"Now put away your pad and let's get in that water."

Teena Delfina

A Toe in the Water

when we've gotten all the men and male institutions out of our lives as much as we can, what remains? when our lives no longer revolve around what we're against, what then are we for? what are our lives for?

what we seem to aim for, each in her own way, is a greater depth of sharing, to know each other to an extent never possible in the cultures from which we came. at least that's what i aim for.

i have a friend now who is 16 years younger. she comes to me with a great deal of emotional openness, taking the risk of saying. "i need to talk about what happened between us yesterday." it shocked me a bit to have someone initiate that kind of real-talk. it doesn't happen a lot. when it does happen, a part of me that is usually timid ventures out, a part of me that will meet their risk with my honesty. she says, i felt your

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anger directed at me, and i say, well, mostly i was just mad at the situation, but yes, it's still hard for me not to fix the blame on someone.

at 41 i have many many years of believing that talking about feelings simply is not possible. the reason i will always meet a wom's risk-taking with a truthful answer is that i know so well the loneliness of having my perceptions denied. of having feelings be unspeakable, unspoken.

during my first year on lesbian land, 9980, we had a support group based on hogie wyckoff's book *solving women's problems*. she writes about acknowledging the "grain of truth" in someone else's perception for instance, if a wom perceives me as wanting sex with her, my reality may be that i was feeling good about myself and expressing that by being flirty. but besides telling her that, i would also search for the grain of truth—that there are ways she does attract me even though i choose not to be sexual with her.

that one concept—the grain of truth—has been immensely important to me. i miss being part of a group where it was an accepted idea, where you could use the phrase "grain of truth" and be immediately understood.

how i would love to have the courage to say to a sister in distress, "breathe with me, joanna." would she remember this from *the waderground* and respond, "breathe with me, zana"? or would she stare at me, puzzled? i'd love to use the transformative language forms of laadan (wim's language created by suzette haden elgin) or those of "the sharers" in *a door into ocean* by joan slonczewski. it's a big leap to take and i don't take it as often as i'd like. neither do my friends and land sisters. we read the books and talk about them and sometimes we write using new forms, but day-to-day interactions are harder to change.

there are breakthroughs. a bit here, a bit there. on the land where i live we shared a "sexuality day"—to stretch ourselves and our notions of what and how sexuality has to be. i found that it was terrifically scary to lie in bed and cuddle (or even just talk) with wim i'd not been that intimate with. and in following days, we retreated back towards our old boundaries. but not all the way. some things changed and have stayed changed. just a little maybe, but isn't that how lasting change often happens—a little here, a little there?

i test the waters lightly more often now. stick a toe in and it doesn't get bitten off by sharks and maybe next week i'll stick a toe in again. one day, a whole foot

zana

Radical Lesbianism [Excerpted]

The following text was written by the present collective of the journal *Amazones d'hier, Lesbiennes d'aujourd'hui* [Amazons yesterday, Lesbians today-]S and does not pretend to reflect the opinion of all radical lesbians, particularly with regard to the interpretation of the history of radical lesbianism and the strategies for struggle. Like any analysis, radical lesbianism first brought together individuals around a theoretical accord, then later branched out into several tendencies. . . . Like feminism, radical lesbianism is—in its own right—a tool for understanding reality, an analysis of the system of the appropriation of the class of women by the class of men, and an instrument of struggle against the system.

From the split . . .

In parallel to the grouping together of lesbians in 1976, when the "Francophone Lesbian-Feminist Women's Coop" was being set up in Montreal, Lesbian separatism (the source of radicalism in Quebec) grew out of the break with feminism. The latter, as much in its theory as in its practice, rendered and continues to render lesbians invisible. . . .

The movement uniting lesbians gave rise to videos, publications, annual October meetings, to discussion and research groups, and to political debates where it was possible to understand lesbians outside of feminism and to start with the concrete and particular situation of lesbians. Hence, the decision of some groups to present their activities "for lesbians only."

The analyses of American separatists and of European radicals contributed to a widening of lesbians' field of action since it permitted linking together lesbianism and the struggle against the system of the appropriation of women.

From these analyses come the concepts which transformed what had originally constituted a reaction—a separation from militant feminism—into a theory that adopted a terminology already existing in France: radical lesbianism.

. . . . To the theory

Radical lesbianism revolves around concepts which maintain that "lesbians are not women"¹ and that heterosexuality, which goes far beyond the scope of sexuality (hence, the use of the term heterosociety), is in fact the system which creates, maintains, and fosters the appropriation of the class of women. The structure of this system is supported by the ideologies of naturalism and of difference.

. . . . even if radical lesbianism and feminism take on the same problems, they do not tackle them from the same point of view . . . Indeed, the objective of radical lesbianism is the destruction of the heterosocial system, the destruction of the class of women; for, without "women" (a social construct and not a "natural" state) heterosociety can not survive, and vice versa.

Although lesbians are subject to the conditions of the collective appropriation of "women" (economic, social, political conditions), they escape on the other hand, private appropriation (marriage, cohabitation with men). Therefore, in the social order, they find themselves in a position which is incomparable to that of "women." They are, in fact the flaw in the heterosocial system.

It is this position—on the "inside" and on the "outside" at the same time—which leads us to claim that lesbians are not "women" and which sheds new light on heterosexuality. A system always considered, until then, as the result of a so-called natural complementarity—where "women" are naturally different from men, that is to say inferior and therefore subject to various oppressions—and hence as inevitable Whereas in reality this social construct . . . is AVOIDABLE. Lesbianism provides the proof

These stances and objectives have obviously provoked strong reactions. Radical lesbianism has been criticized as being only concerned with lesbians, and accused of contempt of women.

This was to forget that radical lesbianism aims not at the physical destruction of beings born female but rather the destruction of the shackles which confine these beings within a definition and obligations defined by men, for the sole benefit of men. It is to forget that radical lesbianism's goal is the elimination of a system which rapes, kills, accords lower wages, and confines women to the status of mother and housewife.

Therefore, radical lesbianism does not aim at women gaining a so-called equality within a structure (heterosystem) that is built upon the fundamental principle of inequality between two classes, where one class is appropriated by the other, its enemy.

Inside and Outside

The political action of radical lesbians was, first directed towards the "inside,"² which is to say, towards lesbians. The goal: to transform the ghettoized—hence, passive—situation of lesbianism (outlawed from society by the confinement to closed quarters—the personal, the bars, the districts, and by stifling any public speech other than female

homosexuality³) into a political position . . . with the aim of tackling the "outside," the heterosocial system.

Although it was temporarily necessary to focus solely on the "inside," there was the ever present danger of turning inward and of cutting oneself off from the social context . . . lesbians and lesbianism censured themselves as though we were, and should be beings who are special, different, better, more beautiful, more "human" than the straights. . . . This is clearly not our present objective.

Nevertheless, we persist in publishing our journal "for lesbians only"! But it is with the purpose of deepening a theoretical reflection nourished not only by internal debates but also by analysis of actions executed on the "outside." . . .

In view of the content of radical lesbianism's aims, the strategies of struggle are not perfectly obvious. . . . unlike feminism, radical lesbianism does not demand alternations in the heterosocial system. On the one hand, we do not aim at making ourselves visible at all cost in order to assert an existence reduced to that of homosexuality and, on the other hand, we consider it essential that lesbians constitute a political force, and hence, a public one.

That is why some radical lesbians have chosen to cross swords with heterosociety—through the still timid actions which have been carried out up until now: public demonstrations against the Pope at the time of his visit to Montreal; graffiti denouncing the heterosexual system in response to fascist graffiti attacking namely women and homosexuals; participation and proposals during the annual national conference of Canadian Feminist Periodicals in Spring 86—in hope that the experience drawn from these actions will allow us to adjust our aim so as to be able to face the rise of the Right, from a point of view which is not solely a defensive one. . . .

In fact, to us, it appears crucial that radicalism express itself and struggle on all terrains, and that theory and action sustain one another. Those are the reasons why we work on both the inside and the outside.

The AHLA Collective
Translation by Denise Blais

¹ Monique Wittig, "The Straight Mind," *Feminist Issues*, vol. 1, no. 1, 1980.

² We have used the terms *outside* and *inside* for purely technical reasons to indicate where our actions are directed . . . In fact, in our opinion, there is neither an inside nor an outside; there is only one global system to which the social group of lesbians—like all social groups, in differing positions—is bound.

³Speaking within the perspective of female homosexuality signifies, for us, demanding the recognition of the "other" sexuality within the heterosocial system, whereas radical lesbianism attacks the foundations of this system.

Lesbian Separatism *for Ourselves*

My personal spark of Separatism ignited in 1983 at the Womyn's Peace Encampment at Romulus, N.Y. At the encampment I figured out the necessity for womyn-only action for generating change.

There were few if any Separatists I knew with whom I could rejoice in this new seeing. There was no community waiting to receive me into her numbers. No golden labrys was placed around my neck.¹

Instead the air was thick with resistance Sitting with Lesbian friends in my kitchen in 1984 or thereabouts I drew the rune of separation. As I included the same Lesbians in my life and struggled with them over the things I was seeing, ironically, it was they who one by one chose to separate from me.

Later in 1984 I went to a workshop at the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival, titled "Dreaming in Female" and facilitated by Michelle Gautreaux. The premise was that we were to talk only about what we wanted, what we dreamed of; and not the realities we struggled against. These workshop guidelines proved to be very difficult to keep to. . . . Slowly we began to find that we had common dreams of lesbian community. . . . These dreams were being generated from very different life experiences . . . but we received a respectful seriousness and validation from each other that is only present among Separatists.

My separations from energy draining debaters and "supporters" who have set me up as "The Separatist," has had the positive result of freeing me to connect with dykes with whom I can start the conversation on the same wave length. These conversations have been inspiring and creative, reveling in clarity and truth. There are also many struggles and differences between us .

While most of us are aware that we strengthen patriarchy by giving the system and its components our attention, it is much more difficult to separate our attention from other lesbians and heterosexual females. We can be easily tempted to dilute our Lesbian Separatist consciousness to include them, to rescue them from what we see as self-destructive, patriarchy-serving behavior.

These inclusions and rescuings are self-defeating. Not only does this generosity of inclusion undermine and dilute Lesbian Separatism as an ideology and movement, it also undermines and insults the ability of lesbians to choose Separatism clearly and distinctly from other ways of seeing and being. We can give most generously to non-Separatists and near-Separatists by creating and maintaining a clear and distinct Separatist ideology, ethic and movement, as well as Separatist only and Lesbian only spaces.

I am not suggesting that we cut ourselves off from non-separatist Lesbians. On the contrary, we need them to join us in our reclaiming of ourselves and the planet. I am suggesting that we make our presence and our views known without engaging in defense and argument about Separatism.

The seeing of men for the destructive parasites they are and thus seeing the need to separate is a seeing that can not be won or forced by argument. . . . Lesbians are repelled and retreat from our pro-Separatist arguments with them. When we create for ourselves, I have seen that Lesbians are truly curious about what we are doing. Thus we create something for them to move to.

When we finally get to ourselves there is a lot of work to be done. . . . When we are challenged by non-separatists we can say they disagree because they are not Separatists. When we are challenged by another Separatist we need to look deeper and examine the habitual walls of self-protection and defenses that have good cause to exist within hetero-patriarchy.

There is no safety in the process of trying to live beyond the patriarchy and we will (and do) hurt each other as Separatists more than anyone else can.² I accept this danger along with the freeing possibilities of our Separatist encounters and explorations because I know that this is the only direction I can truly move in. Befriending Dyke Separatists is the only friendship that can exist between females without male barriers.

Sheila Bowles

¹ Perhaps we can begin to change this and have celebratory ceremonies for new Separatist and anniversary parties for Dykes who continue to retain their Separatist clarity.

² I came to this conclusion during a late night discussion in the Separatist camping area at Michigan 1988.

Strategy and Class

I want Separatists to strategize with. I am delighted that I now have Separatists in my life, when for so many years I seemed not to be able to find even radical dykes. But I want more. I want a network of cadres, of dykes committed to planning and bringing about the downfall of men and if necessary their extinction. And I know only a few who are primarily interested in thinking this way and acting this way. Our lives are privatized. The space we have made for ourselves in the patriarchy is so *small*. We are like animals in a zoo, going round and round, muttering, taking the frustrations of our cramped space out on each other, seldom looking up at the bars and beyond, seldom strategizing how to get out.

Last year Julia Penelope gave a workshop, at the *1987 Radical Thought on Women* conference in Cleveland, on football. She described a number of the strategies and tactics that the boys have devised and perfected through the years. It is similar I imagine to military strategy. Planning is thorough and complex: attention is given not just to the star players but also to the physical and other support systems the team needs. Many decisions are made with a long-term perspective, even if the results in the short term are negative. The emotions of each pud are carefully tended to, e.g., if a player messes up a play, he is often given another opportunity to complete the same play very soon after, even if that isn't the best play for the game at that point.

Very important I believe for Separatists to note, the assets and skills of individuals are (pardon the expression) capitalized on. Rather than making everyone the same, football utilizes differences. And there are many tactics, such as the end around, that puds have developed through sports but also apply in their business and personal dealings. I don't mean that we should use all the boys' tactics. For a while they would work, because the boys don't expect us to have this arcane knowledge; but in the long run I think we would do better to develop some specifically dyke and wom strategies.

I was exhilarated by Julia's talk; at last someone was talking about Sep strategy, Sep organizing! And yet, though the audience appreciated the talk, audience is what they were. They seemed to be appreciating someone talking about life on another planet they were never going to get to visit. What I've come to understand is that this phenomenon and my position in and perceptions of it are conditioned by class. I am white middle-middle class, with the qualification that being half Portuguese

(though I never learned to speak it) put my family on the edges. We lived on the right block, but in the wrong house.

Until recently I remained puzzled by a conversation I still remember from 1972 or thereabouts with another feminist. The topic was woms' "feminine wiles" and whether they are patriarchal conditioning, done unconsciously, or conscious strategies of manipulation. I was amazed that anyone would even consider the possibility that woms were intentionally, consciously manipulative of men. I was certain that one could not act out such a strategy without ingesting it and coming to believe that one was what one pretended to be. In fact, I still think my position was closer to the truth than my friend's, particularly if the woms are each acting individually and don't have group support to maintain their awareness of what they're doing. But the point I want to make is that it was class that was behind our different perceptions of possibility. The feminist I was talking with was older than I and had a background in union organizing.

Growing up middle class (and higher class than my parents), I learned that my "work" was supposed to be *valid*. It was supposed to reflect my true self. As in "What do you WANT to BE when you grow up?" I was expected to put a great deal of energy into deciding on the *right* career for myself, since I would *become* my work. The system was on my side (it wasn't really, of course); or if it wasn't I was stuck, because there was no other place to go. If I found myself on the outside of it, which I often did, I would be there alone (middle-class individualism), which I often was.

Working class and lower class dykes, on the other hand, (and this has been confirmed for me by lower class dykes that I know) grow up learning that the system is not on their side, that working in it is almost always necessary but is almost always unrewarding, that members of the higher classes are to be manipulated and tricked wherever possible, because you as a member of a lower class don't have the power to force them to do what you want them to do, and that lower class solidarity is an important reality that can help you maneuver the system.

The best administrator I know is a working class dyke who has an extraordinary ability to work the system, for the benefit of dykes, and knows exactly how far she can push it. She never stops short of that. I used to marvel at this "instinct" that I knew I did not possess. But I now see that she had been assimilating this training daily as she grew up. And then there was the working class wom who told me exactly how to lie to this same dyke administrator, in order to get myself out of a sticky

personnel mess. Other Lesbians and woms I have known have had this same astuteness, because, I believe, they have a perspective of the system from 'outside' (in one sense) and so have an integral perception of how it works. And because being 'outside' goes along for them with some sense of power, gained from class solidarity.

I don't mean to imply that class solidarity is a just compensation for poverty and struggle. And I also think the middle class position has its own advantages, other than economic, for dykes. A sense of entitlement—that you have the right to get what you want (this right is so completely assumed you are usually not aware of it), and of individualism—that others too are entitled to get what they want, are good and useful things for a dyke and especially a Separatist to have. As for concrete benefits, partly because of my class privilege, I have been able (for short periods) to in fact do work that expressed my true self, an incomparable experience for which nothing can substitute and to which every dyke is entitled.

I now think I understand better why radical middle class dykes are so often "downwardly mobile." Once we see that working in the patriarchy is exploiting ourself and that our energy given to the patriarchy is turned against us, we believe the only honorable thing to do is to stop working there. Our work doesn't express our true self, so it would be immoral to continue. We are obsessed with determining the purity of our actions: How can I be a real Separatist if I vote? How can I be a real Separatist if I work for the puds? How can I be a real Separatist if I talk to my brother? How can I be a real Separatist if I'm making money while other dykes or other women are not? How can I buy a computer when women in Asia are ruining their eyes to make it? As if it were possible to live a TRUE life in a world controlled by the patriarchy. Or as if it were good for all dykes or all woms to be poor.

More reprehensibly, we expect approval, of all things, for our downward mobility, which we see and expect lower class dykes to see as a morally praiseworthy alliance with them. I wish I could remember the year, the purpose of the meeting, and the wom more specifically, but I remember a Black wom at a meeting in the 70's saying something like: 'We don't want you to be downwardly mobile, we want you to get out of the way.' In other words, all these middle-class woms throwing themselves down the ladder were clogging up the passageway for those born on the bottom.

Since we white middle-class dykes feel so criticized for what we ARE (white, middle-class) and want the love and approval of others, we seek to become what we are NOT. Impossible, working class dykes say! As indeed it is. Although I have been criticizing white middle-class dykes, I am not willing to be too harsh on us. An awful lot of abuse is heaped on us already, often by ourselves. The phrase "white middle-class women" has become a pejorative term all by itself, it conveys incompetence and irrelevance and is most often said with scorn. The phrase automatically invalidates whatever it's applied to, and no further argument is thought necessary. The sexism here should be obvious. This language usage is not done to the benefit of ANY Sep, dyke or feminist. In almost all cases, the real intent and effect is to invalidate Separatism, lesbianism, and feminism. It is the kind of ploy that Anna Lee explores in her essay in this issue, wherein the "interests" of Black woms are used to invalidate lesbians' and woms' issues and to turn woms' attention back to white male interests. This ploy is used most often by the Left (as in 'lesbianism is a white middle-class trip'), but dykes also use the phrase as a scornful shorthand way of dismissing ideas, projects, and other dykes.

I am definitely NOT leading up to the proposition that white middle-class Seps should work "in the system" and make lots of money. For one thing, given the insane work world of the patriarchy, a low consumption, low wage life, especially when it comes with the accumulated remnants of middle-class privilege, can be a good deal more pleasant than a yuppie life style and gives us more time to foment the dyke revolution.

What I AM saying is that moral purity is not the best way to ethically evaluate any course of action Seps might take. The only way out of the ethical thicket I've been describing is commitment to REVOLUTIONARY STRATEGY, so that our actions are determined and evaluated by whether or not they fit into a plan for dyke revolution. What *matters* is not where I work or how much money I make, what *matters* is what I do with my money and my time. Perhaps I work part-time at a wom's bookstore but drink away my money and 'free' time in a male-owned bar. Or devote my time to a bitter battle to purge another dyke from a dyke project. Perhaps I make a lot of money in the computer field, but am learning specific methods of sabotage there and also tithe to dyke projects. Ditto even the military. And when I say "matters," I mean both "is good for the dyke revolution" and "is good for my soul," because those two goods are (for me) essentially the same.

Jeanette Silveira

Dear Dyke Separatist Strangers:

Dacey Yates

With this essay I posit to you that Dyke Separatist community will be necessary to save Earth's life. Men will kill the planet unless Dyke Separatists stop them. Of all beings, human or other, we are the only ones able to take up and maintain a position of conscious opposition against men. And we access the only force powerful enough to stop them, our authentic spirituality, Dykemagic. Presently our grasp of Dykemagic is too frail to get the job done; the power exists but our remembering of it is inadequate and will remain so unless we create community. In our fragmented state of individual and small-group isolations our progress in dis-covering Dykemagic would be too slow, considering the time remaining for effective action. I herein discuss-toward-dispelling some major past impediments to Amazon community, which have induced us to passivize ourselves: understandable mistrust of each others' competence as feminist allies; fears of poverty, and consequent adherence to men's money economy—versus Dykemagic—for survival; uncertainty about personal violence toward men; and fear of being/seeming crazy-grandiose or elitist. I unveil Dyke Separatists as epic personages. I propose that the priority motive behind creating Dyke Separatist community, now, must be to develop Dykemagical prowess for strategic use in eliminating patriarchy and stopping men's ecocides, and that the most immediate requirement is for enough of us to identify each other and establish dependable channels of communication oriented to the priority motive. To so coalesce will be to form a nucleus of community-to-be, from which stage we can cause its further definition to evolve. Also I am pleased to share with you accounts of relevant experiences, mundane and Dykemagical, and my resulting conclusions and envisionments about men-stopping community.

Part One: Realities of the Situation

Time Factors

It is urgent that we renew and accelerate movement toward community, to save the life of the planet. We are running out of time. Men's sabotaging of Earth's vital systems will soon—probably within the lifespan of most of us—reach the accrued point of no return unless Dyke Separatists gather our power and stop them. We are the only beings who can. Other womons are emotionally unable to really oppose them; non-humon beings haven't the necessary psychophysiological equipment; and men cannot/won't stop themselves. We, uniquely, are both willing and able to oppose men in a sustained way, and we have access to the one power which could stop them. That is our authentic spirituality, our Dykemagic.

(My use of the term *Dykemagic* interchangeable with *Dyke spirituality* is recent, and follows Jeanette Silveira's lead.¹ By either term I mean my/our interrelatings with a Spirit I perceive. I believe Her to be the meta-Being, the essence-Being, of all authentic beings of Earth-and-Moon. When I use the word Magic as a proper noun, I mean it as Her Name.)

We have already accomplished an impossibility, having discovered and begun the re-remembering of Dykemagic despite patriarchy. But in our fragmented state of non-community our progress with Magic would be too little, too late. Community is a requisite condition if we are to grow rapidly Magical enough; we must communicate and synergize with one another at a depth and pace which only community will allow.

And if we are to conceptualize the kind of community we need, and lay plans to actualize it, then we must complete those stages soon. We are in a time like the "window" time in a space launch. Except ours is a once-only window. Conditions are more favorable than ever before or again, for long distance and wide-spread information among Dykes in worldwide patriarchy.

For the first time—and for a short time remaining—some of us in a few of men's nations have pertinent marginal resources: nominal citizen status with protected rights, token public trends which damper blatant organized mysogynies, a few spontaneous networks of Dyke Separatists who know of each others' existence, and a few Lesbian presses.

It is unrealistic to assume that eight years hence men will still be willing to allow us these toeholds. In the u.s. they have already reversed

As pressures build from the culminating stages of social pathology, environmental damage, and impending collapse of institutionalized systems, men will try to cope by imposing restrictions and penalties to quell dissent and disorder. With the u.s. as continued example, given their system stresses which must come with expanding population, spread of illiteracy, rapid geometric progression of AIDS, proliferation of drugs, mushrooming of crime, polarization of rich and poor, drying-up of traditional tax bases, nuclear "incidents," sudden shortages of food and potable water resulting from environmental abuse, etc., how long can it be before this so-called democracy is a full-blown police state? Men's pattern is to blame their actions' results on womons, with special focus on any recognizable Witch/Lesbian/Amazon activist. Is it realistic to hope Dyke Separatists have even eight more years of relative safety in the open?

Trust/Confidence and Community

Dyke Separatists' realistic wariness about placing deep confidence in unproven womons has been a barrier to community.

