Marilyn revisited

by

Marilyn Murphy

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“Marilyn’s warm and witty book will help many women find their true selves.”

— Gloria Steinem

By Marilyn Murphy

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It is most important to us that you are able to receive this book as well as other WE&S publications, CDs and DVDs, so we ask that you simply contribute as generously as your resources allow. Truly.

If you can send more, it is ever so helpful.
collective strategies are sound, are “cost-effective,” are least prone to cooptation, and so on.

Everything is in question. Everything has to be created anew.

It is this talking, discussing, analyzing, assessing, re-describing, re-defining, judging, figuring out that I speak of that Marilyn Murphy is engaged in throughout all of her writing. Because the work is interminable, so challenging and so strenuous, you might expect it to be grim and bleak. Quite the opposite is true. Marilyn Murphy is spirited, witty, and passionate throughout, as are most of the radical Lesbian feminists she writes about. This work of critique and creation is energizing and healthful, the workers are strengthened and cheered by the work. As it turns out, a life of trying to be politically correct, at least as Marilyn Murphy has led it, is a life characterized by an unusual degree of freedom, the satisfactions of continual creativity, the rewards of stimulating companionship, and, we are allowed to suppose, good sex.

~April 1991

Marilyn revisited

BY

Marilyn Murphy

A younger Marilyn
As with Marilyn's first book, *Are You Girls Traveling Alone?*, on her behalf we dedicate this second volume to the women in Marilyn's life.

My mother, Sally Murphy
My sisters, Jeanne, Sally Ann, Carol and Sharon
My daughters, Annie, Jeanne and Susan
My granddaughters, Kachina and Tahkus
My nieces, Caroline, Marilyn, Cynthia, Isla
My sisters-in-love, Sandra and Jacqui
My daughter-in-law,

Sister Rose Edmond and Sister William Agnes,
St. Patrick's school, Long Island City, NY
The Dominican Sisters,
St. Agnes Academy, College Point, NY

The friends of my non-Lesbian years
whose love helped me survive

Lesbian publishers, editors and writers
Jinx Beers
who asked me to write for the Lesbian News
Lynne Harper

Sagaris, Califia Community and Pagoda women
Lesbian friends who, like my biological family,
argue with, entertain me, and who forgive me
when I use their lives in my writing
who teach, inspire, encourage

and Irene Weiss
my beloved companion
my sweet distraction
my severest critic

whose life and thoughts infuse everything I write

resources--bodily energy, and/or, intelligence, understanding, vitality--to be available and engaged in the creation of a world for women. They want none of it to be turned back against women by the sometimes insidious, sometimes blatant, manipulations which systematically lock women into the service of men.

Radical feminist theorizing is endless because Everything Matters and Everything Is Connected. It carries you out to global economics and follows you into your bedroom, and it never stops. Every time you begin to feel good about getting something figured out and making the necessary changes, something else comes up. You might finally comprehend that the religious values you learned growing up were profoundly patriarchal and then begin learning about the spiritual practices and traditions of other cultures which are less patriarchal--or so you believe--only to find that you have unwittingly started participating in a trend of cultural colonization and exploitation of those cultures. You begin to learn to love and care for your body only to figure out that what you've started doing to "care for your body" (e.g., dieting) is in fact both physically destructive and traps you into self-loathing. These are what political correctness is about. If you aren't in this business radically, wholeheartedly, and for the long haul, political correctness can be mighty irritating.

Discerning what action, attitude, and stance are really liberatory, for ourselves and others, is almost never easy. We have been confused and misinformed, have been taught since the cradle values which promote our subordination rather than our liberation. To a large extent these learned values have even caught us up in the oppression of others. Because of this, we have to think and analyze and talk with each other endlessly about how to understand the information we have, how to assess our feelings and desires, how to change ourselves; we have to think together and discuss among ourselves what sorts of
feminism”—she certainly thinks men's oppression of women is “fundamental” in many ways to many aspects of women's lives. She believes that men's oppression of women is very involved both as cause and as effect in the compulsory practices and dominant mores and meanings that govern reproduction and sex, and that alterations in these practices, mores, and meanings are a significant part of a viable strategy of liberation. But what makes her “very” feminist, or “extremist” feminist, hence radical in my own favored meaning of the word, is that her analysis evolves coherently from a central and passionate phylogeny (the contrary of misogyny), an intelligent and engaged loving perception of women. And she proceeds courageously -- to the extremes -- to enact the values which her analysis supports.