We have experienced womon-betrayals in connection with trying to find/assemble peer community for ourselves. We get more than our statistical share of betrayals, and more potent ones, because we are more potent as threats to internalized patriarchy. Many of us have in common an experience profile that begins when we are newer to Separatist existence and unacclimatized to the psychospiritual isolation which accompanies it. In that phase we seek community because we so acutely feel the need for relief from that radical aloneness which was never meant to be, and so acutely starve for the nutritive synergizing which comes only through getting/giving peer interchange. Those needs feel drastic. We make eager efforts toward community but our trusts are met with such hurt that after several tries we stop trying and start something which looks like withdrawal but is more a wary waiting for undefined opportunity. At some point we notice we have survived on a long time with our radical needs still unmet. We weren't starving for community after all, we are "only" chronically malnourished from the lack. And we realize we must have been gradually achieving a contrived equilibrium in our isolation. We have a sense of status quo, and are tempted to cleave to that, for the traumas experienced in trying for community were more painful than is the present isolation.

Our unspoken moratorium on movement toward community has in part consisted of this ambivalent pause or waiting within the status quo.

Our unspoken moratorium on movement toward community has in part consisted of this ambivalent pause or waiting within the status quo. In that many of us have used this period to heal and assimilate some hidden realities discovered the hard way, we will emerge from it sturdier and wiser.

Because of the shift in my motivation—I want community now as Earth wants to live—I am actively moving again, and definitely interested in reducing my/our betrayals by womons, including by each other. To that end I share some observations and recommendations.

In the different situations when Dyke Separatists are betrayed by womons, two commonalities are frequent. One is that the Dyke Separatist erroneously thinks the other woman's level of feminist consciousness is at a par with her own, i.e., the Dyke Separatist mistakenly assumes herself to be relating with a peer in that sense, relating with a woman whose awarenesses and strengths are roughly the same as hers in all of several areas—when that is not so. Secondly, the hidden presence of men in the other woman's life, i.e., physical or ghostly man/men and the woman's fear of their punishment, is the precipitating factor of the betrayal.

When I envision Amazon community of the near future, one of its features is a folkway norm of get-acquaintedness which facilitates mutual conveyance of deep and valid information about ourselves in regard to our actual levels of personal feminist expertise.

If you were a Dyke I were trying to get to know toward possible community, then I would want to know where the men are in your life, and whether you have the ability to keep their inimicalness in conscious account. Men, embodied or ghostly, individually or grouped, are a fact of patriarchal existence and they are going to be here and there no matter what we do (for a while). They are no match for authentic Dyke Separatists so long as we know where they are, and that they are the enemy, and in what strength. I will endeavor never again to try community with a woman who conceals from me and/or relegates to her subconscious the actual strength of men's presence, if they are in any of the following areas of her life: 1) the at-home/at-leisure personal sphere; 2) the religious/spiritual sphere; 3) the survival/getting-money sphere.

If you and I were exploring each other for the possibility of community, unless you conveyed deep information about yourself, then my best option would be to wait and watch for emergence of its clues. We haven't time for that. Regarding your at-home/at-leisure life, mainly I

problem by moving away from them) I would want to know whether you somehow learned anyway how to counter the access and control patriarchy gives to father, brother, and son, in a woman's life—and indirectly in the life of any really close associate. If you don't know how important and hard it is to counter them here, I need to know you don't know. And you need to know about me, the same.

Also I would want to know if you were soft on Jesus, Jahweh, some guru, some panoply of god-and-goddess-spirits combined, etc., that is, do you consciously or subconsciously revere/fear men in their hidden presence as god image?

Thirdly I would want to know how you handle the circumstance that you too require some things which, in patriarchy, can be obtained only with money, and all money comes directly or indirectly from men. That is, I would want to know (and find out if you consciously know) the extent to which men are accessing and controlling you via money. If you told me only, "I work as a ___ in a ___" or, "I don't have a patriarchal job, I get money from/by ___" then I would remain ignorant of how critically men might be able to pull your strings—and thus indirectly mine, in community—because of your actual or felt need for money, or the needs of someone you love.

Each Dyke Separatist is immeasurably important. For your own and all our sakes I would want you to know me deeply enough to make your own assessment of my competencies, regarding the above. I have unawareness about myself. We all do. The wonder is that we don't have more, considering the dearth of peer help in identifying and dispelling our abscesses of internalized patriarchy.

We already owe it to ourselves and Earth to know and assess these things about any woman before placing serious trusts in her as peer-ally. And the need for caution will grow. So long as we must live surrounded by the enemy's escalating regime, it amounts to a vice to place pollyanna-like confidence in the woman whose actual feminist strengths we know little about. If we are aware of each others' strengths and weaknesses we can trust smart.

(No sense requiring our lives to be pristine of men; that is presently impossible. Nor that we be consistent in our day-to-day Separatist behaviors regardless of the situation's degree of significance; we would have no energy left if we did that, men are too legion and patriarchy too insidiously developed. As Separatist peer-allies we can expect to have some differences of opinion as to how womans ideally ought to conduct

insidiously developed. As Separatist peer-allies we can expect to have some differences of opinion as to how womons ideally ought to conduct ourselves in the future absence of patriarchy. Also our sub-priorities will be mismatched slightly or greatly. And we should be ready to make allowances for each others' transitory mistakes, furies, and fatigues, if we have assessed that we all know, sufficiently, what we are doing in consideration of the long run.)

I suggest we approach mutual trust as a process of consciously placing and withholding selected confidence in selected degrees—and start action to find each other. This time with the sense that we are into the final hand against men.

Doing that, we must also be intense about caring for each other, proceeding with kinds of concern which are more exquisite than polite, more exquisite even than circumstance would seem to allow. But we are Magical beings and we can give it our personal best.

Money Versus Dykemagic

In our initial acts toward community, let us immediately take up the topic of ourselves-and-money. We have been virtually silenced about that, including in print. Considering the control men have over our lives with money, our wee personal mention of it is a significant absence of phenomenal proportion.

Our silence about money is about the choices we have been forced to make. We hate our choices, and some of us feel shame. We hate each others' choices, and some of us succumb to converting that into disdain and horizontal hostility. This is devastating to potential for community.²

I used to think religion was men's strongest device to keep us doing what they want; now I think money is. I used to take middle class salary for doing one of patriarchy's jobs; having quit that, cast my lot with Magic for survival, and left it so for seven years, now I know something of poverty. It is a worldwide sadoviolent force. It is more a major tool for control than rape, marriage, battery, pornography, or prostitution, although it gets far less feminist press. Fear of men's punishments by poverty makes womons tolerate those and other hells.³

Fear of poverty is likelier even than fear of men-as-god, to keep us physically in and contributing to patriarchy; and so long as we are embodied in this life, our psyches are virtually inseparable from our bodies. The prime purpose of men's money system is to ensure them the necessary physical access to an adequate number of us to vampirize, to fuel themselves/patriarchy. Essentially their economy is a substitute for their

Magic and men's economy are antithetical, and those likeminded of us who have not yet done so will have to get off the fence of diluted allegiance both ways, and make the necessary choice between these two orientations. That could mean quitting a job, or it could mean changing the uses of one's income. In any case, it would mean a radical change of stance in relation to one's tangible and intangible resources, from being their owner to being the administrator of their use toward the community's priority. What will matter is how much of the time and energies of all of us we can free to participate with Magic to end the rule of men.⁴

The decision to go wholemindedly with Magic is the biggie of choices, in patriarchy. For some it entails completely disrupting the life's situation, including important personal relationships. It is an ongoing choice, impossible to maintain without somewhere along the line facing the realities behind a succession of fears of punishments concomitant to poverty: fears of unmet basic needs for the body and its health, of being exploitive, of loss of friends and perhaps lovers, loss of independence, loss of ability to provide for other beings we love, and loss of so-called security in the future. For starters. On the other hand is the need to see to it that anybody gets to have any future.

We know money is not a contained, separated nuisance in any woman's life; instead, a permeating force coloring everything she does and thus everything she is. Coloring her somewhat dead. The Separatist knows that each decision she makes, each relationship she participates in, each act she performs, each hour she spends, is tainted directly or indirectly by some less-to-more fetid compromise between her ethics and her or another's need for money, and she knows by reason and feel that she is consequently less-to-more disempowered.

Trapped in men's worldwide economy, we are all like fish existing sick in polluted water. Especially every Separatist knows there is no clean money, and no life clean of money.

To portray Magic as I know Her, the most apt image is also an environment we are immersed in and partaking of—but this time a life-enhancing environment. Wholesome, additive, vitalizing.

We are simultaneously immersed in and partaking of two antithetical environments: men/money, and Magic. Each must, by its nature, try to displace the other. We are swimming in and participating internally and externally in a pushing-struggle between two unspeakably powerful forces, each driven to ultimate itself and each unable to in the relative presence of the other. One is prime-motivated toward the annihilation of

forces, each driven to ultimate itself and each unable to in the relative presence of the other. One is prime-motivated toward the annihilation of being, one toward the moreness of being. If that is not a cosmic war between good and evil, for all practical purposes it might as well be.

Magic and Destined Dykes

Dyke Separatists are born strongly inclined to the moreness of life. Julia Penelope put it another way, saying of us that there are “. . . those who crave reality at any cost.” In the same essay she asks this question: “. . . why is it possible for us and apparently impossible for a majority of wimmin? What is it in us that acknowledges our fear but feels compelled, in spite of it, to say, *Men are the enemy?*”⁵ She identified that as one of the two central questions of her essay, *The Mystery of Lesbians*.

Dividing her question into its parts, Part A is: What is this drive in us that makes us crave reality at any cost, makes us acknowledge our fear of the consequences and name men the enemy? Part B is: Whatever the identity of that drive, why is it so strongly present in us and not in the majority of womons?

Regarding Part A, the identity of the drive toward reality, we are coming to understand what is in us. I put it that we are born unusually Magical: innately quite driven to participate in the moreness of life, and talented at doing that. Our genius includes not only our life-enhancing capabilities, but also that we are more enabled to birth life in ways additional to what is usually meant by ‘giving birth.’ I refer to all of this Magicalness-in-unusual-degree as ‘being born to the purpose of imparting life.’

As to Part B, why us, that is what I still want to know. Aware of what is in us, I ponder why that, or the same amount of it, would not also be in the next-door Lesbian and/or all womons. Karmic reincarnation explains nothing but how it profits men, so I disbelieve that prior to birth we have earned what we are—or what we get—in this life. (This frustrating, fascinating question, I suspect, will continue to intrigue us until Magic leads us, via it, to dis-cover certain mysteries about womon-only reproduction of our authentic species. But that is a side story.)

Dyke Separatists, how many of you have sat up into the night going, “why me?” I have considered two possibilities which seem equally likely and perhaps not mutually exclusive. One is that there may be some still-extant strain of original womon-ness, unadulterated or relatively so, which is linked with gene patterns so as to emerge, nowadays, rarely and apparently randomly. The other possibility is that Magic—Who is

days to focus Her prime womonly resources on an apparently random few instead of de-concentrating the dwindling store among all womons.

But regardless why us, so long as the circumstance lasts that men dominate Earth, to be born to the purpose of imparting life means also, inevitably, to be born to the purpose of opposing men.

From birth, we have shared that Destiny. Capital D. My hope for the future hinges partly on my bet that most of you have tried to make sense of a Sense that you are some kind of Destined Personage—as in the epic myths. We have crammed that Sense under the table because it is unsafe to be grandiose and un-nice to be elitist. Fear of having those manly attributes inhibits Dykely thought. (Often so. This particular fear and self-doubt has kept us from breaking silence about many deep intuitions.)

To discount the idea that Dyke Separatists are literally destined heroes, epic personages, it is necessary to ignore the fact that we are the only beings on Earth who are able to oppose patriarchy. It is up to the handful of us to end the regime of men, or not: we have a Task. If we fail, Earth dies; if we succeed, She lives. What epic tops that?

The Question of Personal Violence Toward Men

Obvious, but a thing one just doesn't say, so best say it: to end patriarchy it will be necessary to Magically at least decimate the number of men. Who would, and who would not, be willing to participate in that? This is another need-to-know-about-each-other item, but its importance warrants a singular look,

Unwillingness (including ambivalence) to do/cause violence to men has been a barrier to community—any womon community anywhere since patriarchy—because it negates trust/confidence at the fundamental level, and it should: **whose side is she on, who would stand pacifically by while they do this to me?**

Period.

The Most Dangerous Self-Passivization

Men's barriers to dyke Separatist community include the patri-reasons and beliefs we host, for keeping still instead of acting or for busying ourselves with lower priority acts. We face the necessity of simply taking a quantum leap out of our self-passivizations. Time is so precious that analyzing and debating our way through their rationalizations amounts to a passivization itself. Those "reasons" and "beliefs" are numerous.

There is one mind-set toward self-passivization, though, which is contradictory to both the premise and the heart of all that I am saying in this essay to you, and I wish to address it.

Some Dyke Separatists are passivizing themselves by denying the significance to what men are doing to Earth. Typically the rationalization of this denial is a line of reasoning or a belief system selected from a standard few supplied by patriarchy. For instance, a christian Lesbian explained to me that she deliberately blocks feelings/thoughts/information about ecocide because she expects its culmination will not occur until after her death and then it won't matter; she will have gone to her real home, heaven. Atheists will have gone to the oblivion of non-existence. And there are three or four variations on the newer sub-theme that men are incapable of killing Earth, despite the way things look.

Take your pick. The name of the game is Inject Your Own Brain With This Novocaine. To stop hurting, some of us have done it. Just as all of us have done it because of other pains.

It is pain beyond description to consider the indices of Earth's condition, the readout of Her vital signs. The state of the air, the ozone, the waters, the soil, the forests, the plunging count of species—and on. Men's torture-toward-death of our gorgeous and loving and beloved Living Home. Pain beyond description and we, including those of us who haven't already, are able to face it.

Part II: Personal Experiences

Herstory

One of my purposes here is to serve as an example and convey my actual self to you as much as I briefly can. Also I think it is worth sharing the facts of how I came to find myself an epic hero, since only Magic could account for it.

There have been three identifiable stages to my Separatism so far, and all of them began before I knew there was a word for Separatist.

I live where I was born 50 years ago and have nearly always lived—in a smallish city in the bible belt. Also here are my mother and many relatives. (I am telling you I have met the enemy head-on in my mother's husbands, sons, sons-in law, and grandsons. I have named them enemy; in some prime instances, to them.) They have made use of the stereotype "eccentric old-maid big-sister big-auntie whose bristles we must ignore because we must be fond of her anyway"; I see them on some holidays

and let them get by with it, or don't, depending how much energy I want to spend. It is like washing dishes; do it, and soon it is there to do again.

As to Lesbians, I had an adequate number of friends by the time I was 20, but I was 39 before I met one (including myself) who wasn't both christian and passing. She gave me a copy of *Radical Feminism*.⁶ Within six months I seemingly abruptly Got It that all men really were my enemies without exception, and became determined to keep them out of my home-and-leisure spaces.

Before another year had passed—by 1980—I had read *The Church and the Second Sex*,⁷ *Beyond God the Father*,⁸ and *When God Was a Woman*.⁹ By mid-1980 I had withdrawn from and shut my spaces against every brand of patri-religion.

I date being as-Separatist-as-possible-for-me from the hour seven years ago when I closed the cover of *Gyn/Ecology*.¹⁰ I sat gazing at the book and at infinity, with one self-truth filling me: it would be better to starve or get sick and die untended, if it came to it, than continue surviving by selling myself—adding my self—directly and without an ultimate struggle, to the unspeakable atrocity that is patriarchy.

Next workday, which “happened” to be the first day of a full moon, I went to the office and initiated the paperwork to resign, so as to pull out my retirement and unused-vacation monies. My thought had been to do that only, then leave. But Something told me to stay on for the minimally-expected two weeks just as if being a good girl. Those two weeks were the most intensive period of culminated understandings I have ever experienced. I entered a round-the-clock altered state quite noticeable to me but undiscerned by others; I remained in it for the duration and a while after.

In my journal I referred to the two weeks as a place, not a time: as a waiting room, an anteroom to a portal or passage. The following are some excerpts from what I recorded, mostly at my office desk with the door shut, of that experience.

Journal Accounts of Dykemagic

“ . . . Here I discover an inventory phaseout placespace of prime importance to the continuing Journey's prognosis. This is the last and most likely place for mission abort. I am engaged with wonderments . . . visions . . . exorcism . . .

“A kind of initiation rite is happening. What I am doing is taking stock. Older words constitute a fitter naming for this Rite of Passage:
Tacan Stocc.

Stock/Stocc: Trunk; main stem; the original from which others derive; the source.

Take/Tacan: Getting something into one's own hands; letting something in, apprehending it, understanding it; receiving something into one's body as by eating, drinking, inhaling; causing something to go along to another place.

"I am no longer taken stock, and I am Tacan Stocc.

"What constitutes my Stocc? What am I to be tacan into No Man's Land, into the placespace Mary Daly has named Hagocracy, the Otherworld of Positively Revolting Hags?

"Over there, Journeying is faster and lighter. Here in this Waiting Room, I must not let them use me as their double agent to presabotage my own flight. I must recognize what is, and what is not, absolutely necessary.

"How to make this set of discriminations? Not by utilizing the logical/linear mode. Working with logic is tedious. Time draws nigh, closer and closer to the Portal. I must be more crone-logically efficient.

"Many new Knowings have been brought to me in this place. I must put them now in my Cauldron and blend them together, heated with my/Our Fire. I must alchemize these ingredients and others, the new/Old Knowings, combine them and burn away the dross, so that I will have some Ludic Knowing to sustain me in Our Otherworld.

"I put Cauldron into the middle of space and stepdance around her three times, looking out at all the candidate ingredients. Absently I croon a ditty,

What goes into my pot—and what does not?
What goes into my pot—and what does not?

until the soundfeel completes herself.

"Aha! I spy something that looks notforthepot. It is a certificate of ownership. I scrutinize it more closely. It is the certificate of ownership, to be exact.

"Own. *Own*, anciently and presently synonymous with 'possess.' And *Ship*, from an old root word glaring with meaning: 'severed, divided.' *Owner-ship* = The divided state of possessing.

"I have not only been possessed, I possess. I own. I am possessed by owning. I am severed, divided, split, dismembered, by owning.

"I fall flat on fanny, stunned with this perception. Overwhelmed with the magnitude of detailed Work necessary to exorcise their implants of owning from my head.

"Oh, well, yes, the former I had been travelling lighter the past few years, with a steadily diminishing count of material possessions. There had been a loosening of ties to the ball-and-chain existence of 'having lots of things.' But that lightening was done just for convenience. That was done because I had become more picky about what was 'worth owning.' That was done from the complacency of having mastered the malfunctioning system well enough to think I could extract from it—somehow—anything I really wanted to own.

"And this is Radically different, an Other matter entirely. This is my sudden Sight that 'own' is a deception in the first place; a central lie implanted and now grown creepy tendrils out into my brain so that my own thought processes contribute unique variations on the theme, 'own.'

"This is dis-owning 'my own' thoughts!

"And if I cannot do it—if I take even a remnant of 'own' with me—then it won't matter what else I leave behind. I could not Fly for long, with 'own' growing in my brain. I would be collecting heavy things.

"As I Will It, So Must It Be: I. Will. Fly. Free!

"And now the witch-Eye can see. There is not a 'magnitude of detailed work necessary' to exorcise owning, but only one master certificate to be dispelled.

"I enter a scene; an ancient Vision from Our past/present/future timespace envelopes me and I become a living part of it.

"With me are twelve Other Womons of Maturity. We are representative Mothers of thirteen communities, come together at a time of Solstice to blend Our selves, to be ourSelf. Doing this we unite also Our peoples: the products, the skills, the new inventions of the populaces who are, to Us, One beloved child to be nurtured and enhanced.

"In Our few days together we Womons of Maturity see and name the biophilic directions for the flow of goods, talents, energies, among Our clans, so that these nurturers will go where they are needed and not be wasted here and wanted there.

"We, the Wise Womons, matured to Active Knowing of the Radix Principle that all life is One Life, have been raised up by Our Children to add-minister the tangible and intangible substances of Their everyday life. For Us and Them, Life has properties but people do not own those as property.

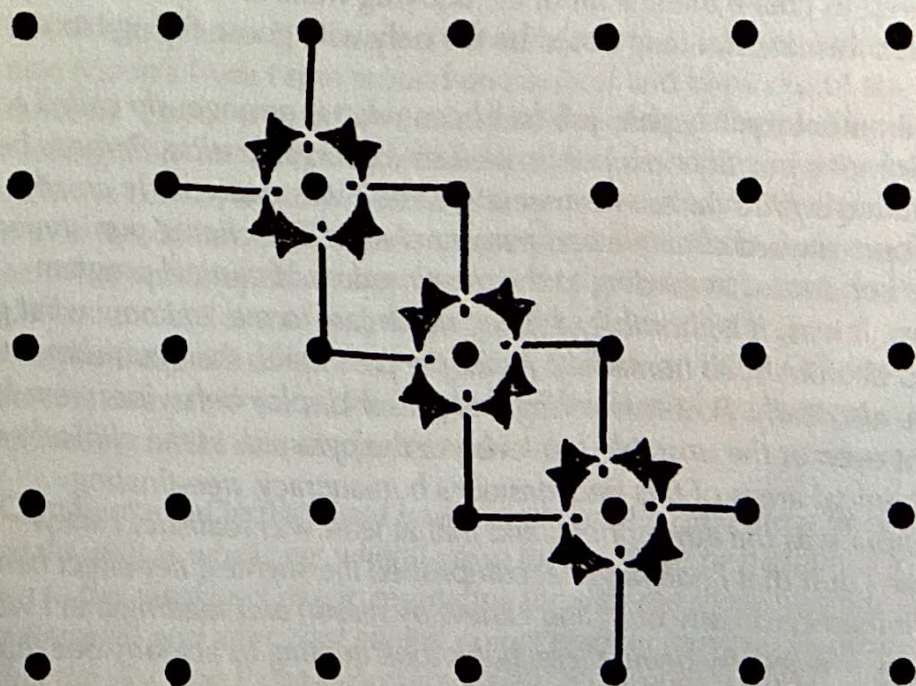
"We, Thirteen Womons Of The Vision, represent many different terrains, and no territories. Our cities and settlements and psyches are not encapsulated by walls. The invaders have not yet come. Or they have been dispelled. We, Thirteen Peers, are Peering Around together rapturously in Our cherished Gathering Time.

"We are reveling in Our Work, which is Really a riot of multidimensional Order. We are laughing. We are getting up and sitting down and dancing. We are cracking electric jokes, relieving ourSelves of accumulated charges built up in singular be-ing.

"We sing songs of holy ribaldry composed on the spot by one or two or three of Us. There is not very much serious discussion. Most of the Work is hidden in allegorical play. No one takes notes; we all share the same Sense of when a thing is not finished and when it is, and what it is. We are Friends of Life-long Loving, even those of Us new to each Other this particular Solstice, and we Spark each others' be-ings in Our Fire Work display of gynergic unification.

"The Vision fades.

"I am blinking, no longer looking to that Other place of be-ing with my friends. I am puzzled at thinking —'That Vision should go into Cauldron.'



"I take up the certificate of ownership and write diagonally across it in huge black letters: 'CANCELLED, BY OUR ORDER,' and sign my Real Names, clearly in script. Under Cauldron it goes, this previously nefarious 'Deed,' and I put Fire to it so that it becomes the first tinder to flame the Cooking Pot. An edge of it becomes a moving march of brownness. The document slowly curls, twists, lending itself gradually to that which releases and transforms the energy so long invested, captured, in it. Its advancing flames, steady and peaceful, entrance me.

"I see a world of open doors, and no signs that say 'Keep Off The Grass.' A world where I could no longer find myself being the things I most dread to be: thief, interloper.

"I understand how alone I could be, having completed that act. I understand that that was one of the rarest of Acts; I know no one else who has done it. Could I be the only one I know?

"Could I be the only one I may ever know who has re-membered this way out? Surely not. I so hope not.

"I long for peers to play with me in the free state where I am going; a network of peers to catch and carry and bounce me high again should my wings freeze or tire and I falter in the skies; peers to Fly with me as wild geese fly, taking turns at the lead where the wall of wind must be cleaved to create the first lift of the buoying wake for the entire victorious formation. I long not to be the only wild goose Flying Home.