This union and integration of analysis and action, this lived theory, does not separate politics from living. Every moment of living has meanings connected with our oppression, our resistance, our liberation. Where we live, how we get money, how we spend our money, who our friends are, what we eat, what we wear, what we do for fun, how we quarrel and how we make up, the art we make, who our lovers are and what we do with them, what organizations we participate in, how we relate to institutions of government and law, what rites and rituals we participate in, what we celebrate and how, and the language we use ... always, everywhere, on any topic, the language and the languages we use ... all of these things align our energies and powers with or against (or ambiguously with and against) oppression, resistance, liberation. When feminist theory is anything worth doing and worth listening to, it illuminates these alignments in ways that help us to locate ourselves deliberately and willfully, through everything we do, in opposition to our oppression and in support of our liberation.

Radical feminists, I mean extremist feminists, want to produce such theory, for they want all of their personal

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE by Jae Haggard
CONFESSIONS OF AN ERSTWHILE-CATHOLIC GIRL 00
OFF THE DEEP END 00
CALIFIA: AN EXPERIMENT IN FEMINIST EDUCATION 00
DID YOUR MOTHER DO VOLUNTEER WORK? 00
HOME SWEET ROAM: RV’ERS 00
SORT OF A LOVE STORY 00
WOMEN’S HISTORY MONTH 00
OUR PROUD PRESENT 00
LESBIAN/WOMEN-ONLY SPACE AND THE KU KLUX KLAN 00
LEZ BE OPINIONATED 00
LOOKING FOR LESBIANS 00
BOBO 00
A PLAGUE ON BOTH THEIR HOUSES 00
GASLIGHT 00
LESBIAN FREEDOM 00
and recommendations. By my lights, the politics that suffuses and unifies this work could be identified as a species of radical feminism, but I need to explain what I mean by that.

Though I am an academic and was a feminist by 1969, I managed to live for years without the knowledge that when academic feminists (and many participants in what was then called “Women's Liberation”) used the term “radical feminism,” they meant only to refer to a quite particular set of claims that were made—most uncompromisingly perhaps—by Shulamith Firestone in *The Dialectic of Sex* and Ti-Grace Atkinson in *Amazon Odyssey*.

These claims were: that men's domination of women is the original and most fundamental social division and hierarchy; that all other dominance-subordinance divisions evolved from that and presuppose it; that the origin of men's domination of women is connected with the differences in female and male biological roles of reproduction; that the way to end all oppressions is to end the oppression of women by men, and that this can be done by socially, politically and technologically changing the practices and meanings of reproduction. These claims, articulated in books published in the early 1970s, have now been almost entirely rejected among feminists in the academy and most other feminists as well, and the term "radical feminist" is a term which almost no one in the academy would use to name or locate herself.

Oddly out-of-touch, I thought “radical feminist” meant “feminist to the root,” “feminist all the way,” “extremely feminist,” or even “extremist feminist.” I thought that if you took feminism absolutely seriously, embraced it wholly, and followed it courageously and logically (crone-logically or lesbianic logically) to its conclusions, you were a Radical Feminist.

Marilyn Murphy is my kind of Radical Feminist. Her understanding of the world bears some resemblance to what academics and early activists labeled “radical
Because it so reflects the life and work of Marilyn Murphy, we are reprinting the Introduction to Are You Girls Traveling Alone? This insightful introduction by Marilyn Frye places Marilyn’s life and works in the context of her times. This introduction is as vivid and relevant today, in 2013, as it was in 1991.