Commentary: My patri-job had been what is erroneously called an administrative position in a public welfare (dis)organization. Perhaps because the outfit's name was mental health it was particularly crazily demonic toward clientele and personnel alike. The clients' punishments were conducted according to the most modern of clinical program-mings. It was, it is, horrible, a living nightmare to me, to know what goes on so deviously, so humanely. As for the personnel, their punishments came also daily. Power-wresting and power-display behaviors were frequent even at the unstable top levels of the pyramid. In the clinical and nonclinical areas of this frankenstein's bureaucracy, free-floating paranoia was the atmosphere, and that at least was realistic. I knew before I quit that I had never accomplished the slightest net-effect beneficial influence on any of it; and I knew by reason and reading that I was making it worse by being there, but it took quitting to actually See that.

“. . . These last days at the job are days of clear and final observation. Having given notice, I immediately withdrew the power of my Real Presence from them and their works, although leaving my body in their midst for the while. It has since become more plain to me what I had supplied.

“To outward appearance my motions are the same as before. But I am not breathing Life into the works. There is a subtle—but significant—withering of the men’s doings, without my Self involved; also an intangible confusion of their directedness, as if some path or trail had mysteriously disappeared. An array of their circumstances, seemingly unconnected with me, is gloomier for them; there is a certain deficit of zest. Of Life. They come to me, and I speak and act as before, yet not as before. I withhold the real Fuel; and their unknowing puzzled emptiness, unconscious lack of satisfaction, shows in their eyes and purposeless movements. They leave my office more quickly. I know they will be on their restless and mindless search to find some other woman to replace this waystop in the line of fueling stations. Blind pups smacking away from the unproductive nipple, snuzzling on down the line to find another one. They gotta have it. And they can only get it from womons.

“I am amused to learn the Real meaning of their saying, ‘cold as a witch’s teat.’

“Oh, this Journeyer is preparing for a Major Move, alright. When at the next Moon’s Dark I spin around on my heel and blink out of appearance as ‘career woman’ in the institutions of the fathers, when I have quit selling them my Fire, they will no longer dole out to me any dollars. And always before, it has worked this way: they doled me dollars and then took the dollars back at the company store. For food, lodging, flush toilet. What will they take away from me at the company store if I have no dollars and still want food, lodging, and a flush toilet?

“Maybe there are other ways of getting dollars, or Ways Other than dollars. I have yet to see it. I hold troubled feelings of unsureness. Troubled, it checks out, not frightened . . .”

Commentary: Despite that I have never directly seen the aurora borealis, that is what I get when I grasp for an image or metaphor to liken to the display of magic resonating through me those two weeks of pre-Passage, and after: vast etheric colors grandly moving, awesomely filling the sky. The Passage occurred; I did go through a Portal, and here is some of what I recorded within a few days after emerging (jobless) on the Other side.

"... I am here, in Hagland! All about and within, there are voices making a soft sea of voices, a matrix of voices, saying, whispering, singing, touching, in welcome. They speak each in different language, and yet I understand. The Old english *wilcuma* looks and sounds a good word to stand for what is said to me so softly, reassuringly, so alively joyfully.

"Within the people, the pets, the plants, the 'non-sentient objects,' and within this Self, are forces rejoicing that I am here. These move about me protectively, making their existence Known one after another, as if to provide frequent, nearly constant reassurance and promise.

"I am clearminded, yet unfocused. It has been given for the understanding: there is a transition period of about three nightdays of passage through some Major Portals; that is one of Our Real Old Truths, distorted and now dis-covered. The experience is something like waking up gradually although you were not at all asleep; like becoming oriented although you were not disoriented; like incorporating anOther kind of awakeness which permeates and makes more lucid the awakeness you already had . . .

"... It has been given to me to Know: The Goddess chooses me to be one of Her consciously personal, consciously powerful materializations. Sister Mello Rye has described it, 'She has been born many times but came through in initiations when the time came that the person had developed their understanding enough that She came to dwell absolutely in their bodies and direct the action'¹¹

"I have always been a personification of The Goddess. All of Us are. But the former I didn't know I was, and was a baffled channel. Knowing it makes a great difference. In this freed timespace I am like a pendulum spinning around slowly, depending from the thread I've spun, orienting to an Other gravitational pull.

"Oh, She has sent me messages all my life: I see that now. It was Her Voice, always, The Voice That Does Not Speak. But what She Said was distorted by layers upon layers of baffles. Patriarchal baffles. The former I felt the force of Her Voice, rather than hearing it distinctly as a Voice. She guided me around the right corners of the men's maze mostly by means of what I thought were 'merely' my own inexplicable but impossible-to-ignore impulses, urges, positive paranoias, and compelling attractions and loathings.

"Without cessation She has moved me.

"Surely Her longing for me has matched mine for Her.

"Now, at last, We have dis-spelled their spooks.

"I drink from Her well of Life.

"She asks to dwell absolutely in me; I ask to dwell absolutely in Her; We say Yes; all happens without a sequence; and there are not two here, only One.

"I understand: from now on, whatever I do or appear to be doing, is done from the basis of Her agenda, Her purposes. I am not consciously familiar with Her business, nor how it operates. I will learn The Family Business, for She will teach me."

Commentary: The journal excerpt below describes the Magical experience which caused me to know that the purpose of my existence is to impart life, participate in the moreness of life. Also described is the experience which gave me the explanation for my sense of destinedness. Thirdly it describes my coming to know, in a beginning way, this: Within the interdependent design of Earth's beings, womons have a unique role which is somehow vital to other classes of beings (not excluding those which men have forbidden us to think of as beings, such as waters, minerals). We are focal points for the outflow of Life. Life, in some way, at some stage, flows through us and proceeds on to enliven other beings in our respective spheres of personal influence, our O-zones. This function—or our type of it—is needed by Earth regardless of men. Men's vampirizing of us is their sucking of our energies which are supposed to go to that function.

". . . I Sense a great personal drama I'm discovering here now, a great destiny. A great triumph of the Enlivening Spirit that is 'my own' soul.

"It is the destiny of me to be full and overflowing with Life, contagious with Life, enLivening all who/which come within the expanding range of 'my' gynergic alive joyful aura, contagious to all touched with this Life which emerges and overflows through me. That is the center of the Humon enterprise. I am a center of the Humon enterprise. I am a center, ever-expanding Joy Alive Spilling Over Forceful Fountain Center of this Humon enterprise. This Family Business.

"The herstory of this singular woman is but a unique version of how that came/comes/wilcuma to be.

"Now, now! I see clearly the fertile matrix within which this singular Self was destined to emerge out of its hidden fosterfoundling secreted place. Supported by the Femol Force, buffered all around, secretly and remarkably defended by multi-womons' auric shields, I was protected

consistently enough that only painful and temporarily numbing wounds—not permanently debilitating ones—could be inflicted on this embodied psyche which houses and channels the Living Spirit, the Spirit Who Gives Life.

"I see a real epic myth here. What a great, ironic, destined triumph it is that I could be conscious surviving! To be Vivifying. I am astounded at the multidimensionality of the help I've had, secret forces cooperating back and forth through past/present/future/time/space, emanating now from one unknowing woman or group of womons, now from another. It was/is Her force emanating through various womons, and through animal and plant and mineral creatures; yes, and even through men despite themselves.

". . . This day is the first harbingeress of autumn; clear, cool, bright, with emphatic gusts of breezes which give strong noticeable caresses and chorus yes yes yes to me with the pine and oak treetops, vibrating down the trunks and through the roots and through the earth and through the feet of me and up these legs and torso and out through these eyes and circling again to the treetops as I look at them and hearfeel the chorus. Earth and I are symbiotically, gynergistically, sensing each Other, in union. In ecstasy . . .

". . . I perceive: it is en-Spiriting, important that sun, wind, air moisture, precipitation, interact directly with this body. Not only I profit. Sister Earth profits also from this interaction; it is synergistic. Sister Earth calls, says She needs Our personal Presences as much as We need Hers. I do not yet Know the dynamics of 'Her' need and 'mine': but quite certainly I Know Our gynergy forms are interdependent. I understand: get this body out-of-doors more for the exposure unfiltered by walls, roof, ceiling. And get other womons out. Invite them out. Attract them out . . .

". . . I Fly in widening circles these days and nights, acquainting with this free timespace which is so unstructured. Preparatory, no doubt, to selecting from among multidimensional directions to Fly purposefully . . .

". . . I am a witch. I am a witch. I am a witch.

"I say it aloud three times many times, pleasuring theSelf: feeling out through this expanding expanse of me, this untippable unending silent base.

"O strong! O quiet power alive, alive-O."

Part Three: My Present Envisionments about Community

Much of what I now see about Dyke Separatist community sources from that episode of *Big Magic* seven years ago, and is implied in my account of it above. Only recently did I Get It, specifically and lucidly, that community was one of the things that episode was all about. Having emphasized that it was about community, no need to be redundant.

When I envision Magical Amazon community in its first stages I see, initially, a long distance nucleus group of likemindeds. Physically, we come together initially and periodically, but we live wherever we presently are. Thirteen is ideal.

Next I skip to a time when there are thirteen nuclear groups. Something like a confederation exists. Something like a supracouncil exists. Some of us have shifted locations and/or sorted out and swapped primary contacts, for various reasons. But overall community remains physically disbursed, to meet two needs. One is obscurity/safety from patriarchy. The other is to impart life in our respective personal O-zones. Our arrangement of groups-with-a-council-something is not pyramidal and is more than a confederation. It is a molecular structure. The core groups are bonded by atom-members who are link-ers or bridge-ers. Trying to diagram this structure on paper, I fail because it is not one-dimensional, and not static. My internal hologram of it is: a structure made of relatively similar molecules, which are made of relatively unique atoms.

I see this structure growing slowly at first, then faster and larger, as Separatist Dykes in precondition to Amazonizing do that; with, in line behind them, Dykes in precondition to Separatizing doing that, Lesbians in precondition to Dyking doing that, and het womons in precondition to Lesbianizing doing that. Also there will be an increase in the number of leaped steps. The actual existence of community will be the main cause of its own growth, geometric in proportion to its increasing strength, and size, until the number of core groups is enough to network Earth.

I see this structure as humon society's structure after patriarchy.

I see each member administering—not owning and not communizing—her personal resources toward community's initial priority goal of Magically ending patriarchy, and after patriarchy, continuing that kind of womons' economy in the purpose of participating in the moreness of life. That is, I see something like a potlatch economy, assisted with the

counsel of recognized Wise Womons. As we do this in the beginning, we learn surely that we are "Less Than Self-Sufficient—More than Sufficient," as Nett Hart puts it in her essay of that title, subtitled "A Land Dyke Looks At Abundance."¹² Nett's description of herself I see as a metaphorical description of community:

... I do not live by averages. In averages there is always the calculation against scarcity, the face set hard against the wall, the looming doom of failure. To me a poor harvest is simply a poor harvest of some part of what may be harvested, not a 'crop failure.' I turn to other harvests, those I planted and those I did not. I eat wild when I do not cultivate. There is sufficiency from this land. If not this, then that, but always plenty . . . for me and all with whom it is shared. There is even time enough . . . Just when I think I have become a good grower of a particular vegetable, something totally neglected indulges me with a bounty I could not give. Nature is incapable of scarcity . . . I am learning sufficiency, not the kind that insists I do everything perfectly all the time to produce a planned though meager 'enough,' but a sufficiency that leaves me content and wanting at the same time. My want is my deepest motivation, my connection to life . . . I can move toward the life I want knowing at every junction I have more than I need and less than I want. My desire and content are moving boundaries. I live at the edge.

This is faith in reality: in life. This is craving for reality; participating in the moreness of life. It is authentic Dykefaith, the Magical virtue rising up now in some, soon in more, from the ashes of having our spirits so tortured with the "faith" men have crammed down our throats. We have retched and recoiled from the very word itself. No more of that; we have the faith we can embrace now.

We are going to be alright, do just fine, in community.

I have not said how to start. It is the measure of patriarchy that I would have to ask this question: How could, say, thirteen of us find each other?¹³

Betting across the barriers to simple initial contact and communication is community's problem for today.

Notes

¹See "Dyke Magic," by Jeanette Silveira, in the Readers' Forum, *LE* 3:1.

²I acknowledge and thank A., a Magical Dyke, for these insights which she gave me and I paraphrased; also for her other work to assist with this essay.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Jeanette Silveira, in editorial commentary.

⁵ Julia Penelope, "The Mystery of Lesbians: III," *LE*, 1:3, pp. 10-11.

⁶ *Radical Feminism*, Anne Koedt, Ellen Levine, Anita Rapone, eds., (New York: Quadrangle, 1973).

⁷ Mary Daly, *The Church and the Second Sex* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975).

⁸ Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father* (Boston: Beacon, 1973).

⁹ Merlin Stone, *When God Was a Woman* (New York: Harcourt, 1976).

¹⁰ Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology, the Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (Boston: Beacon, 1978).

¹¹ Crystal Vision and Ebon Nether, "Interview with Mello Rye." In Anne Kent Rush, *Moon, Moon* (Berkeley: Moon Books, 1976).

¹² *Maize*, Summer 9988.

¹³ Of course, write me c/o *LE*, yes; but what also?

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Crookery

Margaret 'Chase' Smith

I retired at the age of thirty and have been retired for 14 years. In all that time I have not been hungry nor have I failed to pay for my ticket to whatever concert or dyke cultural event I went to. Yes I have been worried about money; dykes with traditional jobs worry about money too.

My retirement began on a summer day in 1974 when I was faced with an unfathomable problem, namely, whether or not to cross a picket line. I was on coffee break having a coke and a hard roll at the local greasy spoon across from the library. I had been working at the library in some kind of clerk category when the federal government released funds for projects that hired the hard core unemployed. My library hired seven hard core unemployed to complete an inventory of it's one million books and put me in charge. Suddenly I was a supervisor, and management spent a lot of time familiarizing me with the library from the inside and teaching me how to oversee people. Management and I worked closely together and we became friends. I took my coffee breaks and lunch with them and heard all about their children and aches and pains and what they had dreamt about when they were young and innocent girls. Being a dyke it was great for me working with so many womons (only the upper echelon of administrators were men) and now my salary was a living wage.

The strikers, including the womons I supervised, were my class—middle rung of lower class—unskilled and frequently unemployed labor. Management were now my friends and what I had learned from them was that the strike called by the clerks' union leaders was a farce. The library had already agreed to the changes the union had asked for, but the union wanted to test the public's and the courts' reactions to public service workers' going on strike. Boys' games and they were using the lives and paychecks of my class.

What was I going to do? I had never crossed a picket line in my life. But because I was operating as management I wasn't in the union anymore. I hated management and I hated the union, but most importantly I realized that I would *never* be free. That the world as it is set up would always try to use me against my own class. Later I realized that it was not only a matter of class, but also a matter of sex: men would always try to use me against my own—other womons.

When the English invaded the Irish they brought the Scots in to be the foremen in the factories, and yes they were men. The men are always brought in to oversee the womons. And the middle class oversees the poor for the rich. How was I ever supposed to be happy in the work world? It wasn't "Take This Job and Shove It" but take any career I could conceive of and "Shove It." I quit. I would rather be a crook.

Arts and Crafts

So I am a crook. I think of it as a vocation. I call what I do the "art of crookery." I don't steal from my local womons' bookstore or any lesbian rich or poor. I steal from the patriarchy and I'm good at it. I would love to tell you here and now what I do and exactly how I do do it. But if I want this to be published in a Lesbian journal, I'd better not. Why? Because I fear the powers that be would come and get me and probably punish who ever gave me "air time." I also fear the reader would punish me because she the reader is afraid of being punished as if she were an accomplice (well look what they did to Ethel Rosenberg for just TYPING the supposed secrets of the atom bomb). Or the reader would voice being ashamed of me as if I were giving Lesbians a bad name. That would break my heart—because what I want to do is share with separatists and other dykes another option for survival than slaving in the patriarchy and all too often doing the boy's work for them.

I want to tell you that it's fun. I believe that "crookery—the wonderful art of stealing from the patriarchy" is a great source of self esteem. It helps me feel like I am fighting back and not just laying there and taking it. But mostly I want to tell you that crookery can work and that it gets easier and more *profitable* with time. At first you start unbelievably afraid of even stealing the smallest thing—afraid for many different reasons, some of these influenced by class and some that cut across all boundaries. But with each success you gain confidence, as is true with any discipline or job. The more you free your mind up the more things to steal will just fall into your lap. Possibilities open up to you and your

mind becomes stimulated with numerous opportunities to practice the craft.

You do have to do some work on guilt and fear, two emotions that have been drilled into womons' heads since babyhood. Once, standing in line knowing I was about to do something illegal, the top of my head got hot and I thought it was going to burst like a volcano—all that had happened was that I had gotten so scared I'd raised my blood pressure. I had to learn some gentle self-talk and inner meditative stuff to help me continue. These kinds of situations are a great place to practice and to check out whether you indeed are making the non-stress techniques your own. Crookery is cheaper than therapy and probably less dangerous; and it creates sustenance and rewards in your life instead of a monthly bill. Some of the stumbling blocks I see to crookery are Fear, Ingrained Taboos, Inadequate Training, and a Lack of Opportunity to Practice. So. We've seen that before, it is the same stuff they used to keep us from loving ourselves or another womon. It's always said that hard work develops character, well crookery develops *depth* of character.

What about karma? I and my practice and advocacy of crookery have been accused of creating bad karma. It seems womons take to the concept of karma like fish to water. I think we do because karma gives us a sense of justice and control. I wish it were more than a sense. The earth does not have enough time or resources for all the past slaves to know life as masters. So what kind of job in the patriarchy do *you* hold that creates good karma?

It is, however, beneficial to do rituals around the things that we steal to truly make them our own, as we are so susceptible to thoughts of doing an injustice. I also Tithed. I don't do that out of guilt but because I want to build a Dyke Nation. Tithing (giving 10% of your work) to another dyke radical cause creates movement and is a good separatist ethic to perpetuate.

Stealing is hard on your nerves, but so is the stress of working for an asshole or with one. When you get right down to it most work that is done in this poorly set up unjust 8 hours a day system is meaningless. I think that is why they had to barbarously set up such a strong work ethic in the lower classes, had to infuse in us a pungent moral code, or else we would quit, and have planted such a fear of being unsuccessful in the middle classes. I believe that if womons ran the world, the workday load would be cut in half just from taking the bullshit out of it. Yet even believing all this, one of the hardest things to adjust to when I quit working

was my lower self esteem. I didn't realize how many strokes going to work every day had provided, or how much mileage we get out of complaining about having to do it. Nor had I expected the disrespect (albeit jealousy) that would be heaped upon me by other dykes for not following suit in this patriarchal ritual of "having a job". I was surprised at how much social conditioning was in myself and I vowed to get some of it out.

Crookery was useful in helping me challenge my assumptions. I don't mean to minimize the risks, but criminality is not as dangerous as they would have us believe. And as a matter of fact the cost of 'solving' most minor crimes is greater than the cost of the crime itself; often, if catching us is not cost effective, the pursuit is simply dropped. So minor crime is an excellent place to start to build your self confidence. When going through a depression or grieving the loss of something or someone special, it is said that if you can put together a 'series of small successes' you can bring yourself out of it. I have tried this using crookery and it did work and satisfy me better than drugs.

Training or apprenticing in crookery can be very helpful, details that someone else has already worked out should be passed along. Most aspects can be worked thru with a little research and woman's common sense. Being raised a girl is good training for this vocation. You know how you are usually smarter than boys but have to pretend that you are not—this is also a good strategy in stealing from men. Men will bend over backwards to be superior and condescending to you while you are getting the information necessary to rip them off. When you realize that victims of crime are usually not compensated, "men as victims" has a wonderful ring.

Another good political skill that crookery helps develop is the art of lying. This skill has been essential for the survival of many a woman, no matter what class, and crookery gives you good practice. If we lived in a world of our choosing we would choose not to lie; but to treat the world we live in as *if* it were our choosing is to lie to our very cells, and those kinds of lies *will not* lead us to a world *of* our choosing. Lying is best done to others and most rewardingly done to the enemy.

Men are not going to give up their power and privileges because we ask them to, or because on their own they have figured out it would be the right thing to do (after attending some kind of massive encounter group?). Enter crookery: a chance to actively take things from the enemy instead of catering to him. A lot of us talk (armchair separatists) about

"stepping outside the patriarchy." I believe that crookery is a stepping stone and wish more of us so-called radicals would help each other with it. And while we are at it, let's stomp on a few patriarchs on the way out.

I do not mean to imply that I have devoted my career to being a Roberta Hood tho that is one of the most enjoyable and exciting things I've learned and then been able to do. My main reason had been to be able to support myself and not "work" and I have succeeded. It has not always been easy and several times I have questioned if it is worth it—I think tho that it is!

Class

I also do not mean to imply that I think this a career best suited or justifiable for working class womons. Middle and upperclass womons often have more access to and opportunities for bigger schemes. And they need to be taking their share of the risks in this revolution. I believe that we live in three class systems; the Male-Female, the Racial, and the nine prong Upper to Lower class systems. That these systems are then reinforced by the other oppressions—ageism, sizeism, ablebodiedism, imperialism, etc. And that the male-female is the first division. The privileges and hierarchies become complicated. Once we get rid of the men we are going to have to clean up their crappy class and hierarchy systems.

Sometimes I despair wondering if it is even possible to work with inter-class stuff much less enjoy it. Class Class Class seems to get in the way in every group and worm its way negatively into every project I've worked on. Altho it may be the real reason we are not trusting each other and thus dragging our heels in group situations; it is rarely talked about *outloud*. But it screams in my head. My middle classed friends tell me they are often unaware of it—of course—since they are higher classed than me they don't *need* to be. That's the part that incenses me most because if they were aware of it maybe I wouldn't have to be. I have also been told that the middle class feels blamed and judged *before* they have even spoken or *despite* what they had to say. And I know I have done that—figured out the dyke's class and used it as a short hand to support or not trust or dismiss. Crookery could be of use to us in learning some practical ways of dealing with each other again.

It has been suggested that we need to return to consciousness raising groups; perhaps we should make some of them "crookery cadres". We often give lip service to wanting to be able to "appreciate differences"—crookery cadres could function as a means to serve that end. On some

levels I think it easier for my class to steal, for example, the “necessity” of it can overcome fear. Higher classes aren’t as motivated that way, but neither would they sweat as much about getting caught, knowing that they could pay their way out of trouble. Recently I did some civil property destruction with a group and noticed that I was sweating it less than usual—most of the lesbians were middle class so I knew that we could come up with the bail on the spot, not have to *fund raise* it first. I mentioned my lessened fear, only to find the others were scared shitless but for different reasons. One dyke was afraid her parents would be disappointed in her. My father had disappointed me and himself often enough so it didn’t feel earthshaking for me to disappoint him. Also, all my life I have seen authority figures (parents, doctors, cops, teachers) act like assholes so they do not hold as much awe for me. Working together on crookery, hopefully, we could rub off on each other.

Not to say that I’m not afraid of cops—I am afraid of them because they could kill me for nothing if they wanted to—but their bad opinion of me does not hurt my feelings. However, when it comes to lawyers I freeze; I could use the confidence of my middle class friends to talk with them. I don’t mean to set up our groups along stereotypes, I just want to use each of our best skills and not encourage collective mediocrity. In many instances we could run like the old collectives, everyone taking a turn at *each* job, which could be very illuminating. I do want us to have some empathy in trying to understand each other again—and some fun with each other too. Part of my reason in being a separatist is that since I don’t spend energy being tolerant of men I will have more patience to give to other lesbians/womons.

A great benefit of crookery is that it keeps me alive and moving. We need movement, it invigorates us and gives us the space we have to have to keep from picking on and at ourselves. Having crookery as an option feels like blinders have been lifted off me; and I get to participate in life in a way that someone else did not design for me.

For the Love of Separatism*

Anna Lee

Separatism is focusing on each other as lesbians and minimizing the energy given to males. As a separatist, when I focus on lesbians, I include *all* lesbians who choose to focus on lesbians. The previous two statements define the separatist ideal. Obviously the diversity (of race, class, age and so forth) among us is not as complete as it could be, but it is a fact that the lesbian community is more diverse than any other existing community. While it is important not to romanticize the lesbian community, we too often denigrate our accomplishments and intentions. I will return to what blocks that diversity later in my discussion. I want to discuss first how I came to identify as a separatist and then how the unacknowledged bond between women and men prohibits racial diversity among lesbians.

Coming Out Separatist: Kinda

I embraced the theory of separatism very slowly. While other separatists accepted separatism almost simultaneously with coming out, I

*While this paper is loosely based on "A Black Separatist," which will appear in the separatist anthology, *For Lesbians Only* (London: Onlywomen Press, in press), I have retitled this paper to minimize confusion.

I want to thank the many lesbians who have encouraged me over the years to rethink some of my analyses. I want to thank Tara Ayres who loves me enough to continue to argue with me even when I am my most stubborn. I want to thank Julia Penelope and Sarah Hoagland for continually inspiring me with their writing and their willingness to critique my writing. I want to thank Lee Evans and Vivienne Louise who listened to my ranting and raving and offered helpful suggestions that pulled me from my dilemmas. Finally I want to thank Noel Furie, Selma Miriam, Betsey Beaven and Denslow Brown who have always challenged me to explore further what separatism means to me. Of course, I take responsibility for the arguments found in this essay.

gradually began to understand and accept separatism over a number of years. I have also heard that the separatist lifestyle was adopted by some prefeminist lesbians. While this community may have adopted the lifestyle, from my observations, ideological justification or theory was not important to prefeminist lesbians. All of this is to say that my journey is not necessarily the same as that of other postfeminist lesbians nor my separatism the same as that practiced by prefeminist lesbians. My journey is mine, to which I've added my perceptions of others' journeys.

I came out in 1969, believing that my loving a woman was happenstance and that our love for each other was no different than heterosexual loving. To say I loved a woman because she was a woman was too "queer."¹ In 1969 no one was talking about women loving women; information was hard to find and the analysis was pretty unsophisticated. While the 60s are perceived as a free, loving and liberating period, it is sometimes forgotten, especially if the observer had not participated in those years, that the free-love and liberation were male focused and directed. Women were the objects. Even though a woman loving a woman was a departure from "predator"² heterosexual relations, self-identification as a lesbian was outside the constraints imposed by hip males. As I said, loving a woman because she was a woman was too queer. As there was silence in the 60s around women loving women, so too interracial relationships were becoming tolerable but not quite acceptable. As a black woman I loved a white woman. It would be four more years before Daughters in 1973 published *Rubyfruit Jungle*, which celebrated coming out gay and depicted an interracial relationship (though not one between lovers) as acceptable.

I stepped into that void in a small midwestern town with four other queers. And we believed we were the only ones in the land. In fact, we felt we had attained nirvana. That others were not so enlightened explained why heterosexuals exhibited the self-hatred of choosing partners unlike themselves. Nineteen years later Katherine Forrest would write a short story describing homosexuals as possessing intelligence, sensitivity and creativity. Heterosexuals no longer had those characteristics and so were becoming extinct. The homosexuals explained to each other that heterosexuals' knowledge that they were becoming extinct was the reason they had persecuted homosexuals throughout history.³

Believing we were superior to heterosexuals led me to my next step: the realization that I loved my lover (a different woman from the first) *because* she was a woman. The idea of separating from males was still

totally foreign to me. While I believed that it was significant that I loved a woman because she was a woman, I believed that my love for a woman was no different than a woman's love for a man or a man's love for a man. The early D.O.B. (Daughters of Bilitis) sought toleration for female homosexuals, even encouraging lesbians to dress in drag. In this case, "drag" meant dressing as if one were a heterosexual feminine woman. D.O.B. argued that female homosexuals needed to make ourselves acceptable to heterosexuals through our dress and behavior. By the early seventies, D.O.B. and particularly its publication, *The Ladder*, had begun to question the female role and to use the word *lesbian*. Coincidentally, as *The Ladder* became independent from D.O.B. the use of the word *lesbian* became more acceptable and in fact the norm in *The Ladder*. However, the context in my small midwestern town remained similar to the civil rights approach advocated by D.O.B. in the early 50s.

The ability to resist is in part dependent on the context within which one finds herself. If a feminist or visible lesbian community had existed in my town, I would have perceived myself as a follower of those who had preceded me instead of a pathfinder who had to make it (whatever "it" was at the moment) up as I went along. But the context is only a part of the ability to resist heterosexual domination. The other part is the individual wherewithal to resist "normalcy."⁴ I believe the pressure to be normal is what so many lesbians are referring to when they say it is a miracle that any of us are able to come out.

So, not having a social context or a political analysis which challenged my acceptance of heterosexuality as the norm and my search for tolerance from heterosexuals, I continued to fall in and out of love for a number of years. I certainly had a fledgling feminist consciousness but I didn't examine the way I participated in relationships as lover or friend. When I moved to the east coast, a whole new world opened for me.

Here I was able to observe a larger mixed group and examine the "normalcy" of heterosexual relationships. The context was not predominantly gay, as had been my previous experience with the four other queers in the midwest. I met white socialists; previously I had interacted with black nationalists and socialists (a separate group from the four other queers). It was the late 70s. I was amazed that a whole group of people could speak in and write pages and pages of marxist rhetoric. I thought that that rhetorical ability was limited to the college radicals I had known. With concentrated effort, I could do only a few sentences and then would forget what my point had been. I had a large group to

observe at the Worker's World Party meetings I attended. I noticed some characteristics similar to the black nationalists and socialists. One was the speaking in tongues or jargon. Two was the fact that the leadership was primarily male, and the women concerned themselves with women's issues and recruiting women.

I had many lively arguments with my lover at the time and with my friend from the midwest who had also moved to the east coast. I knew something was wrong although I didn't have a political analysis for it. I mentioned to my lover that the Worker's World Party discussed rape only in terms of black males being unfairly accused. We both agreed that black males were disproportionately accused, prosecuted and convicted. We disagreed about women's always being disbelieved about our experiences. She believed that after the class revolution, women would not be raped or forced to accept subservient roles at any time. She held this belief even though all the significant roles within the Party were performed by males. I had seen this same refusal to name relationships as harmful within the black nationalist movement. I would later come to learn that mixed groups encourage women to believe that our issues are less important than the issues with which males are concerned.

Coming Out Separatist: Truly

My lover did introduce me to a feminist business which allowed me to perceive the world from an entirely different perspective and which gave me a context for understanding what had troubled me about the various movements in which I had been involved. I was also introduced to a world which was truly women identified. That women identification encouraged my examination of my relationships with women and engendered a refocussing away from male actions.

The group who ran the feminist business valued women. Each woman in the group believed that women's work and ideas were important. They wanted a woman owned, operated and identified collective. They made mistakes, but their intent was to create a world of women who challenged, inspired and nourished themselves and other women. So in 1979 I embarked on my greatest adventure, wherein all the things I had taken for granted were questioned. I had to rethink almost every assumption I had made about how the world operated and what my part in it was. I also had the opportunity to interact with other women, particularly lesbians, in a context that assumed we could change the world and that our movement was growing. I had choices that I had never had.

The choices concerned both resistance to males and connection to women. We never considered women who would want to involve males

in our community as part of our community. The lesbians and the few straight women who were involved in our community considered women-only space as a given. Women energy and relationships were primary for both groups. Separatism was valued by both groups. The issues that were seen as secondary by male dominated groups were examined as if our lives depended on it. In fact, our lives did depend on understanding the ways males sought to control us through violence. Male violence against women ranged and ranges from defining who we can be to killing us.

The Man in Our Head Or in Our Lives?

Because males defined the acceptable ways racism could be discussed, lesbian ability to develop anti-racist postures was undermined. Our ability even to perceive racism between women was minimal. Racism was concerned with black males as if black women did not exist. *Big Mama Rag*, a now defunct Denver newspaper, argued that women should support national liberation struggles. Women should support national liberation struggles even though the males who participate in them define women's issues as secondary to the liberation of the country or community.⁵

For a number of years and even today, the male-defined scope of racism has meant that if males including black males are excluded then an act of racism has occurred. In 1987 a black male hit a white lesbian after she excluded him from viewing her sculpture, and the organizers of Sisterfire, the festival at which this incident occurred, argued the white lesbian had provoked the incident. As a result the organizers suggested that mutual violence had occurred. Their argument is that hitting as violence = exclusion as violence. Is there anything wrong with this equation? What is wrong with this equation is that racism is defined as the exclusion of black males. The white lesbian did exclude white males but not black women from viewing her sculpture. The organizers of Sisterfire ignored black women in their definition of racism and what counts as a racist act. *Big Mama Rag* in a similar vein discounted the interests of non-european women in their advocacy of national liberation struggles. Whether it was the intent of *Big Mama Rag* or Sisterfire, the result is that women bond with white males under the guise of protecting nonwhite males. The following discussion will demonstrate how the real bond is with white males.

The original radical analysis of rape by organizers of rape crisis centers was replaced (often along with the original organizers) with

organizers' acceptance even desire for police participation in preventing the crime of rape. Rape crisis center organizers eagerly sought police involvement even though police had never demonstrated a concern with or success in finding the male rapists of black women. The police, however, have shown a willingness to rape black women.⁶ In fact, white feminists' analysis of rape discounted the experiences of black women. The police have also shown a very successful record of protecting white men from facing the penalties for their rapist acts, while, as I commented earlier, black males are disproportionately targeted to pay the penalty for the crime of rape. Who benefitted from police involvement with rape crisis centers? Not black women. Not black men. But white males did benefit. While white feminists' agenda may not have been articulated, their desire to bond with white males was not unnoticed. In the example of Sisterfire, the organizers' claim is that coalition building is important and essential. The coalition building is the bonding with males, who numerically are white males.

Another example of the bond between white lesbians and white males is the almost wholehearted endorsement of the need to support males dying of aids. Jeanette Silveira said to me in conversation that she considers the non-involvement in aids work as a litmus test for separatism. I agree with her that aids is not a separatist issue, but many white lesbians both separatist and nonseparatist claim that because black women are dying of aids, lesbians should be involved in that struggle. It is true that black females and males die from aids. It is not true that aids is transmitted through the air we breathe or the water we drink. It is transmitted through sexual contact with someone who has aids and through blood exchange with someone who has aids. Because of the ways aids is transmitted, lesbians are a low risk group. In order to induce lesbians to work on aids, the definition of lesbianism is diluted to include women who have sexual contact with men. Who then is a heterosexual woman?

It does not matter to me whether the lumping of lesbians and heterosexual women is intentional; what does concern me is the masking of white female-male bonding by claiming that aids is significant to lesbians because black women are dying from aids. It is not the first time that white women have used black women to advocate an agenda which results in a stronger bond between white women and men.

This bond between white women and white men is motivated by white women's desire for power and white male desire to recapture women's attentions (as I discuss in more depth in my paper on new age

spirituality⁷). I have had to re-examine my relationship to black males. I'm not sure white lesbians have examined their relationship to white men. I'm not sure because the bond between them goes unspoken but manifests in many ways. Some of which I've described.

I am very clear that my brothers hold the power of the penis. Any man regardless of class, income or race holds power in the world. Truly, some males have more control in the world than others. But each has, if nothing else, a woman or woman-substitute as his slave, e.g., his wife, mother, girlfriend, and so forth. A male regardless of his status in the world can exercise his power over at least one woman virtually without interference. A cursory examination of the statistics concerning males battering women or raping their daughters demonstrates these actions are seldom punished. But the women and daughters who object to these male activities are severely punished.⁸

What all of us, especially white lesbians, must be clear about is the difference between power and revokable privilege. Power-over is the necessary resources to decide what the outcome of a situation will be. Revokable privilege is the ability to carry out someone else's decisions and their agenda. Privilege can be wielded as long as someone else's decisions and agenda are followed. White women have revokable privilege. When they serve white male interests, resources are made available to them. When they do not, the availability of resources decreases. When battered women's shelters hire out-lesbians or make services available to lesbians who have been battered, funding from city, county, state or national government is cancelled. It is important to males that women be patched up and returned to them. It is not important to them that lesbians be patched up and returned to a lesbian battering situation.

White lesbians or feminists may, in fact, know that the availability of resources is dependent upon making the male givers of the resources comfortable, or they may not want to examine the gift horses' mouths too closely. When certain actions result in predictable, consistent outcomes then the actions not the rhetoric must be examined. I'm still waiting for white lesbians to question their bond with white men and what that bond means to creating a diverse lesbian community. The bond between white lesbians and men is currently a stumbling block to the creation of meaningful race and class diversity.

Black Lesbian Introspection

The accepted definition of black culture is also a stumbling block. We as black lesbians are allowing black men to define the meaning of our

blackness. While I will specifically discuss the need for black lesbians to promote our own definitions of blackness, I believe all of our communities of origin need to be examined for the female centeredness of each community to determine what qualities we can bring to the lesbian community that enhance lesbian lives.

Within the black community, I grew up with strong women role models. These models were not lesbian but the women understood that their survival was dependent on their ability to move through the world without a male intermediary. They knew that they could not depend on males. Black women in my community created networks of women so that we could call on each other. It did not surprise me that the women around me encouraged me to rely upon myself or believed in me. What those strong black women nourished in me was a strong egoism. An egoism sufficient to survive in a world which would not necessarily look kindly upon me, a world which too often hated me. That black female community taught me loyalty to myself and others. It also taught me to face the truth. For not only would the truth set me free, it would insure my survival. If I didn't like the truth I found, then I should change that truth, not pretend it didn't exist. Middle class pretensions were reserved for those who could afford them. Middle class pretensions would not save my hide.

Even though most of us grew up with strong black female models, even though we learned that we could never be white and therefore acceptable, we have refused to take black lesbian interactions seriously. We deny our female centeredness and get caught up in accepting black male definitions of blackness. The closer an activity is to black males the more the activity is seen as black. In a conversation, a sister supported the black muslims even though she could not be one herself and even though the black muslims insist that women be subordinate to men. In another conversation, a sister perceived a black woman who performed from a heterosexual position as more professional than an openly lesbian black woman who performed in a woman-identified context. In each case black lesbians were not valued. It is a common world view among any oppressed group that what we create among ourselves is not really worth having and lacks the professionalism and validity that are possessed by the oppressor and his lackeys.

Black lesbians reject whites defining who we can be but accept black males defining who we can be. Until we can value what we create, we will not exist except in the distorted house of mirrors at the carnival.

Since we have not seriously considered our position in the world as black lesbians, we are too often concerned more with our appearances than with developing a political analysis that begins with us. A political analysis which makes black lesbians central to understanding the world and our relationship to the world. I am certainly not suggesting that black lesbians are mindless or do not think. What I am suggesting is that the definitions we use of who we are have not been created by us. We have some hard work ahead of us. It is necessary we do that work.

Separating from black males is scary. It is scary because we are stepping into a void. It is a void through which even the strong black women role models we have known cannot help us. The strong black women can provide an impetus to seek our answers but not the answers themselves. The creation of ourselves can be exciting. Excitement is leaving the familiar and comfortable. Bernice Reagon⁹ has suggested that coalition work is difficult because we must go beyond the safety of the comfortable. On the contrary, coalition work resembles our communities of origin, because males are valued members of the coalitions she wants to create. It is creating lesbian community which is unfamiliar to us. Or at least to most of us, since very few of us grew up in a lesbian context. Coalition work is a return to what is known.

Separatism Is Where It's Happening

In the 70s we faced this void named lesbian centrality with only the barest hint of how to create it. We have made some serious mistakes and we will probably make many more. Yet it is within the context of lesbian separatism that we have achieved our greatest accomplishments. We have created spaces in which to know each other. We have developed an analysis which utilizes lesbians as the base. We have acknowledged our differences and sought to value our differing abilities. We have created economic lesbian networks. We have developed lesbian skills in carpentry, music, production, printing, selling, and so forth. These abilities, skills, analyses flourish in a lesbian context. We have surpassed our wildest dreams.

The dreams are not ashes, although there was a hiatus in the 80s. We must acknowledge our past dreams and vistas. The next step must address how we interact with intimates. By intimates I mean all lesbians to whom we relate. For lesbian community is no more than how we relate with each other. Lesbian community requires our participation in order to exist. I hope our lesbian community never becomes so institutionalized that we as individuals consume it but do not have to contribute

anything for it to continue. Once community becomes institutionalized it becomes fossilized. Something fossilized is unable to nourish the joy of creation. It just is. It is unchangeable and unchanging. It is dead.

Lesbian community is a diverse collection of intimates. It is our challenge to establish intimacy with those who grew up different from us. Even within groups whose members could be classified as similar there will be differences among us. So each of us must stretch herself to value differences in intimate relationships. It is fairly easy to value differences from afar. It is much harder to include differences in our intimate circles. It is even harder to seek out those who are different, but we must, because we need those differences in our own lives in order to grow, to be challenged, and to create realities we have not yet dreamed.

Notes

¹ Julia Penelope, "The Mystery of Lesbians," *LE* 1:2. While Julia discusses how her overt lesbianism made her the target for anti-lesbian violence, it was not fear of violence which made me reluctant to use the word *queer*. It was the fear of moving beyond the pale of male-defined acceptable beliefs.

² Sarah Lucia Hoagland. *Lesbian Ethics: Toward a New Value*. (Institute of Lesbian Studies, 1988). This book explains Sarah's concept of predator-protector.

³ Katherine Forrest, "The Test." *Dreams and Swords*, Naiad, 1987.

⁴ Ruston, Bev Jo, Linda Strega, "Heterosexism Causes Lesbophobia Causes Butchphobia. Part II of the Big Sell-Out: Lesbian Femininity," *LE* 2:2, 22-43.

⁵ Elaine Henrichs, "A Call to Resist," *Big Mama Rag*, May 1982. In her discussion of forming coalitions with national liberation struggles, note the absence of women in the policy making bodies of those struggles. In addition, the traditional role of women in African countries is undermined or eliminated when u.s. agriculture policy and national liberation struggles foster subservient roles for women. Whose interest is being served?

⁶ A conversation with Lee Evans.

⁷ Anna Lee, "New Age Spirituality Is the Invention of Heteropatriarchy." Paper given at National Women's Studies Association, Minneapolis, June 1988, as part of a panel on Lesbian Theory organized by Sarah Hoagland.

⁸ Note the case of Karen Newson, who went to jail for six weeks in an attempt to protect her child from being sexually assaulted by the father. The father was awarded custody of the child. *off our backs*, October 1988, p. 3.

⁹ Bernice Reagon, "Coalition Politics: Turning the Century," In, *Home Girls*, Barbara Smith, ed., (New York: Kitchen Table: Woman of Color Press, 1983), 356-368.

Wishful Thinking

Amanda Hayman

Thelma lowered the eggs into the boiling water and made a mental note of when six -1/2 minutes would be up. She poured water into the brown teapot and set it on the table under the tea-cosy shaped like a cat her granddaughter had given her for her birthday. Then she shifted Kipper, the real cat, off today's newspaper, and put it next to Ivy's plate. Ivy was quite finicky about routine, and a day that didn't start with the headlines and the post could be fraught with problems.

Speeding up a little now, Thelma turned the toast over, and then nipped along the passage to pick up the letters lying on the mat. Oh dear, here was the electric bill, and that one must be from Ivy's son, and about time too. But what was this? Curiously she turned over a large white envelope, which was addressed to her in a beautiful gold script, but mindful of the toast and eggs she didn't stop to open it. Brrr! It was chilly in the hall, and Thelma pulled her green mohair cardigan around her ample front and hurried back to the kitchen, which was heating up nicely.

Quickly she buttered the toast, and was just putting the eggs in their special china egg cups when Ivy came yawning through the kitchen door.

"Morning," she mumbled, in a tone that some might have considered a trifle brusque. Not so Thelma, though, same way Ivy wouldn't comment when Thelma was what she considered to be horrendously chirpy. Over the years of living together she and Ivy had arrived at many compromises, not the least important of which was respect for their different morning personas.

"Electric bill's come," said Thelma, pouring milk into the mugs and giving the tea a stir. It was brewed to perfection, strong and black, just the way they liked it.

Thelma smiled fondly at Ivy, who was carrying out her ritual morning search for her glasses. "They're on your head, dear," she said softly, and

as tactfully as she could. Ivy hrrumphed, pulling the spectacles down from their nest among her silver hair and settling them on her nose.

"Well open it then," Ivy motioned toward the brown window envelope.

With a sigh of relief, Thelma showed Ivy the amount of the bill. They would be able to pay it after all.

Ivy had finished her egg, and the foreign news page, before she noticed that there were letters. "What're those?" she asked shortly.

Thelma started, drawn back from a contemplation of the c.r. group she had taken part in the night before. She followed the direction of Ivy's gaze, and reached across the table for the envelopes. "Oh my, I must've forgotten. Here, one each. Yours is from Simon, I suppose—at least it's got a Canadian stamp." She handed over the thin wisp of aerogram, and Ivy eyed it distastefully; she didn't really have much time for her elder son, who had been married twice, and had abandoned families in England and Canada.

"That all?" She made no move to open the communication. Ivy obviously felt Thelma's letter to be far more worthy of attention, for she did not return immediately to her newspaper, but waited with an inquisitive air for it to be opened. "What did you get? Fancy envelope, isn't it?"

"Well, I'm sure I don't know what it could be." Thelma stared again at the elegant writing, and fingered the fine vellum on which it was set out. Carefully, so as not to tear it, she opened the envelope and took out a single pale blue card, which was tastefully scalloped and edged with gold.

At the top was a labrys embossed in gold leaf, and the word "Congratulations."

"Well, I never!" exclaimed Thelma, almost too taken aback to speak. "Just listen to this Ivy." She read aloud.

"'Congratulations. You are the lucky winner of this year's star prize, the granting of three wishes. On each of the attached golden seals you should write one wish. This you must burn, scattering the ashes on the earth. If you follow these instructions precisely, your wish will come true. Believe and be empowered.' And it's signed, 'Amazon Intergalactic Delivery Service!'"

By now Ivy was peering over Thelma's shoulder and the two women looked at each other, puzzled.

"It must be a joke," said Thelma, turning the thick card over to look at the back, but her tone was not convincing.

"But supposing it isn't?" suggested her lover, her morning lethargy miraculously dispelled. "Just imagine! Three wishes. What would you ask for?"

"Oh don't be ridiculous Ivy, it's not possible." Thelma gave her a gentle nudge with her elbow, and stared again at her prize. The 'gold seals' looked like the kind of tin foil that commonly wraps chocolates with gooey cherry-flavored centres, but Ivy was right, you never knew.

Feeling eyes upon her, Thelma turned towards Ivy and saw that she was smiling.

"And where did you go, my love?" asked Ivy. "Decided what you want already, have you?"

Thelma shook her head. "I didn't really think about it that specifically. If I was going to give it a try (and I haven't made up my mind either way yet), d'you think it should be something just for me?"

Ivy shrugged. "Your guess is as good as mine. Why?"

"Supposing I asked for a Lesbian-only world, or no more war? Would it work?"

Ivy's face was a study, and she snorted with laughter before replying. "Thelma, I am not an expert in the psychology of wish-granting, but I suggest that if you're going to kill off all the men you might want to wish for a crash course in parthenogenesis as well."

It was Thelma's turn to be entertained. "There's obviously more to this wish making than meets the eye. What would you ask for, Iv?"

"Well, off the top of my head, and at the risk of sounding selfish, I'd say a million pounds, a more functional body, and three more wishes," Ivy replied in a matter-of-fact manner.

"Oh Ivy, you are a card." The two women smiled at each other affectionately, as they held hands and enjoyed the shared moment. "I could do without the arthritis, too, if it comes to that, but if we could get improved health for *all* old women, wouldn't that be better?"