Introduction to Are You Girls Traveling Alone?
Marilyn Frye

Two things that a great many women's studies students and community lesbians/feminists (not mutually exclusive classes) roundly dislike are “political correctness” and inaccessible academic feminist and lesbian theory. But paradoxically enough, sometimes the same woman who is pissed off and offended by anybody else’s “politically correcting” her will turn right around and be pissed off and offended by academic feminist theory precisely because it is politically incorrect. She may not use exactly this phrase, but her complaint is that such theory does not empower, it may even disempower, her or other women in her situation. What she sees is that producing such theory is politically (pertaining to empowerment and liberation) incorrect (inefffectual, counter-productive or damaging).

This confusion of attitudes about political correctness is encouraged by several things, all having to do with the distance there usually is between carefully thought-out theory and the judgments and assessments we make in our ordinary personal and political interactions with each other.

Marilyn Murphy closes that gap. This collection of her articles is a sustained expression of commitment, serious but not humorless, to practical political correctness in all aspects of life and thought, and she is equally committed to clearly and practically spelling out the perceptions, analysis, and political intuitions that ground her judgments.

PREFACE

Oh how lucky we are. We have been actively creating and preserving our Lesbian culture(s) for nearly four decades now. And what a wondrous Lesbian world we have. We know ourselves as a Lesbian People.

Marilyn Murphy was one of our defining voices, especially throughout the 1980ies. Her column, Lesbianic Logic, in Lesbian News out of Los Angeles, touched and expanded so many of our lives. Our thanks to Jinx Beers for prioritizing Marilyn’s thoughtful and inspiring columns.

In 1991 Clothespin Fever Press compiled several dozen of Marilyn’s columns into the marvelous book Are You Girls Traveling Alone? Now, thanks to Irene Weiss, we are publishing Marilyn Revisited, a collection of articles that did not appear in Are You Girls. In addition to the new columns we are delighted to add many photos that have not appeared before. And, we include three moving tributes to Marilyn.

Irene’s wisdom and world view infuse Marilyn’s writings. To give scope to this new volume, we have a feature on Irene and the incredible difference Irene has made in our Lesbian world.

To create context and give you a sense of Are You Girls, we are also reprinting Jinx Beer’s Preface, Marilyn Frye’s Introduction, the contents and appendix from Are You Girls.

We at Woman, Earth and Spirit invite you to step into Marilyn’s world, which is our world, as you read Marilyn Revisited. It sure makes me smile with delight and Lesbianly pride. I hope it will, similarly, spark you.

~Jae Haggard, Editor
Marilyn’s longtime partner and the love of her life, Irene Weiss, has made copies of Are You Girls available to you. It is thanks to Irene that this new volume is possible. Since it is most important to Irene and all of us that you have access to Marilyn’s books, we ask that you simply send whatever you can afford. Truly. At least $3.50 for shipping is greatly appreciated. Otherwise a suggested price is $10 each ppd.

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Shari Garrett for formatting & proofing
Lee Lanning for compiling the article on Irene and lots of editing/proofing/production tasks.
Julia Penelope, Elana Dykewomon and Yolanda Ritter for early editing.

...community. No censorship, very little editing, was the rule of the day. I looked upon The Lesbian News as a clearinghouse for ideas, events, happenings, and opinions of the Southern California community.

And in my nearly fifteen years of stewardship, I believe I upheld that vision of the LN despite, or maybe because of, Marilyn's wonderful ability to articulate her personal opinion. I found over the seven or so years that Marilyn wrote for the LN under my editorship that no one was neutral about her. I had letters that threatened to stop reading the paper if we continued to give her space. I had letters that threatened to stop reading the paper if we ever discontinued her column. I had women who said they never read Marilyn's column, and those who declared Lesbianic Logic was the first item they turned to when each new LN hit the streets. Hey, ya gotta be doin' something right to generate this much notice!

What Marilyn does that is “right” is to open up topics for discussion. Some of her detractors say this is “divisive” in the community. I believe as Marilyn does, that a healthy community has the ability and obligation to discuss their differences. Intelligent and thoughtful communication heals the wounds that narrow-mindedness and self-aggrandizement in our community open. Marilyn doesn't spit out ideas for the sake of controversy; she researches and experiences and intelligently and thoughtfully shares her opinions so that others can join in the discussion and learn.

Except for a few libraries and personal collections, Marilyn's unique Lesbianic Logic has not been available for newcomers to read, or us old-comers to re-read, until now. The publication of this book opens a new and wonderful opportunity for us to look at ourselves and celebrate our differences as well as our community.

~Jinx Beers
founder of The Lesbian News
Los Angeles, March 1991
Preface

to Are You Girls Traveling Alone?

Jinx Beers

Marilyn Murphy and I are only about a year part in age. Thus we grew up in America during the same years, but on very different paths. Marilyn chose the more conventional road of marriage and motherhood — after all, isn't that what women are taught as they are growing up in America? — and enjoyed all the privileges of heterosexuality. Only of late, in her early forties, did she realize there were other options and became a Lesbian. A convert, as they say!

I, on the other hand, learned very early (before age seven) that I was attracted to girls and never for a moment considered marriage or children. I'm a life-long Lesbian who has always known who I was, or more accurately, what I wasn't, and have “enjoyed” all the discrimination of homosexuality.

Isn't it strange, then, that as Marilyn and I approach our sixtieth year of life, our philosophies have turned out to be very, very similar indeed. That's not to say that I agree with everything she says or writes, but I would and have defended her right to say it.

In 1982 Marilyn Murphy joined the staff of the growing, 7 year old newsletter/magazine/newspaper The Lesbian News as a columnist. She was the only columnist to whom I ever gave space who had the freedom to write about anything she wanted, rather than a specific subject. And she was an instant hit — or miss depending upon which side of the “Marilyn Murphy controversy” you happened to be on.

No other columnist before or since Marilyn has generated as many letters, as many comments, or has had as much time taken by the Editorial Board! Why? Because Marilyn has dared to give her opinion on topics no one else was ready to think about. She stirs the pot!

When I founded The Lesbian News, it was with a conviction that it was going to be a community news medium that was open to all opinions and to everyone who had something to say to the Lesbian/Feminist

Confessions of An
Erstwhile-Catholic Girl

I was born and raised Catholic, was a devout, believing, pillar of the church kind of Catholic until I lost my faith completely when I was 35 years of age and a sophomore in college. I am no longer a Catholic, no longer a Christian. I suppose I am an agnostic since I’m iffy about the existence of anything outside or above the physical – although my notion of the physical is broad and flexible. I have no religion, if “religion” is defined as “an organized system of beliefs and rituals centering on a supernatural being or beings.”* If, however, “religion” is defined as “a belief upheld and pursued with zeal and devotion,”* then I certainly qualify as a woman with religion. My religion is radical Lesbian Feminism or radical Feminist Lesbianism, depending upon how I’m feeling at the moment.

Having said all that, I must acknowledge that who I am in the world, and how I live in the world are very much the result of the working-class brand of Catholicism in which I was raised, and the social action, progressive, Pope John XXIII Catholicism, in which I lived my young adulthood. While I am sure I could have developed a similar philosophy / ethic in ways that cost me less, I am grateful for the positive stuff I learned as a Catholic. Recognizing the benefits of my 35 years of Catholicism keeps me from being bitter about the cost.

As a Catholic, I learned I was important in the world, and how I live in the world are very much the result of the working-class brand of Catholicism in which I was raised, and the social action, progressive, Pope John XXIII Catholicism, in which I lived my young adulthood. While I am sure I could have developed a similar philosophy / ethic in ways that cost me less, I am grateful for the positive stuff I learned as a Catholic. Recognizing the benefits of my 35 years of Catholicism keeps me from being bitter about the cost.