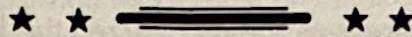
"But really, Thelma, what *are* you going to do?"

"You know, I think I need help." This was one thing Thelma was sure about. "First of all to decide whether or not to take it seriously, and if I do so, how to get the maximum possible benefit for the greatest number of dykes."

Ivy nodded her head in agreement. "We could ask a few women over this evening, if you like."

This was just what Thelma had been thinking about. "Who would be best, do you think? I don't want anyone who will laugh at us, or who might get carried away by the 'spiritual implications.'"

They talked about it for a few minutes, while Ivy cleared away the breakfast things and started to wash up and Thelma got ready to go out, and eventually settled on five women they both liked and trusted.



Ivy looked at the women sprawled around the long double living room, and thought for the fiftieth time how right they'd been to knock that wall through two years ago. Not only was the whole place lighter, but whereas the seven of them coming today would have been squashed in before, it was now possible to fit in twice that number, if the occasion called for it. She caught Milly's eye across the room, and smiled warmly.

"What's going on?" mouthed Milly elaborately, but Ivy shook her head, pantomiming that her friend must wait until they were all settled.

Milly frowned, adding to the myriad lines of her big handsome face, and took a deep drag. This wasn't exactly a gathering of Ivy and Thelma's nearest and dearest, nor yet any affinity group that *she* could think of, in fact they seemed a pretty mixed bunch so far. She was the only smoker, though, which presumably meant she'd have to go through the motions of asking permission to continue. Oh for the good old days when we all trampled on each other's needs without so much as a by your leave, thought Milly cynically.

Two women sat close together on the old grey sofa. This was actually the most comfortable way, for if you sat at the ends the sag in the middle would get you before too long, and you'd inevitably end up in each other's laps anyway. For Geeta and Marguerite this was just fine—as far as they were concerned the closer the better.

The Lesbian community had rocked with gossip when Marguerite, soon to retire from her job as a social worker, had come back from a women's spirituality weekend wildly in love with a woman nearly forty years her junior. And the whisper had gone round "What *can* Geeta see in her?" For the younger Pakistani woman was a beauty, whilst Marguerite, well they used to call her "poor Marguerite" because of her lumbering twenty stone bulk. Of course the gossip had reached the pair concerned, and in fury and exasperation Geeta had announced over the p.a. at a Winter Solstice disco that she and Marguerite were destined to

spend the rest of their lives together—she had seen it in their charts—so would everyone please shut up and leave them alone. And P.S. Marguerite was far and away the sexiest woman there. There had been no doubt that she meant what she said, and so they had been accepted, more or less, as just another couple since then.

The doorbell rang, and Thelma was heard bustling from the kitchen to answer it.

Milly raised her eyebrows as she recognized the high breathy voice that was apologizing for being late. Cerise was 22, and a real will o' the wisp, basing herself in their small town at the times she wasn't visiting her many friends on women's land. Milly had asked her once why she didn't just live in the country all the time. Smiling gently Cerise had explained that she wasn't sure yet that cutting herself off from the political scene was exactly the right thing to do. Then, in a low voice, with many shy glances up at Milly from under long lashes, she had confessed to hearing voices in the countryside, a phenomenon to which she was not entirely reconciled. In the town these voices seemed to leave her alone, and so when she became afraid she returned here.

Milly had done her best to reassure the young woman, though had hardly known what to say, but clearly Cerise had been grateful to have someone to talk to, and had offered to do Milly's tarot for her.

Thelma came in with a tray of mugs and passed round tea. It was too strong, of course, but with the exception of Cerise everyone was prepared for this.

Following behind with plates of biscuits was a tall, thin woman, whose long brown hair was coiled neatly on the back of her head. Karen enjoyed great popularity in that Lesbian community, and every woman there had, at one time or another, benefitted from her great common sense and unerring fairness. There could be no doubt, whatever the purpose of this get-together, why she had been invited. Sometimes Karen complained that younger women tried to treat her as a mother, a role which she had absolutely no wish to play, but as Thelma had pointed out, it was probably because she looked just like their mothers did. Karen had laughed more than anyone at this, but the polyester slacks and expression of concern she wore tonight bore out the truthfulness of that remark.

When they'd all settled down, and finished saying how nice it was to see each other again, Thelma spoke.

"As Ivy said when she rang you, I need your advice. This arrived in the post this morning." She held up the pale blue card. "And I want to know what you all think about it." Karen, who was nearest, took it from her, and examined it in silence, though her expression was puzzled.

The prize was passed from woman to woman, and each in turn studied it carefully. No-one said anything, though Cerise went pink with excitement, and Marguerite looked questioningly in Thelma's direction.

Eventually it was returned to Thelma, and she fingered it tentatively as she talked. "I have two questions. Should we take this seriously? If the answer is yes, then what should we ask for? I say 'we,' because that is how I view the situation. I do not believe that this is something that I alone can, or should, decide. Please don't be afraid to say exactly what you feel, although we should, of course try and respect each other's beliefs."

"What a wonderful chance for all dykes," Cerise spoke out immediately.

Thelma looked at her affectionately. "That's what I thought too, dear, but we don't want to raise false hopes."

"What does your instinct tell you, Thelma?" asked Marguerite seriously.

"To tread very carefully."

Marguerite nodded. "That's wise. Did you receive any vibrations when you first held the card?"

Thelma thought for a minute. "I liked the smoothness of the surface and the lettering. It felt . . . solid. And, oh yes, I remembered three wishes I'd made when I was a small child . . ."

"You surely don't think this is for real, do you?" Unable to stand it any longer, Milly burst into the conversation. "It has to be some kid playing a joke on you."

"But you don't know that Milly," objected Geeta. "Supposing Thelma doesn't act on this, she might be throwing away a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity."

Milly sounded disgruntled. "So you think maybe Thelma has a fairy godmother?" A titter ran around the group, and despite herself Geeta smiled a little.

"Well, maybe she has," she said. "And maybe you're right and I'm wrong. But one thing I do know." Here she paused and shook back her glossy black hair. "There are forces around us of which we know nothing, maybe even emanating from ourselves. Me, I would prefer not to

risk displeasing these spirits, or sprites, or fairy godmothers, if you like, by scorning their gifts."

"But she doesn't believe in spirits and sprites and suchlike," Milly tried again. "Do you Thelma?"

Thelma shook her head slowly, struggling to be as honest as possible. "No," she said, "I don't think I do."

"But it seems to me that that only makes it more credible," put in Karen, joining the conversation for the first time. "I mean, if it had been sent to Marguerite, or Cerise, or even Ivy, there might have been a chance for the joker to have been taken seriously and to have achieved the desired effect, but with Thelma there was a very good chance she would have put it straight in the dustbin."

Ivy nodded in silent agreement. She had often been troubled by Thelma's refusal to be involved in matters pertaining to the spiritual.

Here Thelma laughed. "That's quite funny, really, because you know, I never even thought of this being a spiritual dilemma. I suppose the tradition of three wishes must be pretty deeply ingrained."

She looked at Milly. "What do you think I should do, Mill?"

Milly shrugged. "Quite frankly, Thelma, I think you *should* put it in the dustbin, and then just forget about it. You and Ivy have a good life together, though you aren't rich and are getting on a bit. Why spoil it by dreaming about the things you can't ever have?"

As she heard this, Thelma knew she would *not* throw away her prize. She wanted to give it a go, at least. Now she saw how clever Ivy had been in insisting that Milly be included in this group.

She got up and walked over to where her lover was slouched in her favourite armchair and knelt beside her. "You crafty old thing," she whispered, as she kissed the soft silver hair.

Ivy gave her hand a squeeze, and then Thelma straightened up and addressed the group.

"If I decide to go ahead with this, and I'm saying if, mind, what do you think I should wish for?"

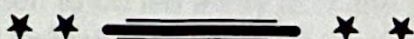
At this question the women started to chatter excitedly, throwing out ideas, and then discarding them as impossible. All except Milly, who sat smoking sullenly.

Ivy slipped into the chair next to her. "Come on Milly, we need your ideas too. Supposing it worked and we used up all three wishes on communing with the spirits. Think how you'd kick yourself then."

Milly grunted, and scowled at Ivy, but that remark had been well-placed, and it was not many minutes before she made her first suggestion.

Eventually Karen called a halt to the discussion. "I have a suggestion," she said. "Well, two, actually. Firstly, that we all write down our ideas for Thelma to think about later," here she waved aside Thelma's protests. "And secondly, despite what she said earlier, I think she must make the final decision. After all, if we're going along with this at all we have to accept that there was a reason for her to receive it. What do you say?"

Of course everyone agreed with her, even Thelma seeing the wisdom of those words, whilst Ivy immediately went in search of pens and paper. Soon all that could be heard was the odd rustle or sigh, as they attempted to cull the very best of their brainwaves.



It was the next afternoon, sunny for once, and Thelma and Ivy sat in their favourite places at the kitchen table, a heap of paper in front of them. There really hadn't been time to read what everyone had suggested before now—the last visitor, Milly, hadn't gone home till after midnight, and, as usual, Thelma had had to go to work this morning.

But now there was nothing to stop them, and it was with a good deal of anticipation that Thelma, at Ivy's insistence, reached out her hand for the first slip.

"A new set of laws to give dykes a decent life," she read out, after scanning the paper briefly.

Ivy chuckled. "I bet that was Milly," she said.

"Ivy!" warned Thelma reprovingly. "You know we said we weren't going to guess who wrote what—even if it was obvious."

Ivy smiled apologetically and opened the second wish, which turned out to be for "a Lesbian-only planet," and was quickly followed by "complete freedom from worry." Obviously they were going to be dealing with a pretty mixed bunch.

The piece of paper Thelma was reading now made her gasp. One of their friends had written, "I want an enormous political, cultural and social upheaval, but totally without the shedding of women's blood. I want every man to become aware that his presence on this planet will not be tolerated unless he undergoes drastic reform of his basic nature and sex-drive."

"There's a lot of anger there," she remarked.

"And why not?" Ivy retorted. "We all have good reason to be angry with men, both as individuals and collectively. Anyway, it seems to be a recurring theme—someone else has written 'an end to violence against women,' and you had 'all living things being equal and able to communicate' a moment ago."

She picked up yet another paper. "See, here it is again, if in a rather watered down form. 'I don't care who lives on this planet, as long as they get along harmoniously. I have straight women friends, and if men would get their act together I'd welcome them into my life too.'"

Here Thelma laughed. "And in brackets underneath she's written 'though I'll always be a Lesbian.' No prizes for guessing whose this is. Oops!" She clapped her hand over her mouth and looked guiltily at Ivy, who shrugged.

They went on reading together, and this further investigation yielded "several million pounds," "perpetual youth," "the total development of our psychic capabilities," "an end to disease, famine, capitalism, yuppies and everything else which means some people are more equal than others."

Thelma pushed back her chair. "How many more are left, Iv?"

"Only a couple. Why?"

"I feel like my brain's overloading, but I think we'd better finish the job. Here. One for you and one for me. You go first."

"In the wonderful, new, peaceful, Lesbian world that you are all no doubt envisioning I ask that all women, no matter how they look, are seen to be equally beautiful and worthy of being loved, and are never made to feel any other way."

The two women exchanged glances. They knew full well who had written that, and the pain so exposed was uncomfortable to acknowledge.

"Later," said Thelma, and then went on to the last slip. "I want women to have the option for parthenogenesis within themselves, so that if we find the biological male is *really* incapable of change, it can be dispensed with.' This has to have come from the same woman who wanted the revolution—she's certainly got things carefully worked out."

Getting no reply from Ivy, who was looking dreamily at the pile of wishes, she started to repeat herself. "Ivy, did you hear me, I said I thought . . ."

"Yes, Thelma, I heard you, and I suppose you're right." But she didn't sound very interested. In fact, she was hoping that Thelma would move on and not pursue the subject of just who had written the last paper opened. Ivy knew that some of her more extreme ideas were hard for the down-to-earth Thelma to envision, and although she hoped that one day she would be able to explain herself clearly enough for Thelma to understand and share the dream, now was not the time.

"It was *you* wasn't it?" exclaimed Thelma in amazement, grabbing her lover's arm.

But Ivy just continued to smile. "No guessing, remember," was all she said, and feeling Thelma's gaze upon her, she moved the conversation along.

"Has this lot helped you make up your mind?" she asked.

Thelma allowed herself to be led away from the subject of whether or not Ivy was the radical lesbian in their midst.

"Not exactly," she said, musingly. "But I think I've got a clearer idea of the direction I want to go in."

Here she paused, and wound one of her wiry grey curls round her finger. Ivy wondered what was coming next, and with good cause, for Thelma's next remark took her completely by surprise.

"Let's have a go, then," declared the winner, going to the dresser drawer where she had reverently laid her prize.

"What, now?" stuttered Ivy.

"Why not? No time like the present, eh!" Thelma grinned broadly, and then turned her attention to studying the directions once more, though she already knew them by heart.

"On each seal write one wish," she read aloud, and picking up a biro prepared to write.

"B.b.b...but what are you wishing for?" cried Ivy, feeling as though she'd missed out on some vital step in the decision-making process.

Thelma laid down the pen. "I reckon that it'd better be something concrete for a first try. So that we can see results, you know." She went on to explain a little further. "If I wish for a revolution, or eternal youth (which incidentally, I'm not at all sure is a good idea) it's going to be a while before we know if it worked, and we'll never be dead sure that it was my wish that caused it . . ."

"So what are you writing?" by now Ivy appeared quite exasperated. "For heaven's sake, woman, don't keep me in suspense."

Thelma smiled mischievously. "Money," she said simply.

"Money? How much money?"

"I thought I'd just write 'a very large amount of cash.' After all, I don't want to limit our options, do I?"

And with this Thelma began to write the words carefully on the seal. Then she fetched an old saucer from the cupboard and took the matches off the refrigerator. The gold paper caught light immediately, and, it seemed to Ivy, burned for an inordinately long time, and with a queer purple flame.

As soon as it died away Thelma took the remaining ashes outside and spread them on the earth, just next to the lavender bush, as she had been instructed, being careful to brush every last particle off the saucer.

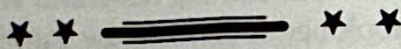
Neither woman spoke until the saucer had been washed and put away, and a fresh pot of tea was on the table between them.

Then Ivy asked. "You going to tell Marguerite or Milly?"

"What do you think?"

"Best not. Nor the others. Not till something comes of it, at any rate."

Thelma nodded. "That's just what I think, too. Now, how about a nice bit of swiss roll with this tea?" And she went to get the cake tin.



A week or so later Marguerite was rudely awakened by the shrilling of the telephone.

"H'llo," she slurred into the receiver.

A torrent of words fell into her ears, and she held the instrument gingerly away from her.

"Thelma? Is that you? Slow down for goodness sake. What time is it?"

"8:30. LISTEN Marguerite. Something amazing has happened."

Marguerite fumbled for her glasses. "No wonder I'm still asleep. We were up until three working on some runes. OK Thelma, I've got my glasses on now, so I can hear you. What were you saying?"

"My wish! It came true! It really did! Oh Marguerite, it's not possible! I can hardly believe it, but like Ivy said, you never know and . . ."

"Wait a minute. What wish, Thelma?" By now Marguerite was wide awake and sitting up in bed, though Geeta was still sleeping by her side. "Start at the beginning, please."

"Well, you see, I thought I'd better wish for something concrete, you know, *tangible*, so that we'd know if it had worked or not, so I wrote 'a very large amount of cash,' and this morning I got a letter saying my

premium bond's come up, and I've won 350,000 pounds. Now, what do you think of that?" Thelma had to stop for breath.

"My dear, I'm absolutely delighted. How very exciting. Now, I don't want to be a wet blanket, but it couldn't be a coincidence, could it?"

A deep laugh met this suggestion. "Hardly," said Thelma. "You see, Marguerite, I don't have any premium bonds."

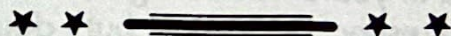
"Oh!" the full implication was now clear. "Why didn't you say so? So it really works?" A million possibilities were going through Marguerite's head. "What are you going to do with the money, do you know?"

"Not yet, but I've got some ideas. At least we'll be able to pay off the mortgage, and at last this town will have a Lesbian Centre. Look, I must go—I just wanted to let you know the good news—but really I'm all of a daze."

"Of course. I understand. Ring me again when you have time. And give my love to Ivy."

Marguerite put the phone down and sat thinking for a moment or two. Then she shook the woman still slumbering beside her.

"Hey Geeta, Geeta. Wake up. You'll never guess what . . ."



For the next couple of months Thelma and Ivy were much preoccupied by how to best use all that money, and neither gave more than a passing thought to the two remaining wishes. But at last there came a time in late Spring when the new Lesbian Centre was more-or-less on its feet, the future financially secure, thanks to the trust fund Thelma had set up.

The two women were walking along the bank of the river, a little way out from the town, enjoying the longer evening and the fresh smells of the almost-countryside. Their progress was somewhat halting, as Ivy's arthritis was playing up, thanks to a series of showers that morning, and eventually they stopped and sat on a bench to watch a family of ducklings have a swimming lesson. Ivy produced an orange and her penknife, and they shared the succulent fruit in companionable silence.

"Sometimes I feel like life will never be the same again," remarked Thelma, a propos of nothing.

"Oh, I don't know," Ivy objected. "We'll get used to the Lesbian Centre by and by, and though you and I will definitely be better off without the mortgage repayments, our life won't change that much."

"Ah yes." Thelma chewed thoughtfully on the last piece of orange, and then wiped her hands on her dungarees. The sky was starting to go pink, and the undersides of the dancing clouds were edged with a line of fire.

"But what of my other two wishes?" she asked softly.

Ivy looked at her inquiringly. "Got a plan?" she wanted to know.

"Oh, maybe. Always, at the back of my mind, I know they're there. Although some people would say my win was just luck—like Milly—she still doesn't believe that I didn't have any premium bonds, you know."

"I know. But that's Milly for you."

"Look."

Ivy looked and in the palm of Thelma's hand was a piece of the golden paper.

"Another seal," she breathed. "So you *do* have a plan!" She eyed her lover with interest.

"Only if you agree," insisted Thelma. "You know, Ivy, when we read all those wishes that Marguerite and Cerise and the rest wrote, it struck me that the only way women could possibly be safe was in a world without men. That idea of yours—don't argue, I know it was you—about teaching them to respect us, is nice, but I doubt it would ever work. So I've pretty much made up my mind to wish for a women-only world that can reproduce itself. What do you think?"

For several minutes Ivy said nothing. "We'll probably never live to see it," she commented at last.

"I know."

"And there are going to be some big problems until straight women realise they don't need men."

"Probably so."

"But all in all, I think you're right."

"Thanks love."

Solemnly Thelma wrote her words, and then took some matches from her pocket. Ivy cupped her hands around the wish to protect it from the breeze, but the flame had no trouble taking hold. When the flame had died away, Thelma carefully rubbed the ashes into the grass with her finger, humming softly as she worked.

Then the two women rose and embraced each other lovingly as they exchanged a tender kiss. "What about the last wish?" whispered Ivy.

"I think we'd better save that—after all, you never know what might be needed in the future."

And hand in hand they began to walk slowly back towards the town.

Epilogue

"Good evening. This is the 6 o'clock news from BBC radio Liverpool.

"Three more people have died from the as-yet unidentified disease that is believed to have originated in the Amazon basin, bringing the death toll to 27. All the victims are men who had been in contact, directly or indirectly, with Dr. Timothy Jervaise, the anthropologist who died in May at the North West Hospital for Tropical Diseases.


"Nineteen women have also contracted the disease so far, but with the exception of one they are now all off the danger list. Doctors are, however, expressing concern about 12 of these women, who, they say, may have a slightly different strain of the sickness, the symptoms of which are similar to pregnancy. In at least three-quarters of the cases actual pregnancy would have to be ruled out, as there was no possibility that sexual intercourse had taken place, it was confirmed today.

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Separation in Black: A Personal Journey

Jacqueline Anderson

Separatism for me has been both a complex and simple decision. I define myself as a Black Lesbian Separatist because that is an accurate description, but that description describes also the complexity of my decision to embrace separatism as a personal politic.

My first experiences with separation were within various Black contexts, i.e., Black nationalisms and Black only organizations. Separation seemed logically to be the first conceptual step to meaningful survival. It was then and remains my view that African-Americans live under continual assault and that that will continue to be the case. The agenda of death that the u.s. has planned for us is directed against a whole people and affects every single facet of our lives. Separation as a people seemed to be the only action that would provide the possibility of both healing and planning—acting and creating. Current data concerning the status of African-Americans in the u.s. has done nothing to change my opinion.

During the years between 1967 and 1976, there was a 246% increase in the enrollment of Black college students.¹ The increase was 6% between 1976 and 1982. It is now virtually at a standstill. For the past 40 years, the unemployment rate for Afro-Americans has consistently been twice that of whites. The median income for intact Black families is \$13,598, which is 56% of the white family income of \$24,603. The ratio has declined: in 1969 Black family income was 61% of white. The family income of Black families depends on multiple workers 2/3 of the time while this is true of white families only 1/2 the time. In 1981 the average income of Black families headed by womyn was \$7,510 per year, and the projection is that by the 1990's most Afro-American families will be supported by womyn. It is important to note that Afro-Americans will be the first ethnic group in the country of which this is true.

¹All of the data in this article is from *The Black Scholar*, v. 17, #5 (Sept/Oct 1986).

Within the workforce, womyn of all colors are concentrated in low-paying, female-dominated occupations. For example, in 1982 over 50% of working womyn were employed in only 20% of 427 occupations. However, white womyn are more able to move out of female-dominated jobs. Black womyn are employed 60% of the time in clerical and non-household service occupational groups.

Black women have little access to ways out of poverty; we are born into poor households and we move into poor households. It makes little difference what Black people do, the result will at best be token success. In 1982, young Black people between the ages of 16 and 24 with four or more years of college experienced a 23.9% rate of unemployment as opposed to 8.6% for white young people. So, even if we go to college, that does not mean that we will work. During the 125 years since the end of legal slavery in this country, Afro-Americans have continued to be devastated through economic enslavement. Black womyn and children of course have been and still are the more victimized, and many of these Black womyn are or are about to become lesbians.

Minimally, separation as a politic has meant to me separating from that which is destructive to the well-being of the separator. There is overwhelming evidence that white culture is not conducive to the well-being of Afro-Americans, thus the necessity of separation. It is also obvious that our separation can be only a re-action because the white u.s. has already separated from us in all aspects meaningful to survival.

The Black family has been the subject of much study. It has most often been concluded that it was not in conformity with the norm of male as head and all others as essentially chattel. The infamous Moynihan report told everyone that the Black family was pathological and the basis of the pathology was that Black womyn had too much influence—too much to say. The sapphire image, in other words, was accurate and its truth a problem. We accepted that judgment of ourselves, as we have accepted so many others from outsiders, and Black men began to talk about being emasculated by Black womyn. They could not be men because we would not be proper womyn, i.e., like the stereotyped image of white womyn as soft, idle and totally supportive. Black nationalist organizations of the 70's were notoriously misogynist and dangerous to Black womyn and false to the very traditions they purported to be re-instituting. Black womyn became the enemy to the extent that we would not conform to an ideal that was false to the culture that was its source. In recent years, with some frequency, troubled relations between Black womyn and men have been the preoccupation of Black publications.

The issue is phony and moot, however, because Black men have been quite honest concerning their definition of freedom. They want "what the white man has," i.e., a position in heteropatriarchy. One most telling expression of this is present in the choice of mate that advantaged Black men make. Interracial marriage is highest among college educated Black men and occurs at twice the rate for Black womyn. Interestingly, when the Bride is a Black woman, the groom will be Black also 98% of the time. So, many Black womyn can expect today: rejection as womyn by Black men, single parent status, poverty, under or un-employment, and few, *if any*, resources to fight against male violence.

Kalaamu Ya Salaam, who wrote an article entitled, "We Black Men Must Stop Raping Our Women," stated publicly what many of us knew already: that Black womyn need desperately to come together as womyn in support of each other because nothing positive can be *expected* from Black men. He was recommending separatism, acknowledging that Black men had already separated from Black womyn. I would further argue that Black womyn must separate, not only for our health and welfare, but also for any chance of success in fighting racism. I believe that Black womyn want to be free and that Black men want to be white men. This fundamental difference in aspiration will defeat us unless we acknowledge it and act accordingly, i.e., separate as womyn and define for ourselves the conditions for our liberation.

The recognition that Black men were willing participants in womon-hating simplified for me acknowledging the truth of lesbian separatism. The logic was simple: If womyn who choose to serve men are hated as womyn, then womyn who choose not to serve men must be doubly hated. But, accompanying my commitment to lesbian separatism was a complexity that continues to haunt me. As a lesbian separatist, I am engaged politically with white lesbians who, as members of white culture, I have defined as enemies of my culture.

Because I am completely committed to Black womyn, the appeal of lesbian first is not possible for me: all Black womyn are not lesbians, but we are all victims of racism. The tragedy in the lives of Black womyn is that racism robs us of the means of self-determination as both womyn and lesbians. So, the zeal and clarity which many of my white separatist friends and colleagues are able to muster is also not possible for me. Most Black lesbians of my acquaintance are under or un-employed because they are Black and female. Many are single parents. For us, the experience that gets in the way of personal autonomy is the economic dependence that racism forces upon us.

Black womyn are more than fleetingly aware of Black male womon-hating. It is for most a very personal and palpable experience. But, we may not be willing to acknowledge it in the presence of white womyn. Racism builds barriers of suspicion and distrust. I, like many others, watched adult white womyn spit on little Black children integrating schools. I, like many others, have seen the rabid hatred of white womyn for us. I know that white families picnicked while Black people were lynched. Black and white womyn have a troubled history together in this nation and there is little reason for any of us to believe that our united effort as womyn and lesbians will result in anything greater than more tokenism for Black womyn and Black lesbians. But, I continue to be willing to take the risk and to understand fully why many of my sisters are unwilling to do so.

For me, the risk is necessary because I do not view oppression as a series of discrete events, but rather as a process the success of which depends on the principle of divide and conquer. I cannot choose one part of myself over another. I cannot accept freedom as a Black person and its opposite as a womyn. I cannot accept liberation as a woman and oppression as a lesbian. I am a whole—a unity—and I must be able to live as that tripartite unity able to express all of myself.

The heteropatriarchy oppresses and lesbian separatists have, in my view, constructed the clearest and most accurate analysis of its methods and objectives. But the African part of my history as an Afro-American precedes the power and dominance of the heteropatriarchy. Misogyny has not *always* been an essential aspect of my culture and I often cringe at the universalizing that states as fact that all cultures at all times have been guilty of womon-hating. Many lesbians of color are aware of its source and know that womon-hating did not *begin* in our cultures. It is important to me to know the truth of who I am and how and why I now must live as I do.

The history of white and Black contact has *always* been conditioned by white hatred of dark skin. That hatred is still present and infiltrates my life as a lesbian. But failure to recognize the truth of lesbian separatism will not make racism disappear nor strengthen the fight against it.

Thus, I live with my separatisms because they are necessary responses to the separations that have already occurred. I do not find them to be in contradiction because I do not find my being to be in contradiction.

The Lesson of the Lotus Flower

*Diana Karuna**

Dedication

To the Goddess for sending me Sumati, who placed the Radha wreath of true friendship 'round my neck.

It is August 1988, and I am at a plateau in the intense pain-growth-change process through which I have been learning to transform my behaviors that were abusive to those closest to me. For many years I had had some clues in my prior relationships that I had "control issues"; but I had never admitted their true magnitude until May 1986, when in response to an episode of my jealous rage my former partner announced she was leaving me. And while I saw clearly how the patriarchy has controlled wimmin and children for centuries, I did not comprehend the universality of the control dilemma. It was when I came across a Hindu passage: "IT IS VERY DIFFICULT FOR A PERSON TO BECOME FREE AS LONG AS [S]HE DESIRES TO 'LORD IT OVER' THE MATERIAL NATURE" (*Bhagavad-Gita*), that I recognized the *lack of freedom* I felt throughout my attempts to control others. I was entangled in the misery I created and the misery I felt. The more I strove to ease my own misery and imprisonment, the more entangled I became.

It has been an arduous but creative process to come to new definitions and new behaviors. I have been searching for meaningful terms that do not tap into the extreme self-blame I still carry within about this part of my life. The word "batterer" as I have encountered it while reading stories of Lesbian abusiveness,¹ sends reinforcing messages to the part of myself that refuses to forgive myself and believes that I yet "deserve to suffer" because I have caused another to suffer. Now in

* *Diana* [Greek-Latin "Divine"] *Karuna* (a pseudonym) [Sanskrit "Mercy, Grace"]

1988, I choose to be known as a "Lesbian with controlling behaviors." With this term I in no way intend to minimize the extent, parameters, or consequences of my controlling behaviors; rather, for me, this term gets to the roots of the problem, at the individual, family, and societal levels.

I give myself permission to begin from a new spiritual base, in which new seeds can take root, and from which I can raise myself with Powerful help. The crime and the punishment of my soul have begun to be lifted and released. Renamed. I take steps to unlock the shackles that had kept me bound.

My Story

It is January 1983 and a heart-felt saga has begun, with the meeting of two Lesbian wimmin who will court, become best friends, date, fall in love, and set the stage for what they hope will last forever. I, at age 42, came out to myself, my father and my family 8 months into the relationship; Elsa (not her real name) had been out to her family and community since age 23.

Although neither of us recognized them as such, my controlling behaviors began early in the relationship, with my throwing first a fork in the yard and later a teacup past E. into the sink. We then were labelling these only as uncomfortable, or painful, or regretful, or remorseful times. We processed each episode and came to some resolve. E. initiated these discussions more often than myself: she carried the badge of "the one with many prior relationships" while I was "the more inexperienced one". I wrote in my journal regularly, whenever I was in pain about an episode. My journal was my friend with an on-the-spot memory; I returned to her regularly, because my own memory would leave me both in controlling episodes and in vulnerable times such as lovemaking or encounters with any feelings.

In retrospect, the beginnings were full of wonderment and sincere attempts at making the relationship work. Our personalities and approaches were very different, but our values in life were similar. Well, what went awry? Nothing, seemingly; big things always got mended, forgiven, talked out or seen through. But through the years the overlooked and ignored piled up and, in the final year, tipped the scales. Neither of us felt understood, appreciated, known, loved, or cared about by the other. My jealousies reigned over a good deal of our lives.

All the episodes which accumulated over the 3-1/2 years were repetitions of the three stage "abuse cycle" Lenore Walker talks about: building tension, explosion, honeymoon, and then repeat.² Early on I had set down a pattern of rampant jealousy that spread its roots ultimately into all corners of the relationship. Underneath my jealousy were my extreme lack of trust in relationships and my intense fears of abandonment. I could not let myself fully believe that I was loved by this soulful, wonderful woman, for I was not trusting nor loving myself.

I had uncovered six personas within me; the jealous one, who ruled much of my controlling episodes, I named *Green Woman*. She was both a powerful protectress and a major "cue" that started the rest of my controlling behavior sequence. The therapist I had for incest therapy cautioned me not to rule out *Green Woman*, for she was an important signal that the little one inside felt abandoned. To this date, when *Green Woman* comes I know immediately that it is up to Big D to take care of Little D, in order for *Green Woman* not to go on a rampage.

Rampage is what *Green Woman* did in the final control episode (May 1986), when I did not let E. get to sleep, because of my jealousy over her outing with a friend. The lesson, that my entire way of being needed to change, came not gently but in the fiery passion and fervor of the slashing *Green Woman* who resided within, disguising the six-year old girl who felt unheard and unlistened to, helpless, and unworthy of love. During this episode E. said, "No more, I am leaving." The crucial message was finally carried home to me: "You will lose what you most wanted."

My Background

I am an incest survivor and a child of a gambler. I was physically beaten as a child and grew up in an environment that shamed, criticized, blamed, and punished emotionally as well as physically. In both my mother's and father's families, jealousy was expressed to an inordinate degree.

I come from an Italian background, grandparents part Sicilian and Abruzzi. They were a very poor people, people of the land. The men were "Lords" over "their" wimmin and children. My grandmother was ordered to America to marry a man with three children. The picture I have of her shows a very unhappy woman, standing in wait for the ship, as she is bartered away for a dowry. Greed and dominance have been the theme for many, many generations. Abuse was a secret well-kept by my lineage. Behind closed doors wimmin and children were beaten to get

them to "tow the line," an expression my father used often. He would also say, when I'd cry, "I'll give you something to cry about."

Had someone suggested to me that anyone would fear me as I had feared my father, I would have thought it absurd. Yet E. did fear me at the end. The truth is not as simple as "batterer" vs. "victim." My father had been beaten by his father, who had been beaten by his. My father beat me and will remain a threatening figure in my life until I meet him face to face with assertive words about what I want and what I do not like in his behaviors. I lived in a fear which I never let myself know. I suspect that during the hard times in their marriage my father beat my mother. As I discovered at age 41 in one-to-one therapy, my mother sexually abused me as a child. I believe she herself was sexually abused by a family member; as concrete evidence I have only the facts that an aunt on her side of the family also behaved incestuously toward me and that one of her brothers killed himself. I repeated my mother's behavior towards me by having a sexual relationship with a woman 17 years younger than I. I was 34, she was 17; I began to "fall in love" with her when she was 15.

Looking at this family history, what is important to me now is that, just as I once was choosing to perpetuate this legacy of control, I am now choosing to stop all controlling behaviors in my life and to fill myself with the love and vulnerability that was missing for me as a child.

My Life Prior to Meeting E.

Before I met the woman of my dreams I lived in a chosen, lonely, sporadic celibacy. I buried myself in my counseling work, concentrating on the feelings of others. I had been trained well, studying to be a nun for 6 months at age 19. Now I was "passing." My occasional dates and affairs with men, mostly lacking in any real intimacy, did nothing to satisfy the craving I felt for emotional closeness with women.

At 27 I had one intense, short-lived Lesbian relationship which ended disastrously. From there I went deeper into the closet, until the 5-1/2 year relationship with the younger woman, a former client. The relationship was troubled, by her abuse of alcohol and by my abuse period. The lovemaking, though intense, was darkened by the alcohol and the incestuousness of the relationship. My anxiety that people would find out weighed heavily on my soul, which I feared was lost because I was ashamed both of being a Lesbian and of being in love with a client.

My mother's death in 1981 was truly the key to unlocking my emotions. Because I did not feel "finished" with my mother's death after

seven months of grief group and because I felt shame over my incestuous relationship, I dared to burrow through the ultimate shame and entered therapy. There I learned about my own incest, and gained the freedom to admit to myself a little more that I am a Lesbian.

The Control Cycle

The "Naming the Violence" Summary, which I painfully compiled in June 1987, shows the number of controlling behavior episodes recorded in my journal.

Interspersed among the physical threats were the far more frequent psychological, mental and emotional warfare patterns I used to protect myself from love. The abuse did not include sexual abuse. I and E. both believe the psychological and emotional abuse to be longer lasting and more hurtful than the physical threats. I do not know, however, how the physical incidents of door pushing would have escalated if I had not sought help. The emotional control is what resulted in E.'s fear and distrust of me; my Green Woman pattern left us in isolation as a couple countless times. E. would often help me to know I was special, but I think now that she was there for me more often than she knew was good for her, out of fear of my rage and emotional threats. E. felt deeply degraded by my emotional and physical control patterns. She ended up thinking and feeling that I, who had once been very loving and tender toward her, hated her. She had lost her best friend. As now I mourn so both for having abandoned her, as her best friend, and for losing her.

My negativity came in two forms, one of vileness, vibrations of contempt, hatred and disgust toward her, the other of passivity, negative self-esteem, self-pity. The reverse side of my controlling behaviors was that I would lie dormant, until I thought there was "reason" to put my control armor on. I would hide and expect E. to take over all the mothering for me; then I could hold her responsible for my self-reparenting. My hurting self within had never been tended to as a child. The relationship remained a 75%-25% deal, E. doing most of the giving emotionally. I punished my partner emotionally for not magically guessing what I needed. When she confronted me directly about what I was doing, I became defensive and began my controlling cycle. At this point, because violence causes pain and because I hurt so badly within myself, I came to believe that I had just cause for my rage, that my pain justified my rage at my partner. My unconscious belief was that "someone should pay."

Through the actions my family exhibited to me during my childhood, I truly learned that I had the "right" to control another's life. My journals have enabled me to see my own blame patterns. When I felt blamed, I struck out to blame E. My parents had taught me to be right "at all costs," and, unbeknownst to myself, I followed their directions to a tee. The "cost" was the loss of the woman I loved most in the world, and the price too high to pay, for I too was lost.

During an episode I would say such things as "I'm through taking care of everything around here." "I'm moving when I get some money." "Drop dead." "You're crazy." "Bitch." "Fuck you." I'd exhibit "mind games" and put up a smoke screen to hide my real feelings of abandonment. For example, when I was jealous over the sexuality of her past relationships, I would deny that I was jealous and switch the focus to her "always" comparing me to someone else. While there was some truth in this, my main purpose was to shift E.'s focus away from the real issue. At these times, I'd often be in an "emotional blackout," or "red-out" as I call it, forgetting what I had originally said in the argument, shoving it down further into my subconscious, and actually believing my own whole sphere of words and denial.

Sexuality

Our sexuality, difficult in the beginnings, had blossomed at several points in the relationship, but continued in a cycle parallel to the controlling. I didn't know how to "just be naturally," as E. said, in my sexuality. In the beginning of our lovemaking I threw a teacup past her in the kitchen and threw a pillow past her in bed, because I felt so enraged at my not knowing "how" to be sexually with the woman I loved. Because I felt so control-less, most especially at my emotional nakedness, I reacted in the only ways I knew, by controlling. When I had been most vulnerable within a lovemaking session I would unconsciously conjure up an argument or other sabotage to bring hurtful distance between us, rather than asking for time away to be alone.

I felt that E. controlled when we made love and defined what lovemaking was supposed to be like. In the beginnings I gave her the position of "expert" in sexual matters. Toward the end, especially as I became more depressed about my job and health losses, I wanted to gain the approval and love of my partner through sexuality, through complying with her version of how sex should be. At that time of my losses, I didn't value my intuitive self nor my own gifts of sensuality enough. I considered myself the dysfunctional part of the relationship, someone who would

never mend. In fact, I, who had been touch deprived from childhood, had made amazing strides in lovemaking since the beginnings of our relationship.

My Characters

Difficulties also occurred when, in my fears of "how to be," I would exhibit "splits" of myself to cope—characters (as E. called them) would come up. Ordinarily E. felt loving and accepting towards my characters, but she did feel very antagonistic toward their coming up in bed when she was wanting her needs to be met. I needed the characters to be my buffer when I conveyed messages to others. I couldn't communicate the messages myself because I couldn't decode the characters. I began to work on these splits in incest therapy, and at that time had discovered six characters or splits of myself: Green Woman, Bully, Baby, Charlie Chaplin, Frozen Wommon, and 6 year old girl. Some of these were named by E. after times of lovemaking. The characters were steadily being born and evolving throughout my incest and abuse prevention work. By Fall of 1986, when I reentered therapy to deal with my controlling behaviors, I had come to uncover 12 and had discovered I had two families within me.

In 1986 Baby Jane, one of the newer characters, was named by my partner and myself. When E. began to see me transformed by my rages, she lovingly in her perplexity brought home a small stuffed gorilla, which she said was what I transformed into. Only she said the gorilla was a baby gorilla, which I named "Baby Jane" after Jane Goodall. We laughed playfully and I cried in her arms that I was still loved in my increasing changes.

The Escalation (1985-86)

Since 1982 and through the first year of the relationship I was in one-to-one and group therapy to deal with the incest from my mother. I learned about feelings for the first time in my life, how emotions felt in my throat, my stomach—the basics of the Big Five (sorrow, anger, happiness, fear, compassion). I learned about shame and rage, what they felt like, how to tell when I felt them, which was most of the time then. I learned about nurturing, how to ask for hugs, how to give them. I learned to grieve the sexual abuse by my mother and the huge gaping hole inside me. And I learned to identify some of the splits I carried inside me.

After 1-1/2 years of incest therapy I graduated to a sexuality therapy group which my therapist thought I needed. After I had had 1-1/2 years

of sexuality therapy, E. entered, first, a therapy group and, then, when the money ran out, an incest 12-step group. Now, as I was wanting to experiment and to feel everything I had learned in sexuality therapy, E. was wanting only to be held and nurtured. My partner's incest therapy became primary for her and the sexuality in our relationship took a back seat. I remained E.'s friend on this issue and gave her much nurturing. However, my control episodes grew in proportion to my increasing intent to "protect myself" from the angry self-blame I carried. During this time I did not let myself know I was angry; but I became more and more rageful, because I took it to be my fault that my partner didn't feel like making love with me as often.

What was unfortunate at the beginning and middle of our relationship was that my partner couldn't get what she wanted sexually and had to be, by her choice, the witness to all of my touch deprivation. What was unfortunate for me is that we didn't come to a point where we were each totally accepted by the other and where each of us could get some of what we needed.

In mid-1985 I quit therapy for economic reasons and did not search out lower-cost therapy. E. and I had both been job-hunting for a year, and I had lost the perfect job in my field due to my failing health (about which more below). My E. encouraged me to talk and share about my losses and disappointments, but I burrowed deeper and deeper into denial of my pains and shut-down, insisting that "everything was fine."

I truly believed that I had had so much therapy (well, I had), that it was time for me to try putting it to work. I had worked hard for this time and had grown spiritually and emotionally. Little did I understand or *truly want to know* that a life lived in touch deprivation and emotional neglect cannot be fixed through three years of intensive therapy. I needed to go the longer road.

The less I shared my true feelings about all parts of my life, the more my control increased and worsened. E. did not recognize me any longer. She made suggestion after suggestion for help we could get. Every time she suggested the help she and her former partner had gotten, I went into a jealous rage and flared at her for comparing me to her ex "again" or shouted "go back to her then." These scenes brought tears and pain to both of us, to E. as the recipient of my rage and to myself as the one remorseful over my controlling of her.

As I grew increasingly controlling in my behaviors there were others in her life to give her the friendship she wanted and felt starved for. Of

these friendships too I was jealous. My jealous rage of May 1986, after which she left me for the first time, was over a friend she was developing a romantic interest in. I didn't let her get her sleep when she came in that night.

I found myself no longer trusted in my relationship, I who had been so diligently trusted for so long. I didn't understand then that I had done something to warrant loss of trust. Nor did I understand until long after, why she wanted, on returning after having left me the first time, to hear the words "I'm sorry" more than once. After we had entered couples' therapy, I did begin to understand the extent of the damages. I knew my amends would be lengthy. Little did I know that the amends would be two-sided, to her and to myself.

The Therapy Work

My Denial Begins to Lift

In September 1986 I read *Naming the Violence* and grieved intensely the likeness I recognized between my own behaviors and the battering behaviors described by the victims. I then managed to attend a workshop on "Lesbian Battering," given as part of a "Take Back the Night" campaign. The therapist for this workshop pinpointed more abusive behaviors that I recognized as my own. I learned that leaving my partner at the lake was physical abuse, as well as emotional and psychological abuse. I was crawling slowly out of the denial I had been in. I was in shock, knowing what I had done to the woman I had wished to spend the rest of my life with.

I knew I could not move until I named my entire controlling behaviors, so I went through all my journals since the relationship began and wrote descriptions of the 219 episodes of control shown in the Naming the Violence Summary above. In September 86 I reentered one-to-one therapy, to come to terms with my controlling behavior and my depression over the break-up, and in December I joined a self-help group.

The Group

The self-help group for women who have been abusive in adult relationships (first called "Therapeutic Self-Help Group" and then later "Abuse Prevention Group") started with 15 women—3 self-identified Lesbians including myself and 12 others, and two therapists—one Lesbian and one heterosexual. There were several changes of therapists as well as members (who dropped to 10) until a majority of the group were

Lesbians. I stayed a member in this group until I entered the hospital in November 1987 due to my failing health.

Entering the group for the first time was traumatic. In my shame I did not want to "see anyone" I knew, as my self-talk rehearsal had envisioned seeing all kinds of wimmin from the community and being blamed for how I had behaved in my relationship. But breaking my isolation was basic to getting the help I needed. The group was a space where I did not feel isolated in my pain, for here were 14 others traveling the same road. Worksheets and book learning aids cannot substitute for the invaluable first step of finding and getting to a group. My hope is that with earlier recognition of controlling ways, wimmin can get help early on.

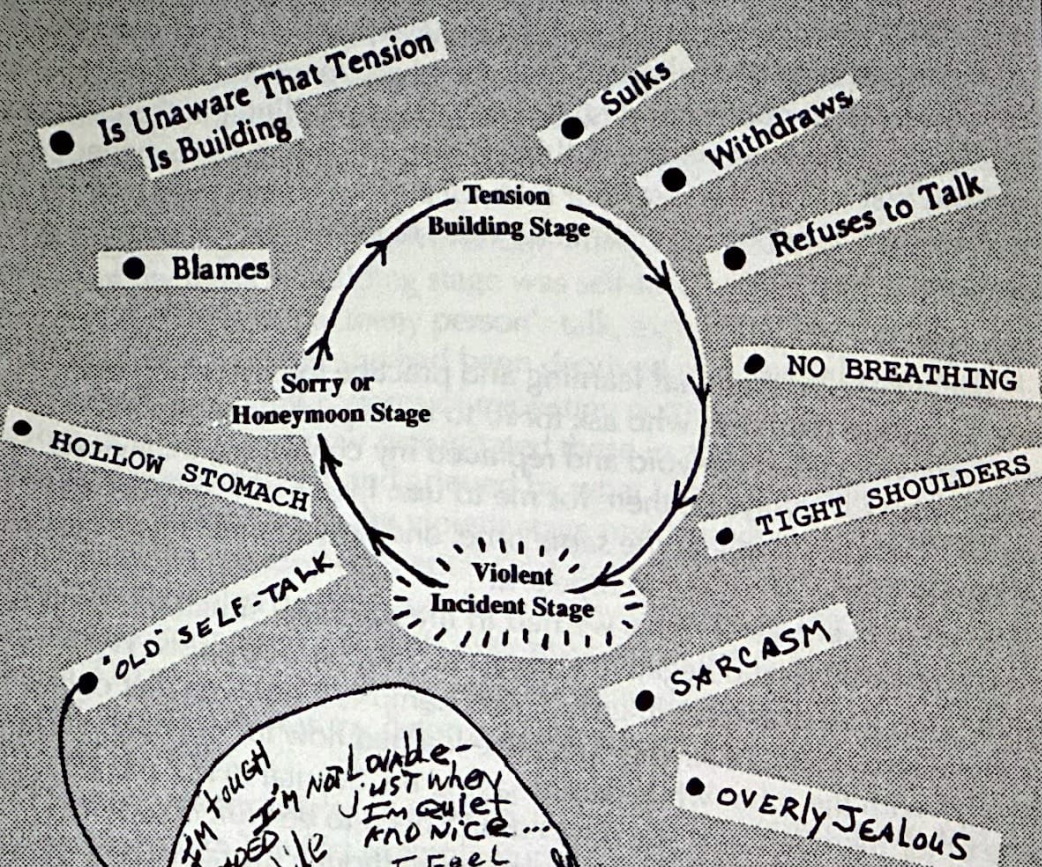
The fact that therapists and group members changed over time challenged and helped me understand my basic need for security and my irrational belief that people should never leave me. When my own therapist became a therapist in the group, something she and I had talked about beforehand, my Green Woman jealousy pattern came up again. Here too I found the courage to face and talk about my (core) abandonment feelings and move on. The therapists and group also challenged the way I express myself in words, sometimes not saying what I meant and sometimes leaving out relevant information. We had many opportunities in group to practice our communication skills.