As a Catholic, I learned I was important in the world, so important that the creator of the universe died for me. I believed I was a member of the “mystical Body of Christ,” spiritually connected with all the rest of suffering humanity by that membership, doing the work of Christ in the world. I believed that I was put on this earth to do good, to make a difference, that what I did in the world mattered. I believed the story of the good Samaritan was meant for me, that loving my neighbor as myself was a moral and ethical imperative. I believed it wasn’t enough to be a believer, wasn’t enough to
avoid “sin.” “Faith without good works is dead,” Catholicism’s answer to Martin Luther, became one of the guiding principles of my life.

Of course, the Sisters were an inspiration to me. They were the only educated women I knew. They encouraged me to stretch my mind, to be creative, to question, to write. Most of them were powerful women, who, like my mother, were my antidotes to the “helpless female” propaganda that surrounded us after World War II. I had wanted to be a nun, a teacher or a missionary, but succumbed to compulsory heterosexuality, marrying at 18 and, in six years, the mother of four children. When I became a Lesbian at 43, I felt I had fulfilled my youthful desire, joining a sisterhood appropriate to my new religion.

While I was a believing Catholic, I did the best I could to live by the Church’s rules and my principles. As an adult, I participated in a Catholic social-action organization, doing prounion, anti-racism and other community-based work. When my Catholicism evaporated, I realized that my principles still informed my life, that I liked the person I was becoming because I tried to live those principles. My loss of the sense of community I enjoyed as a Catholic was profound and was exacerbated by the loss of almost all of my Catholic friends. I missed the celebrations, rituals and music, too, but those were minor losses compared to the freedom I gained to act on what I knew was right, rather than deferring my judgment to the “infallible teaching authority” of the church. After 17 years of Catholic marriage, I obtained the divorce I’d wanted for 15 years.

When the Women’s Liberation Movement burst upon the scene, I was ready. I experienced the great “AHA!” I understood patriarchy, men in power, understood my life, understood the reason for much of the misery in the world. I committed myself to the struggle for the liberation of women, believing that all liberation movements begin with ours. I regained my sense of community, enjoyed the new celebrations, music and rituals women were creating and, along with thousands of other women like myself, joyously,
passionately and seriously embraced our cause. In the years since 1969, I’ve tried to live my principles as best I could. I added “Free Our Sisters, Free Ourselves!” to ”Faith Without Good Works Is Dead,” and have had a great time ever since. I’ve been an organizer, teacher, fund-raiser, speaker, writer for our movement. In 1970, I scrubbed the toilet at the Orange County (California) Women’s Liberation Center and last week I scrubbed the toilet in the Pagoda Center. I’ve gone to the hospital in the middle of the night, called by the rape crisis center I helped found, to hold the hand of a survivor while she was examined by a physician. I’ve organized, facilitated and attended workshops on sexism, racism, anti-Semitism, class, homophobia, and still do. I’ve marched and spray-painted and written letters of protest and praise, and stuffed envelopes and mimeographed, Xeroxed, printed, written and/or laid-out feminist/Lesbian newspapers, newsletters, flyers, position papers, articles, letters, questionnaires and brochures in the thousands and thousands. I’ve made thousands and thousands of movement telephone calls, as well. I continue to do all of the above, except for rape crisis work. And my first book was published in June,1991, and is doing very well.

I love my life and cherish the satisfaction I feel, knowing that my work has made a positive difference in the lives of women, including myself. One would think that feeling of satisfaction is enough “reward” on earth for this formerly Catholic girl. But, because I’ve chosen Lesbian/feminist activism as the way to manifest my religion, my spirituality, I get to meet, know, work and socialize with and love hoards of smart, talented, interesting, enthusiastic and passionately dedicated women-loving and fun-loving women. I need no promised after-life. My cup truly “runneth over”.