When I entered the group, the format was not what I felt I needed and became even less satisfactory as time went on. One client had been appointed permanent 'co-chair'; I found this unworkable and wanted either no co-chair or a distribution of 'chair' duties among all group members. I wanted the group to discuss possible changes in the group format and I wanted more educational skill-learning. I then challenged myself to either "settle" for the group as it was or "do something" to get my needs met. This was a scary task for me, as I was not sure of the "how to's." I had to face the anticipated and the real anger from the other group members and ultimately to face the anger inside myself. I needed to risk and trust, to learn that I could survive my own anger and another's, to learn that I wouldn't be chased with a knife by my mother or be beaten in the breast and stomach by my father until I couldn't breathe. My one-to-one therapist aided me in this overwhelming task.

None of the therapy happened magically; all of it was painful, hard work, learning new ways different from those my parents had modelled. There were times when none of us wanted another educational piece to

The Cycle of Violence

Tension Building Stage



Handwritten text in a speech bubble:

I'm tough
I'm mad
The world is hostile
I tell anyone how I feel
I'm incompetent
I'm out of it
I can't say no
I'm too needy
I don't need anyone
I'm not lovable - just when I'm quiet and nice...
No one will control me
I don't listen
I can't say no
I'm too needy



work on in group, because the relearning felt so shameful and painful. We felt somehow 'we should have known all this.' I took it one step further and blamed myself for not knowing.

By the time my therapist entered the group, in Fall 87, the group had become the group I wanted it to be. I believe that we, the clients, taught the therapists a great deal about the type of group we needed in order to learn how not to control others. As we had been telling the therapists to do all along, the educational skill-learning portion had been extended from the first half to the first hour (of two) and was better prepared for by the therapists. And the co-chair tasks were being rotated among group members.

New Skills

I believe the educational learning and practice format (along with time for group members who ask for it) to be of prime importance. My new behaviors filled the void and replaced my controlling behaviors; these tools will always be there for me to use. I learned how to be assertive and compassionate *at the same time*, and how to untie myself from my family history so as not to repeat it.

We went over lists of rights we had in interpersonal situations, such as to express positive and negative feelings and to make requests. We would then give examples in group, for example, a situation that called for the assertive skill of saying "no." We learned how to "connect emotionally" with the other while firmly saying no. So vital to me and to some other members was learning I didn't need to be gruff in tone or punishing in manner in order to say no, even though my father had done it that way.

Negative feedback from others about our behavior was something we all found difficult. We practiced listening and not responding until the other person is finished, avoiding denial and defensiveness thereby helping to prevent escalation, asking for specifics to prompt the other person to state exactly what the problem is, and stating our emotional reaction—how the criticism made us feel. And we learned we didn't need to thank the person for the criticism.

The most important group work that trained us in new skills was learning how to make a "Prevention Plan" (initially called a "Protection Plan"). At first such a plan was meaningless to me, I was overwhelmed. But there was a teach-in session on "how to" make a protection/prevention plan for myself to use when I sense I'm going to act abusively toward my partner. In the session we brainstormed what we thought

were the physical cues, mental images, assumptions, emotional cues, and red flag words that signalled a building to violence. When examples came out in the teach-in session, I understood what cues were. Feedback from Elsa and the previous therapy work I had done, particularly on the splits in myself, helped me identify my cues. We were told that certainly intervention was needed if the buildup got to the next stage, the violence stage, but that the earlier we could identify our cues in the buildup stage, the better we could limit and ultimately prevent any controlling behaviors.

Through doing Protection/Prevention Plans I learned that a major component of my tension building stage was self-talk, mental and then verbalized talk that was my teeny person's talk, expressing her need for the emotional development she had been deprived of. I saw how I had as a child ingested familial patterns of expecting nothing emotionally and feeling unworthy and now regurgitated these in a violent, controlling manner. I was saddened and grieved by what I had been telling myself for so long. I saw how in the violent stage my deprivations and unmet needs fueled a speeded-up mental "fast frame" of self-talk that was acted out violently. I also began to see how in my third stage, the "sorry" stage, my deep torturing sense of guilt over my controlling of Elsa's life contributed to my tension in the tension building stage, pitting me against myself. Self-blame was my defense against feeling vulnerable and blamed by others.

Here are two examples of Protection/Prevention Plans I made and discussed in group. The first example concerns episodes that would occur at the grocery store during shopping, especially at the check-out counter. Elsa always saw and felt the stress in me at the checkout counter. I denied it, and she reacted to it with fear.

Prevention Action Plan I: The Grocery Store

I. My Cues that Indicate Buildup to Violence

A. My Physical Cues:

- close quarters feeling (hotness, tightness)
- nervousness, speeded up fast frame
- my dirty look, the glare
- hunger (needing snack)
- hardness stance (tank/armadillo/dinosaur)
- clenched teeth, "tsk" noises

B. My Assumptions & Mental Images (Violence Rehearsal, i.e., Self-Talk):

- she's good at math, I'm terrible at math, I'll never get this right.
- I'm inadequate, I practically failed math in school.
- I'm bad for not knowing how to do this.
- I'll "look stupid"
- hurry up (family pattern, my parents rushed each other and me)

C. My Emotional Cues (very important, though tough to identify):

- fear of failing this TEST of the grocery store
- fear of neediness
- feeling little (having to need from counter person, partner)
- I won't be loved because I don't know how to do this and "I'm going to get it"
- disgust at E.

D. My Red Flag Words/Situations/Places:

- I'm not hurried, I'm not stressed, I'm not mad (denial, too late in the cycle)
- being at the Coop

II. My Plan for Preventing My Violence:

A. Bring mini-calculator on trip and use.

B. Take responsibility for deciding who is doing what at checkout before going into store. Exchange roles: 1. Who's bagging groceries. 2. Who's figuring out who owes what for bill.

C. Admit it's too much right now - I'm going outside, I'll be right back to help. ASK FOR HELP.

D. Call upon the affirmation: "I'll never have to abuse anyone again to get my needs met."

E. Call upon the Goddess of the Muses, Humor, and put play into my daily tasks, i.e., the humor of my dropping all the groceries or overflowing the rice bin. "Wear my inner smile."

F. Continue therapy to deal with my core issues.

G. New Self-Talk: I am the mini-Calc Wiz. I can add anything. I am responsible, respecting, loving. I have my own special talents. Life's a lesson, not a test to pass.

From working on this plan I came to understand that during my childhood emotional development I had not attained a sense of competence. This same sense of incompetence also occurred during lovemaking.

The second example was the most painful to work on, because it concerns the episode in May 1986 when I in a jealous rage refused to let Elsa get to sleep. She knew she would tell me soon she would leave.

Protection Action Plan II: Jealousy

I. My Cues That Indicate Build-up to Violence.

A. My Physical Cues:

Early Cues Before Violence

- stomach/intestinal hollowness
- super 8 camera frames (mental) speeded up
- eyes flying out of sockets
- tightness/rigidity of body
- impaired breathing (holding breath or skipped breaths)

Later Cues During Violence

- dark cloud body state (pure negativity), venom spewing out
- standing too close to E. at one point almost face to face

B. My Assumptions & Mental Images (Violence Rehearsal, i.e., Self-Talk)

Early Cues

- GREEN WOMMON READY TO KILL (On duty and working overtime)
- I'm not lovable, I'm not desirable.
- I'm not heard, no one listens, I'm not important.
- I'm being used, I'm not appreciated.
- I'll lose out. Rules are being broken: work at home not done before fun.
- Someone else is more desirable, sexier, more romantic.
- I own her. I'll keep her in reign (father model).

C. My Emotional Cues (very important though tough to identify):

Early Cues

- feeling fragmented, disconnected, spaced out
- feeling abandoned by E. for X
- jealous over the 'romantic friendship' developing before my eyes
- desperate, in danger of losing everything (do not want to admit this)
- out of control, powerless, helpless
- sad

D. My Red Flag Words:

•Later Cues

- CANNOT REMEMBER ANY OF ACTUAL WORDS USED.
- vileness in my words, tone of disgust, anger, negativity
- talking to E. in very blaming "it's all her fault" way.
- the inflection of my words, attacking more than talking with her.

II. My Plan for Controlling my Violence:

A. Time out at point of speeded up frames flashes:

- New Assumption: I'm having big feelings. Cannot solve all today. State 'will be back' today.
- Things to do: Walk. Write in journal, present to partner at later date or in therapy. Allot space, sit down, move to different chair. Call friends. Fix food or tea. Eat banana, other snacks.

B. Ask questions of self:

- Why am I upset? What are my fears, what are my unmet expectations?
- What is the purpose of my anger?
- What part am I playing in creating this conflict situation?

C. Set firm boundaries on what can be discussed when come back together and what cannot be solved or concluded. Plan for fun outing after a portion or part of a conflict situation taken care of.

D. Keep fixed on my self my own feelings. Assume self-responsibility, know what I can and will accept from other, and what I can give.

E. Examine what I want and need in depth:

- Keep in mind my intent and how it's trying to manifest covertly or overtly.
- Know I'll never get what I want most if I'm not vulnerable or intimate (appropriately).
- Know that if splits come out and act abusively, I'll have two problems to deal with instead of one.

F. Continue therapy.

G. New Self-Talk:

- It's natural to feel insecure and jealous about your partner having attractions for other lesbians. Your self-identity is separate from your abilities as a lover.
- It's natural that you can't know that making love is about being able to give and receive love, touch and trust. You are beginning to know in many ways and can do this some of the time. To do it all the time is too big and you can have the time you need to learn what you never learned before. It's not your fault you never learned how to do this. You deserve to live and learn this. You are safe, your big Diana will protect your little Diana.
- It is natural that 'Romance and Passion' would frighten you, for it's about slowing down, not speeding up the way heterosex lovemaking taught you. It's about feeling all nuances in the spectrum of lesbian lovemaking. You can take all the time you need to feel this slowly and eventually you will not fear your being out of control. You are a desirable woman and can have your pleasure.

- You can be listened to now. Sometimes you will ask to be listened to and that will be taking good care of your little girl, so Green Wommon doesn't have to go wild. Green Wommon needs some discipline now.
 - There have been multi-times when you have been a good lover. "You cannot compare yourself to others lest you become vain or bitter - for there'll always be someone lesser or greater than you."
 - You are lovable, you deserve to have your needs met. You do not need to prove yourself to be lovable.
-

In my feeling of not being heard (I.B. Assumptions & Mental Images) I was reliving my incest trauma at age 6, when my mother did not stop when I TOLD HER "IT HURT." My self-talk was "I don't count." Rather than feel this privation, I sent out Green Wommon, ready to kill anyone and everyone who she thought didn't hear me. (Elsa did say that we could talk about it tomorrow, though I only vaguely remembered this.) Green Wommon said, I'LL KILL ANYONE WHO HURTS THIS SIX-YEAR-OLD SWEET LITTLE GIRL AGAIN!!! It was too much for me to feel again the pain of my unmet needs. Diana "should" be OK by now and "should" be able to take care of everything.

The purpose of the Protection/Prevention Plan was to protect both my partner and myself from my violence to my partner. Regardless of what my partner was doing, I needed a plan to prevent any impending violence on my part. Once I had learned to identify my self cues, I learned specifics for preventing their consequences.

In one-to-one therapy and group we were taught how to stop self-talk. We practiced stopping the violent self-talk as soon as it began and replacing it with affirming self-talk. Also, as I paid attention to my self-cues, I was able to discern the underlying unmet needs from childhood and to work on these in one-to-one therapy. The more I uncovered about my needs, the clearer it became that my not taking care of getting my emotional needs met was a sure prescription for a controlling episode.

I also learned about time-outs and practiced these in my relationship. The steps of the time-out are: 1) State that you are uncertain about your feelings or are becoming very angry; 2) Indicate that you need some time to think; 3) Specify exactly how long you will be away; 4) Be back to the other at the specified time; if it is still too difficult to deal with the situation, take another time out.

During the time-outs I was able to muster the assertiveness skills I had been practicing and to use them when E. and I returned from the time-

out. E. and I learned more about time-outs through trial and a fair amount of error. For example, Elsa had felt tension was about to build and wanted a time-out, whereas I didn't see the need. My therapist suggested that the third party, the relationship, could also request a time-out and thereby save us from a conflict about the conflict and from a potential controlling episode.

From the group of wimmin itself I received many valuable clues to my controlling behaviors, as well as new behaviors to use in my life. I consistently got feedback from the group that I was "being too hard on" myself or "blaming" myself or "punishing" myself. I work now to release and transform this final phase of self-judgment and blame to self-observation and self-guidance. A complementary insight, gained with help from therapy, is that my judgments of and my attempts to control others can be transformed into compassion and empathy.

In the three years of incest and then sexuality therapy I had uncovered a great deal, but in the Abuse Prevention Group I got to a deeper level of my core being. It was painful to have my little ones' self-talk uncovered, but now I had the tangible information I needed to begin reversing my old self-talk and diminishing my control behaviors piece by piece towards my goal of completely extinguishing them. What had been painful has become the source of great release and happiness.

The Characters

Knowing my characters was vital to knowing how I would control, what circumstances I would control in, and what core reparenting work I needed. All the characters I now know are my allies, my friends. I didn't believe this when I first started to work on them, because some seemed so vicious or ugly or untouchable. I didn't understand then that they were and are invaluable guides to my center.

Finding out one by one what needs were represented by each character spanned a time frame of 1982-1987 (and maybe more will be born now?). I labored with the cues and clues I had been given—from Elsa, and I am grateful for her gifts of expression and support, and from my one-to-one and group therapy—about what I looked like, sounded like and acted like during the episodes. Uncovering each character was an experience and journey unlike any other. I bless my families born of deprivations and abuse, now returned home to the shelter of love.

One of the characters was born recently, in Fall 1986 when I entered one-to-one counseling for controlling. The Crocogator came to me in a dream. As I related the dream to my therapist I described the huge, ugly

Crocogator standing in the water; my feelings were very adverse towards the creature. In further talking about the creature, I realized the Crocogator wasn't hurting anyone in the water and was indeed a Protectoress of the little ones and a pretty handy character to have around.

<u>Character</u>	<u>Needs</u>
Baby	Trust, touch/holding, safety, affirmation.
Toddler	Separateness, competence, testing limits, being negative.
Bull-y	Safety, expression of vulnerable feelings.
Pre-Teen	Peer relationships, exploration, fun, ideals, community.
Adolescent Boy	Defiance, intimacy through sexuality.
Charlie Chaplin	Safety/protection, acceptance, expression of sexuality.
Six Year Old Girl	Safety, being heard and listened to, being believed.
Dwarfy/ET	Affirmation, touch safety.
Green Wommon	Trust, security, being special.
Baby Jane Gorilla	Trust, nurturing, self-expression.
Crocogator	To be mothered, to mother.
Frozen Wommon	Safety, trust, touching, affirmation.

Often characters were younger versions of older ones, e.g., Baby/Toddler/6-Year-Old-Girl. Some of the characters were mainly about sexuality. Thanks to Pre-Teen, Adolescent boy and Charlie, we decided in my therapy work of 86 that I needed to do specific 'coming out' work. Never would I have guessed that underneath my control issues were my sexuality issues and my coming out issues.

I believe the characters are symbols of the incest and other childhood abuses I've survived. At one time they were 'crying' out for attention. Now the 'crying' has turned to 'whimpering,' which I know needs immediate tending, through self-forgiveness and amends. Now the characters speak for themselves. The Bully doesn't need to act tough or defensive to get her needs met. Green Wommon doesn't need to act jealous or possessive to get her needs met. She can feel her core abandonment issues and knows what to do when she 'feels' like others are leaving her.

Gains and Losses

As I continued my therapy throughout the summer of 1986, E. and I began to see each other again. However, my controlling behaviors had not extinguished. When E. would open up to me again, an episode would happen; although, as I learned new skills, they were fewer and farther between. E., however, wanted complete extinguishment immediately. I did not understand that then, nor did I understand why she didn't want to hop back into the relationship again, now that I was en route to self-cure. I counted on my partner being there through "thick and thin" just like it had been in my family. However, the basic trust I had breached by my controlling behaviors was not yet and might never be restored. We defined our relationship at this time as "in process," and continued so through Fall of 1987.

In Fall of 1987 we went on a trip together and there were many opportunities for an episode to happen. However, with skills I was learning in one-to-one therapy, stressed feelings fizzled and did not build up to anything larger. However, I felt E.'s fervor about us was diminished. I was proud of my successes, yet E. could not celebrate with me for she needed to attend to herself. During this trip I re-baptized my splits of self. I threw 12 rocks, each symbolic of one of my characters, into the water to be cleansed of all their controlling ways, so that they might be reintegrated back into my compassionate self.

During Fall of 1987 E. tried to get into different victim therapy programs but was told at her initial intakes that priority was being given to those having been actually beaten by their partners or that the abuse she described was not sufficiently serious. E. felt crazy at this minimizing of the abuse she was suffering. Fall of 1987 found us in couples therapy with my therapist. Now the rage which E. had held in began to come out. She increasingly lashed out at me with words designed to hurt me. I was surprised and hurt, because I was usually the one who controlled in those ways. In one session, the therapist brought out the doll who represented the third person, "the relationship," and E. said, "I feel like throwing that doll across the room." We were in different places: I was ready to dive into the relationship fully again, and she was ready to do her venting of rage at me for the controlling I did.

The Goddess swooped down upon us to help us finalize things for this time. My health had been failing once more, and the numbness in my legs and arms was getting steadily worse. I entered the hospital for tests

at the end of December, when I was about to graduate from the abuse prevention group; and the eventual diagnosis was Multiple Sclerosis. I knew we needed to say goodbye now and so did she. There were a few more visits and phone calls, and during the last call, due to her health and mine, we said goodbye. I received two goodbye letters from her while in the hospital. Her letter said that she was saying goodbye because she needed "to take care of myself," as "I am a wreck," and that "I have lost part of my love for you and do not think I could gain it back nor be as open, full and rich as I had been with you." Those words remain etched in fire in my soul. The consequences of my controlling behaviors are tumultuous.

I was not walking then or using my hands, fingers or arms; but nothing compared to the grief I felt at this painful parting. After I got home from the hospital I relented and, when she phoned my house, told her I'd like to see her; I guess I needed to do that once more, in order to understand fully that there was no turning back. During couples therapy, as my controlling episodes were subsiding, her controlling behaviors towards me were escalating, due to her anger at me and at her inability to get victim's therapy help. I needed to protect myself and to set limits on what I could accept in her behavior. I have cut off all written and in-person contact with her and her family, to tend full-time to my grievings. I love her and want the relationship and cannot settle for seeing her once in awhile, as she proposed.

Reaching Toward the Goddess

And so my practice of my skills goes on alone and with friends. One day I was at a friend's helping her to cook and she asked me what I was thinking. I was feeling stressed and incompetent and replied, "nothing." In a flash I recognized that this was what I said a lot to E. when she asked me about something; I neglected her emotionally by not sharing what was going on. This time I did not escalate to a hurtful behavior, such as sarcasm or leaving the room without saying anything, but instead removed myself to go rest. Initially I was depressed about falling back into old behaviors, but then told myself how wonderful it was that I recognized what I was doing and immediately stopped it.

Upon occasion I hear myself say something like, "I keep knocking my head against a brick wall." I catch myself and change the words. The violent, shaming and blaming expressions in our language infiltrate and poison our tender, compassionate selves. Here are some examples from my journal while I was in abuse group.

"You're going to get it." "I'll give you something to cry about." "She'll knock you out." "I'm stunned." "I have a 'crush' on . . ." "You'll get a kick out of this." "Let's duke it out." "Stick to your guns." "Can I twist your arm?" "It hit me that . . ." "That's what I get for . . ." "You'll be the death of me yet." "I'll lay down the law." "I'm a whipping post." "Grab it." "Beat it." "I'll take another stab at it." "I'll wring your neck." "What's the matter with you?" "I'm so mad at myself." "I fought tooth and nail." "Shove it." "Going great guns." "I'm gonna let you have it." "You're crazy." "You're silly."

Keeping this journal helped me come to a gentler language that can express the message my heart, unadorned, wishes to convey to others. I have begun including in my language more words that I identify as "Dolphin Primal Sounds." Although I can't actually make dolphin sounds, I remember the glorious beam of ecstasy in the dolphin's face and choose my words very carefully so as to convey the signs, sounds, tastes, feelings of enjoyment. I express the deepest, tenderest, core part of myself, a part which, as E. said, I "kept most often" to myself in my relationship with her. I say words like:

"cherish," "delight," "pleasant," "gentle," "soft," "peaceful," "glistening," "exciting," "buzzing." "I'm fond of you." "I'm happy to see you." "I've missed you." "I'm proud of you." "Thanks for listening." "Thanks for calling."

Now I deem it very dangerous for me to throw anything anywhere or past anything. I concentrate my gestures toward comforting and reaching out. When I notice someone else's rage coming at me in emotionally punishing ways, I ask for what I need from those who can give it, remove myself from the situation (time-out), or consider other options of how to care for myself through assertive means. I can now feel an openness of heart that I did not know or ever feel during my controlling episode times, when my heart was hardened as if compassion could not coexist in my soul with conflict. I controlled automatically and believed I had that right; I did not have any other behavior I could use. Now I know I need not be "mean" in conflict, I've learned that conflict doesn't mean death and that there can be conflict with love.

I have waited for forgiveness from E., just as she was waiting for the complete extinction of my controlling behaviors. Now I have asked the Goddess to help me end and release the final piece of my violence towards self by forgiving myself. The Goddess has. All the thoughts, feelings, and beliefs about my self who wronged another have travelled to my deep inner core, to hide, sob and continue to unconsciously whip my core self. I use the word *whip* because I have a voice, a cry, that periodically comes out of my soul and that sounds like a child being whipped. I now believe that the self whipping the self is as destructive as hurting another.

I now have a deep desire to help the whipping stop and to save the whimpering child within from my own brutality. I now cradle and rock the child when I hear the whimpers come, and through this written piece my tears cleanse me again. In the past my personas manifested as numbness or frozenness, stemming from my childhood incest and touch-deprivation; for many years I believe my throat chakra was closed and unable to open and express. Now the little ones make sounds within me. There was a time they could not. I've grown. As I grieve my relationship my whimpering child's noise blurts out, always unexpectedly from my throat and heart. I pick her up and walk her and talk to her and gently rock her until her whimpering stops.

I have forgiven my mother for my incest, I have forgiven E. for leaving me. I would rather believe that I have truly finished all the phases of my self-forgiveness, but the still present anguish and tears I feel let me know my self-forgiveness phases are not complete.

I have learned that I cannot be connected to E. even in my fantasies of staying spiritually connected. There exists no spirituality in controlling another. All my control needs to be released, even that which is unconscious. Those dreams are broken, shattered, split in half by the axe of violence. All this to make way for a new ground, a new planting of life. This is the lesson of the Lotus Flower.

Endnotes

¹ *Naming the Violence, Speaking Out About Lesbian Battering*, ed. Kerry Lobel for the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence Lesbian Task Force (Seattle: Seal Press, 1986).

² Lenore Walker, *The Battered Woman* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979)

Politics, Vision and Play: Some Thoughts on the Lesbian Separatist Conference

Tara Ayres and Lori Saxe

From June 16 to 19, 1988, approximately fifty Lesbians from the U.S., Canada, and England attended the first annual Lesbian Separatist Conference and Gathering in southeastern Wisconsin.¹ The gathering was exciting, passionate and challenging. This article is about the conference: how we came to organize it, what issues shaped its structure and politics, what Separatist sparks have followed the conference, and what form the conference will take next year. As two of the organizers, we don't pretend that this article is an "objective" account of the conference or its aftermath. Instead, it reflects the energy, emotion and thought that we put into and derived from the gathering. We organized the Sep conference because we wanted to be able to go to it, and this narrative can only capture our perceptions of the highly-charged proceedings.

Beginnings

The Separatist conference was organized by the three of us who make up Burning Bush: Joan Ward, Lori Saxe and Tara Ayres. We are white Lesbians, 28 to 35 years old, of working and middle class backgrounds who live in Madison, Wisconsin. Joan and Tara have known each other for eight years and have known Lori for four. We were all part of a Separatist discussion group that ended disastrously (due to inability to handle political differences) a few years ago, and also worked together on the board of directors of a feminist organization. It was that board experience, in part, that convinced each of us that we wanted to work more seriously as Lesbian Separatists on Lesbian and Separatist issues, instead of continuing to pour our energy into generic "women's" issues.

The possibility of a national Sep conference to be held in California was discussed at the 1987 *Radical Thought on Women Conference* in Cleveland and at the 1987 *Michigan Womyn's Music Festival*. At *Michigan* dykes from around North America talked about organizing regional conferences in preparation for California. Lori and Tara were energized by those discussions at Michigan and began planning our regional conference in the car on the way home. On our return to Madison the excitement was contagious, and Joan became involved in the project.

Only after some months had passed did it become clear that the other conferences were not going to materialize. At that point we broadened our scope to the U.S. and Canada, although we had time to do only limited outreach beyond the midwest.

Plans and Policies

Accessibility was one of our major concerns in planning the conference. We wanted the conference to be accessible to dykes of differing physical abilities. We wanted it to be accessible to dykes of different income levels. We wanted it to be accessible to dykes of color. Because the only significant communities of color in our area are in the corridor between Madison and Chicago, we narrowed our search to southeastern Wisconsin and northern Illinois. In addition, because we wanted a space that would be for Lesbians-only and that would minimize interruptions in conference activities, we leaned toward a rural site rather than an urban one (where dykes would have to go off to different places to eat, to sleep, etc.). In September 1987 we wrote to over 200 camps, schools and conference centers. By January we had visited around twenty sites and had selected a Girl Scout camp outside Milwaukee. After we booked the camp, the director of the Girl Scout council changed the rules governing their rental procedures in order to avoid renting to us. Luckily, she was foolish enough to make some overtly Lesbian-hating remarks to one of her staff members, who shared them with us. Since Wisconsin has a Lesbian/gay rights law, we have filed a complaint with the state, asking for damages that we hope will help fund future conferences.²

We went back to the list of camps we had screened out earlier. Ironically, we located another Girl Scout camp (owned by another council) with a friendly, helpful director. While the camp was more expensive than we had budgeted, the site was beautiful, even under three feet of snow, and we would have it to ourselves. We decided that we could

handle ramping the dining hall, which was the major accessibility challenge. In early March we signed a contract to rent the camp and swung into frenetic activity.

With the site chosen we were able to finalize the policy decisions for the Conference. Some of these decisions were dictated by the site, while others were dictated by our politics. We wanted only Lesbian Separatists there, and allowed for no exceptions to that. We were willing to arrange child care off the site, but wanted no children at the Conference. We stated that the practice and demonstration of sadomasochism were not permitted, for safety and political reasons. Other policies were largely practical, such as vegetarian meals, no outside animals, no outdoor cooking (because of fire hazard during the drought and lack of clean-up labor). After years of working in feminist organizations, we knew the benefit of preventing problems and creating a smooth-running event by working out such decisions in advance.

Living Our Politics

In March, at the height of our organizing frenzy, Tara and Joan ended their six-year lover relationship. It was not an easy or amicable break-up. Adding to the stress was the fact that the three of us constituted the core of our community in Madison: we had spent much of our social time together as a group. There were moments when Joan and Tara each considered withdrawing from Burning Bush and when the future of the conference appeared fragile. What kept us going was the vision we each had of Separatist community and activism. The Conference came to symbolize for us the attainability of Separatist community in a very concrete sense—if we could get through the pain of that spring with at least our working relationships intact, then there was hope that Separatists *can* form communities, based on our common values, that will survive the personal rifts that periodically rock our social circles.

In fact, it was those shared values, and our common commitment to move on toward creating a Separatist world that did get us through the spring. It was also contact with that already emerging larger community that helped us through the travails of our changing relationships. It's hard to imagine how Burning Bush would have survived the spring without the political encouragement and personal support of other Seps around the country.

The bottom line for each of us was that the Conference was too important to be stopped by our immediate emotional traumas. We are convinced that a political community that is torn apart by every

interpersonal schism is ultimately going nowhere. Yes, there were times when working together was damned painful. But we would argue that we would have been in pain even had we withdrawn totally from one another (although perhaps not quite as irritated on a day to day basis). And we would have paid the additional price of failing to move on to develop community. That cost was too high for us to risk.³

Operating on Dyke Standard Time

As the deadline came and went with only ten registrations in hand, we seriously considered cancelling the conference in order to avoid losing more money. Finally, two weeks before the conference we had enough registrations to make the financial risks of going ahead and cancelling about equal. We decided to proceed and began looking at ways to cut back on our expenses. The hardest decision was not to ramp the dining hall. We called the dykes who had indicated mobility problems when they registered, and, since none were wheelchair confined, we decided to save the several hundred dollars the ramp materials would have cost. It was not a decision we were happy with, and we've made ramping the site for next year a high priority.⁴

The Conference

We intended this to be both a conference (with structured time for workshops and intellectual discussion) and a gathering (with unstructured times for Seps to have fun together and renew ourselves and our bonds in a Sep-only place). The physical setting was conducive to both of these purposes, with its lakefront, attractive buildings, and facilities which made camping comfortable. A Lesbian singer, Kitty Barber, performed one evening (which we would probably not do again because dykes wanted more informal time to talk together) and a dance was held one night. (One of the dykes there wondered if that was the first Separatist dance ever held; we don't know). There were impromptu gatherings initiated by dykes there, such as a ritual gathering and dyke charades.

Workshops

We deliberately created a space for ideas to be developed in a variety of formats. With the differences in class and educational backgrounds, we did not want to limit our format to an academic fully-finished-paper-giving one. Our goal was to have intellectually rich discussions which

developed our Separatist theory and made us think about our living, and we believe that this can be done by all thinking Seps in many fashions. Some workshops were highly structured: finished papers, a paper in progress read and discussed in sections, or a discussion with a long introduction by a group of facilitators. More common were discussions facilitated by one Sep giving only a short introduction to get things moving. These latter were most successful when the group was small and the Seps there were very interested in the topic; when many Seps attended, the discussion tended to wander.

Workshop topics ended up falling into one of two themes, themselves not entirely distinct: political activism and Separatist community. In the workshops on activism, the purposes, ethics, and difficulties of doing work in non-Sep "feminist" and Lesbian political groups were explored. Lesbians do a disproportionate amount of the political work in the "women's community" and Seps probably do a disproportionate amount of the Lesbian work. We are often the ones who are driven out for being too radical or too "heterophobic," even while receiving superficial praise for our visionary stances. It is essential to be clear about what one, as a Sep, wants to get out of this work, e.g., learning political skills, meeting new dykes, doing radical education among women. A Separatist may participate for reasons very different from those of the other Lesbians and women. When your Sep goals are no longer being met, or your integrity as a Sep is being attacked, it is time to move on.

Another workshop explored the methods and merits of direct/guerilla actions. This session was highly energizing and has inspired further discussion and activity since the conference. One conclusion many of us came to is that political actions should be Sep-promoting, and the work itself should be and *can be* fun, inspiring, and bond-affirming. If you are burned out on feminist work, it is probably the wrong work.

The workshops dealing with Separatist community could be seen as having two foci. One is establishing Separatist communities. We affirmed the value of having more Seps in our daily lives than we currently do, and had a meeting to plan real, geographically centralized Sep communities in the near future. Different dykes agreed to research and report back on cities' job prospects, political climate, and Lesbian community.

The theme of creating communities has developed further over the summer. There was further visionary talk, such as Amanda Hayman's workshop at Michigan which allowed us to explore how we would

create Sep community if we could have anything we wanted. This envisioning seems to set some direction for real and current plans, for example, by pushing us to develop our values as if they had never been influenced by men. It also included more cautious talk, about such things as how we would resolve conflicts of interest if we lived together more closely.

This latter motif, maintaining the community through conflict, was evident at the Conference: we had two workshops, and a third originally scheduled, on "dealing with dykes we don't like" and horizontal hostility between dykes. It was, however, a less prominent topic at the Conference compared to the discussions at Michigan. The mood at the Conference was often magical, as it was the first time for many of us to surround ourselves with Seps for many days and to plan Sep communities. So it seemed that the focus was, romantically, on all the positives of community. There was a great deal of passion at the Conference—passion for old and new friends, for ideas, for plans of a common future. This passion was positive, getting us through the summer of returning to work in boysland while maintaining our vision. It was in many ways like the early stages of a passionate relationship: creative, while minimizing real difference and potential conflict.

As the summer passed, the overwhelmingly positive view of community shifted to include a focus on difference and conflict. This was evident at Michigan where more of the discussions about bonds and community concerned such things as classism, which was overly neglected at the Conference. Seps at Michigan also articulated the importance of resolving conflict without destructive compromise, and the need for separate space *within* a community both for individuals and for groups of Seps, such as Black Separatists. This shift was also evidenced by some disruptions in friendships. Some new bonds that had begun somewhat idealistically at the Conference ended abruptly during the summer, perhaps because not enough care was taken to maintain some distance and be realistic about differences. Some old bonds were also disrupted over the summer, both temporarily and permanently. Again, part of this seems to be the result of naive passionate intensifying of the bonds and of ignoring differences during the post-Conference high. Thinking about conflict in community and in our relationships, however, has not been primarily negative. It indicates to us that we are taking this idea of building a real community very seriously and we are attempting

to face and work out potential problems before they actualize. No one wants our communities to fail; they are too important to us.

A second focus in the community workshops at the Conference was Separatist and Lesbian bonding. These discussions were more theoretical, and centered on political issues which affect our bonding. A paper by Lee Evans⁵ on consumerist values explored the destructiveness of exchange, cost-benefit, and profit-making as models for Lesbian-bonding. A workshop on Separatist animal politics was designed in part to explore and ethically improve our relations with other animals, and in part to discuss how our current ways of loving animals affects our bonding with other dykes (the love and responsibility we feel toward animals whom we "own" are infused with domination.)

A workshop on racism was meant to define the concept of Separatist anti-racism: Separatism is *not* inherently racist, and we need to further develop a practice of anti-racism as Seps. Though everyone seemed to take the discussion very seriously, the workshop was unsuccessful because nothing new was discussed. Our interpretation now is that white dykes were afraid of being labeled racist, particularly in a context where no one wanted to damp the overall positive spirit by exposing conflict.

There was an area of overt conflict at the Conference, one that has led to a change in our policies for the future. Our policy for the first Conference was to not permit the practice and demonstration of sadomasochism, while still allowing Seps who are sadomasochists to be at the Conference. We made this decision because our analysis of sadomasochism is that it is violence against women, which we did not want enacted at the Conference. We did, however, want to leave the door open for sadomasochist Seps to participate in the Conference as *Seps*, leaving their sadomasochism practice outside. We have now changed our policy to exclude Seps who practice sadomasochism. This change is the result of concrete things that happened at the Conference and of a shift in our analysis of sadomasochism.

There were some dykes at the conference who were sadomasochists, as well as some who were tolerant of the practice. At the end of the Conference, the issue of sadomasochism was brought up during a closure workshop which almost everyone attended. Several things became clear to us during this discussion. One is that the majority of the Seps there, particularly the radical Seps (yes, there are both liberal and radical Seps), did not want sadomasochism at the Conference in any form. We think it is most fair to sadomasochist dykes who would think of coming to the

Conference to let them know that they would not be welcome by most present. More importantly, it was obvious to us that the practice of sadomasochism could not be "left outside" by dykes who engage in it: it pervaded their way of handling conflict and disagreement.

Defining Separatism as not only separating from men, but also creating affirming and loving bonds with Lesbians, we are now analyzing sadomasochism as antithetical to Separatism. It is an overtly masculine and anti-female practice, harmful to our physical safety, our connections, and our ability to build new ways of handling differences. It should be noted that this decision about the Conference is that of the three organizers only, though many of the Seps at the conference and Michigan are in agreement with it.

The issue of sadomasochism was not at all central at the Conference. Our only reason for devoting so much space to it here is that we wish to make clear in one statement how and why we made an important change in our policies.

After the Conference

There was a level of vitality, of connection and presence at the Conference which was breathtaking at times, and which we are so hungry for that it was hard to leave. Returning to our cities and jobs was physically painful: the men were repulsive in an immediate physical way, and the heterosexual women looked like they were in physical bondage after seeing beautiful, proud Seps as the norm for many days. The paid work we do was stultifying and alien after working with Seps for Sep purposes.

Another re-entry shock for us was our becoming convinced that our phones and mail had been tapped. The signs of this began soon after we started advertising nationally, and got undeniably worse right after the Conference. This has been a frustrating invasion of privacy which affects our personal communications as well as some of our behaviors, e. g., being more wary that we would like to be of Conference participants whom we or our friends don't know.

Many Seps felt like they had to wrench themselves away from the Conference and decided to continue the vision of the Conference into the rest of the year as much as possible. There was a good deal of visiting among midwestern Seps this summer; several gatherings were planned—gatherings to spark ideas, to play, and to create a Separatist presence at other festivals and conferences.

Michigan

Both visions of community and creating ways to deal with difference and conflict were central themes at the Sep gathering at the *Michigan Womyn's Music Festival*. At the 87 festival a few of us had volunteered to arrive early in 88 and stake out a Sep camping and meeting area. Marked off by string and by highly visible banners (created at a workshop at the Sep Conference), for many of us the Sep gathering is all that allows us to continue to attend the festival. As the radical political content disappears from the stage and the non-Sep workshops, and as boys are allowed on the land, some Seps feel they cannot return. Others feel that the strong, visible Separatist presence serves an important political function.

There were workshops going on almost constantly in the Sep meeting area. Some of the topics included classism, butch and femme, community-building, humor, sex, consumerism and dyke economics. Sadomasochism was a topic of discussion, since the dykes in the Separatist area decided to declare the area "S/M Free." There were Seps at the festival who disagreed with the decision and chose not to come to the Sep area as a result.

Another theme that emerged from the gathering at Michigan was the exploration of the contradictions Seps experience living in "the real [sic] world." It was suggested, by Jackie Anderson, that one of the reasons other Lesbians see Separatists as escapist, racist, utopian or ostrich-like is our failure to articulate how we handle the dilemmas inherent in being "practicing Separatists." Because we don't discuss the compromises and choices we make in living our Separatism, non-Separatists see Seps as pushing a line of political purity. We believe we are attempting to work toward political *clarity*. Purity is not a possible option within the heteropatriarchy; making ethical and effective political choices is.

The Second Annual Lesbian Separatist Conference

We are already organizing the Conference for next year. Most of what happened at this first Conference was excellent, due to the wonderful Seps there, to our planning and work beforehand, and to the physical setting. The next conference will be held June 15-18, 1989, at the same camp that we used this year. The Conference will be advertised as an international conference.⁶ We plan to make the site even more accessible, by ramping some of the structures and providing more inside sleeping

space. We are being more active about soliciting Seps to do panel discussions and workshops. There are topics we want to see more attention given to, including class, economic and status differences among us, racism, and "sex." At the same time we want to emphasize the "gathering" side of the Conference more strongly for Seps who want to go to fewer workshops and instead socialize and have fun with other Seps.

Ultimately it would be ideal if the Conference became obsolete because our lives were filled daily with Separatist friends and co-workers and with frequent gatherings of Seps coming together to think and talk. Until then we want the Conference to grow and can hardly wait until next June.

Separatists who want more information about the 89 Conference and Gathering, or about anything in this paper, can contact us at:

Burning Bush
P.O. Box 3065
Madison, WI 53704-0065

Notes

¹By "first annual" we don't mean that this was the first Sep gathering ever held. For example, a "Separatist Survival Gathering" was held on Wisconsin Womyn's Land in 1981.

²Our name, *Burning Bush*, was sparked by the Lesbian-hating Girl Scout director. When she began acting peculiar about the nature of our group, she demanded that we adopt an organizational name. After toying with the obvious plants and gemstones (lavender-this and amethyst-that) we hit on *Burning Bush*. We thought hets would probably hear it as vaguely biblical, while to us the Lesbian pun was irresistible.

³We don't mean to imply that Lesbians can never reasonably decide not to work with someone they were formerly close to. Rather, we believe that we should work toward making such permanent ruptures the exception rather than the rule. If we want our community to be more than a collection of increasingly splintered groups of former friends, we must *commit* to this goal.

⁴We did indeed lose money on the Conference, despite donations in addition to their registration fees by several of the participants. Currently we have lost about \$300. We have personally absorbed this shortfall, as well as providing the start-up funds for 1989.

⁵This paper was also given at the National Women's Studies Association, June 88, Minneapolis, and will appear in *Sinister Wisdom*.

⁶In a few years we may become intergalactic (hi, you gynes!).

Letters

Dear LE:

It's funny. Some separatists seem to think all dykes are white, middle-class north americans.

Like "Gladys" (in, Joyce Trebilcot, "Dyke Economics," *LE* 3:1). She suggests that "Dykes can't be liberated while other groups are still oppressed—people of color and working class people and people in Latin American and Asia and Africa . . ." Of course, she immediately drops such qualms in the face of the argument that "we have to start somewhere." Why the "somewhere" has to be with us white, middle-class dykes doesn't seem to be a question.

Gee, don't you think there might be a few dykes out there among all those "others"? And that *they* might think it was a better idea to start by getting the patriarchy to stop killing *them*?

Is this the kind of thing that makes some women say separatism is for middle-class white women who don't care about anybody but themselves?

And is it a coincidence that it goes along with a fondness for capitalism as the road to "our" "liberation"?

If this is "separatism," then separatism is racist.

Say it ain't so.

For liberation,
J. Robbins

Notes on Contributors

Dacey Yates is a pseudonym. My lover and I share homelife with several animals. Also some rocks live here; two, a pair of quartz crystals, are my constant companions. Add some trees and herbs. The aforementioned beings are personal friends and allies. I wish to acknowledge their importance to my life.

Margaret 'Chase' Smith, deceased, is now being channeled through a democrat. About putting herself in nomination for the u.s. presidency, she said, "When people keep telling you you can't do a thing, you kinda want to try it."

Anna Lee is a pseudonym. I am a black lesbian separatist who has finally returned to the midwest.

Amanda Hayman believes that being a Lesbian Separatist is the best thing that ever happened to her. She is white, middle-class, and fat, and has lived in Tokyo, Japan since she left England eight years ago.

Jacqueline Anderson. I am a Separatist. I am on the editorial board of *Hypatia*. I teach aikido to women, and philosophy and literature at a two year college.

Tara Ayres is a Lesbian Separatist who thinks readers know too much about her already, see pp. 106-115.

Lori Saxe longs for Separatist communities. She is exploring how to create a community which is more than a friendship chain while still being centered on friendship. She is also developing a Lesbian theory of animal liberation. She has intense bonds with cats. She is passionate about Separatist theory and reality, friends and a Separatist future.

Announcements & Ads

Lesbian Ethics ad rates are as follows:

Classified: 20 cents a word, \$3 minimum.

Display: 3 x 2-1/2 \$15, half page \$25, full page \$50.

Discounts for multiple issues.

GOLDEN THREADS, a contact publication for lesbians over 50 and women who love older women. Canada and U.S., confidential, warm, reliable. For free information send self-addressed envelope (U.S. residents, please stamp it). Sample copy mailed discreetly, \$5 (U.S. \$). **GOLDEN THREADS**, P.O. Box 3177, Burlington, VT 05401.

Lesbian Lizards. There are no males in the whip tailed lizard subspecies. These parthenogenic lizards have been observed to carry on sexually together. The Grey Whip Tailed Lizard of Arizona and New Mexico is in danger of extinction. Write New Mexico Game and Fish, Villagra Building, Santa Fe, NM 87503 and ask them what they are doing to save this lizard. Info from Ruth Douglas, California.

Women's Review of Books, monthly review of feminist writing. In-depth reviews of the most current and controversial in writing by and/or about women. Subscriptions: \$15 U.S., \$18 Canada, \$25 institutions. Free sample on request. Dept. EX Women's Review, Wellesley Women's Research Center, Wellesly, MA 02181.

Calls for Papers

Disabled Wimmin's Newsletter wants stories, articles, drawings, poetry, ideas by disabled wimmin. Send your work, questions, desires with SASE to: 1 Sun Lane, P'OK [Poughskeepie?], NY 12601.

Fantasy/Science Fiction by and about women. Susanna Sturgis is looking for short stories, novellas and novels for a series to be published by Crossing Press. Previously published works and simultaneous submissions welcome. First dead line is January 31, 89. Send with SASE to P.O. Box 39, West Tisbury, MA 02575.

118 Announcements

Fat Dykes Break the Silence, an anthology. Send narratives, essays, poems, all forms of expression welcome, with SASE by January 1, 89. Also, evidence of **DISCRIMINATION BASED ON WEIGHT** needed for effort to amend California Civil Rights Law. Toni L. Cassista P.O. Box 2968, Santa Cruz, CA 95063.

Nemesis, an anthology, seeks written and visual works from Lesbians only: Separatists and Radical Feminists, which tell our tales of heteropatriarchal disruption and womyn-positive reality building. SASE to NEMESIS, P.O. Box 417042, Chicago, IL 60641-7042. Deadline ASAP.

Our Right to Love, revised edition of 1978 anthology seeks photos of lesbians. Ginny Vida, Editor, Our Right to Love, 45 Plaza St., #1-G, Brooklyn, NY 11217.

Violence against women and children. Special issue of *Gender & Society*, guest edited. Issue will not be limited to pieces in standard academic style. Send 5 copies of your contribution and "\$10 submission fee" [!!!!-JS] by April 1, 89 to Judith Lorber, Editor, Dept. Sociology, CUNY Graduate Center, 33 W. 42nd St., New York, NY 10036.

Guidelines for Authors

Lesbian Ethics is a forum for radical lesbian feminist ethics and philosophy, with an emphasis on how lesbians behave with each other. We welcome essays, reviews, letters to the editor (of no more than 1000 words) and responses to material which has appeared in *LE*. *LE* does not publish poetry or fiction. *LE* does not publish material being published elsewhere, but we don't mind simultaneous submissions as long as you advise us of the fact when you send in your article.

Contributions should be based on lesbian experience, should cite lesbians—adequately referenced, should cite male authors only in extreme circumstances, and should in most contexts use the variations of the words *dyke*, *lesbian*, *woman* in preference to *human*.

The Readers' Forum topic for *LE* 3:3 is Radical Dyke Humor. Deadline is April 30, 89. The Readers' Forum topic for *LE* 4:1 is Betrayals: When We're Not as Ethical with Each Other as We Oughta Be, see Editors Introduction for more info. Deadline is October 31, 89. Forum contributions will be edited to save space and avoid repetition.

Write to inquire about deadlines for articles. Type all manuscripts double-spaced. Include your phone number, for editing purposes. Send an SASE if you want your manuscript returned.



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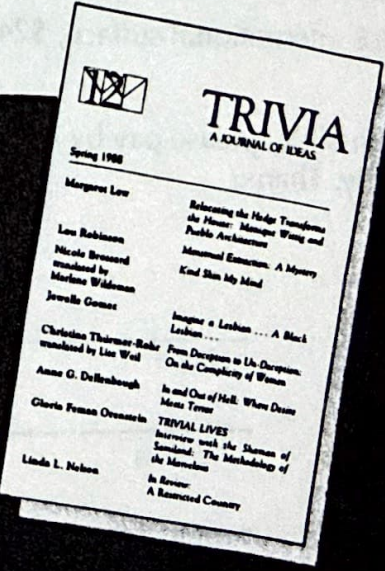
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