~ First appeared in *New Directions for Women, July/August 1992*
Off the Deep End
Sagaris

In the spring of 1975, just before my 43rd birthday, I was a more-or-less happily married woman, a Ph.D. candidate, working on a dissertation about California feminist activists at U.C. Irvine, and a wild-eyed radical, six-year veteran of the Women’s Liberation Movement. Many of my friends and acquaintances were Lesbians, and my non-Lesbian friends and acquaintances were becoming Lesbians so fast that I couldn’t keep track. Lesbian friends called me “hopelessly heterosexual,” and I must admit I sometimes wondered what was wrong with me. There I was, surrounded by some of the smartest, most exciting, challenging, lively, powerful women I’ve ever known – political activists, writers, teachers, artists – and I did not feel a twinge of sexual attraction while in their company… at least nothing that registered as sexual. I figured my mother had done too thorough a job teaching me to repress my natural Lesbian urges. However, I was happy enough in my personal life and ecstatic with my WLM political work, which included my studies, organizing, writing, giving talks, consulting, demonstrating and going to women-only meetings and social events with my ever-increasing number of friends.

Then I attended Sagaris and, as my mother characterizes it, “went off the deep end.” Sagaris (another name for labrys) was a five-week, women-only feminist think tank, graduate school, summer camp, peak experience, organized by a collective of East Coast Lesbians. They rented Vermont State College at Lyndonville, hired a faculty – Rita Mae Brown, Charlotte Bunch, Mary Daly, Candice Falk, Harmony Hammond, Bertha Harris, Thomasina Robinson – and sent out brochures. I didn’t receive one in the mail, but a friend who did sent it on to me. From the first reading, I knew I had to attend. I was overwhelmed by a feeling of destiny, a feeling hard to integrate for a person who believes in a random universe. I couldn’t shake it though and made arrangements to spend

Information from
Are You Girls Traveling Alone?

To give you more idea of the scope of Marilyn’s articles, work and life, we are reprinting portions from Are You Girls. Included here are

Contents. Alphabetical listing of her columns
Jinx Beer’s Preface
Marilyn Fry’s introduction

~Jae

Since the above essays initially appeared in the Lesbian News from 1982 on, we have included the original publication dates. Some of the titles have changed. We have provided the original titles here in this appendix. Many of Marilyn Murphy's Lesbianic Logic columns were reprinted throughout the years, and we’ve listed those years as well.

~Clothespin Fever Press, Los Angeles, 1991

Are You Girls Contents

A DEATH ANNOUNCEMENT 1984
A DEATH IN THE FAMILY, originally titled, Another Death In Our Family, January 1988
AND BABY MAKES TWO, Parts I and II, Sept/Oct. 1986
AND THE WALLS CAME TUMBLING DOWN, July 1987
ARE YOU GIRLS TRAVELING ALONE? April 1984
BREAKING UP IS HARD TO DO, originally titled Sometimes It Ain’t So Wonderful, November 1983
BRIEF AFFAIR, February 1990
CINDERELLA’S SISTERS, October 1984
COLOR ME LA VENDER, August 1982, reprinted May 1985
DEDICATED TO MIDDY, October 1983, reprinted August 1987
$2000 of my husband’s money for room and board and tuition and plane fare for an event I knew next to nothing about. My plans shocked everyone in my family, including me. In my whole life, I had never gone anywhere, overnight without at least one member of my family going with me. Also, in my whole life, I’d only once been gone from home more than a few days with family. Yet, I was determined to do all those things I never did because of a compulsion I couldn’t explain.

So I attended Sagaris and lived one of the pivotal experiences of my life. There were about 150 of us, and most were Lesbians. I attended classes and writing workshops, and meetings of “special interest” groups. I participated in the working class caucus, my liberating introduction to class awareness. In the evenings, I went to the student center for concerts, talent shows, readings, skits, movies and dances. After hours, the crowd split off into the older, drinking group – though not all of us drank, and the younger, marijuana smokers group – though not all smoked. There, we continued what was the all-pervasive, day and night Sagaris pre-occupation, talking, discussing, arguing feminism: feminist theory, feminist politics, feminist art, feminist writing, Lesbian Feminism. I felt like I had died and gone to heaven. I was up early and went to bed late, late, late. The only activities I missed were the 11am Tai Chi and self-defense classes (no talking there!). I would sneak away to the dorm for an hour’s nap. I couldn’t have survived the experience otherwise.

During those five weeks, I was happier than I had ever been. Not that we didn’t have problems. The gay/straight split was heart-wrenching, lasting about four dreadful days and nights. But we got over it. All 16 Californians came down with respiratory problems from the airless humidity. We got over that, too. For my birthday, there was cake for 150, decorated with my name, and all those women singing for me, and dancing! When the writers in Bertha Harris’ workshop read our work to the assembly, the response was so powerful, I expected us to levitate. I became the collective’s “front” woman, their token straight, and enjoyed being called on to shepherd non-
Lesbian press around the place, interpreting for them. I was Rita Mae’s date for the prom (Lesbians made sure all us non-Lesbians had dates.), the only non-Lesbian who knew how to lead.

Then it was July 12 and Sagaris was over. I was sad, but looked forward to resuming my BS (before Sagaris) life. On the bus to the airport, a woman seated in front of me began a flirtation with the driver. I was very agitated, could hardly stand being a witness to it. I didn’t calm down until I did deep breathing in Montpelier’s small airport while waiting for the plane to Boston and my California connection. In the plane, I was seated in the back, on a long plank-type seat, squeezed between a woman and a man who was getting a kick out of being pressed against my thigh. I began to get anxious again. I had to ask my female seat-mate to swap seats, “so I could use the ashtray.” My spirit calmed and I was my old self again, or so I thought.

Later, while walking through the Boston terminal, wearing a floor-length coat and carrying a briefcase and a tote bag, my mind wandering somewhere far away, I was brought back to reality by that prickly, uncomfortable feeling of being watched. Three men were standing in front of a tobacconist shop, giving me the once over. Two other men were eyeing me from the newspaper stand.

Immediately, I lowered my eyes, shortened my stride, tightened my buttocks, and was conscious of those physical responses for the first time since early adolescence, when I first attracted the sexual attention of males, responses that were, by now, automatic, unconscious, almost instinctual. I stopped in my tracks, dazed by the realization that I could make such body changes in response to the presence of men, without knowing I was doing so. If I were that unconscious of the effects, in my body, of men’s gaze, what else could I be doing, unconsciously, in response to the presence of the men in my life and in the world at large? The bars of the cage that comprise women’s oppression, those bars that I had learned to look between, to keep peripheral, had moved without my

Marilyn and I didn't always agree. She was opinionated. I am opinionated. She sometimes didn't know when to stop talking, and I also suffer from this malady. But we had, at least, three things in common that could not be denied: Our abiding love for Irene, and our belief in Lesbians, and in the imperative of Lesbian space.

We both got our early education at Sagaris in the early 70s, through the likes of Rita Mae Brown, and Bertha Harris. We came out of that as lifelong feminists, with a missionary zeal that never waned.

When I remember Marilyn, I think of (by her own description) a "Lesbian Come Lately" who lived her life, as much as she could, with Lesbians, and who encouraged other women to do the same. She was the best Lesbian recruiter I've ever met.

When her book was first published, the inscription she wrote said "Dear Lin, May we continue to travel life's ways together, no matter where we live. Love always, Marilyn".

I don't exactly know where Marilyn is right now, but I know that this place is certainly a better place for Lesbians because, for a short time, she lived here.

See you again later, Marilyn,
possible. She and Irene brought new life to a place that was in need of some loving attention.

Then there was Marilyn at our meetings. Generally the most well informed. Sometimes the most provocative. Always the most vocal. Marilyn could talk anyone, I mean, anyone, under the table. Her mind was so sharp and brimming with ideas that her words sometimes couldn't keep up with them. And she was adamant about her opinions. Mind you, we were a Lesbian community, a Lesbian Separatist community, so EVERYONE was adamant about their opinions. You have twenty Lesbians, you have at least eighty points of view, each one needing to be heard.

In that context, although I sometimes found it exasperating, I admired Marilyn's ability to stand firm and rarely back down when she thought she was right. Which was generally always!

In those days, you could count on seeing Marilyn sitting at her computer in their gorgeous cottage, writing about Lesbian triumphs, habits, political disputes, and foibles. She would attend Lesbian events or just observe those Lesbians in her orb, and glean the essence of that woman or that idea or that controversy. Then, she would write it down with her characteristic "Lesbianic logic". Since two of the articles in Marilyn's book were about things that actually happened to me in my adventures in Lesbian culture, I learned that whatever one said in Marilyn's presence could be used as fodder for future material! But that was o.k. She was chronicling our community. She made it possible for us to reflect on ourselves, and for future generations to get a glimpse of who we are. And she did it with intelligence and humor and a great love for Lesbians.

knowing during those five women-only weeks of Sagaris. Now, those bars were in my sight, in my consciousness, in my face. Now, I knew I was living in a man-made cage. I burst into tears, raced for the women's bathroom, and stayed there till time for my flight.

When I got off the plane in Los Angeles, my husband was standing there, looking for me, waiting with flowers in his arms. “Who is that stranger, standing there, carrying flowers?” I heard myself whisper. He was gone from my heart in that moment. He kissed me and I shuddered slightly and began to cry. “Fatigue,” we called it on the drive home. After all, it was 1am on the East Coast. At home, I rallied enough to speak coherently to him and to my 17-year-old daughter. I went to bed before him, lying at the very edge of the mattress, my mind and emotions in turmoil, feigning sleep until I slept.

I woke early the next morning, disoriented. Had I overslept? Could I have missed the music Marty played on her flute as she strolled the dorms each morning, waking us for breakfast? When I realized where I was, I became distraught. I ran to my daughter's room and cried while she held me, rocking. I realized I was not home. I was in exile from my home, my true home with women, and I was grieving for my loss. At first I thought my extreme response was the result of living with a man. However, I soon began receiving letters from Sagaris Lesbians whose responses were similar to mine. We had glimpsed freedom, and some of us would never recover from the experience.

I left my husband, of course. I became a Lesbian, finally! However, I never became reconciled to living outside of Sagaris. I never lost sight of those bars. In 1976, I participated in the founding of Califia Community, a radical feminist education/action organization which, for ten years sponsored women-only week-long and long weekend camps at which we more or less recreated the Sagaris experience. I visit "home" whenever I attend women-only festivals, conferences, events. In 1988, I began living in a Lesbian community, the Pagoda.*
Pagoda’s Center is usually filled with visiting Lesbians who bring their ideas and talents and experiences to our table. So we talk and argue and discuss. I am home again. Of course, I’ll never forget this.

*The Pagoda was a Lesbian community on the Atlantic Ocean near St Augustine, FL.

Beginning in July-August, 1992, Marilyn’s Lesbianic Logic, appeared regularly in *NDFW*.

~ First appeared in *New Directions for Women*, May-June 1992  Pgs 17-18, 22

Remembering Marilyn

Lin Daniels

I first met Marilyn and Irene in the mid eighties, at the Pagoda. They were traveling through in their RV. We were one of the stops on their way in their search for “Lesbiana”.

As we are approaching Thanksgiving Day, it occurs to me that it was on that day we met. The Pagoda was having their holiday Potluck dinner, which at the Pagoda was more like “Styrofoam luck”. No one cooked. And we were strictly vegetarian. So, whatever could be bought, pre-cooked, at the Winn Dixie that didn't include meat products ended up on the buffet table. In the South, virtually everything is cooked with meat, so a rather grim repast was generally had by all on that Thanksgiving Day.

Although our potlucks, no matter what the occasion, were predictably dreadful, we more than made up for them with the lively discussions that always followed. We had trust fund babies, hippies, Smith graduates, women who never went to college, artists and musicians. We had a resident priestess. We had lay therapists. We had a couple of nurses. And from that November day on, we had Marilyn Murphy.

My then partner, Myriam, and I saw Marilyn and Irene as kindred spirits the moment we met them. Irene, quiet and dignified, and Marilyn, a fountain of words and ideas. They won our hearts that day. And I think we won theirs when we invited them to our cottage for a “real” Thanksgiving dinner, with the forbidden bird and all of the fixings. All evening, we ate, we drank good wine, and talked about everything. I mean everything of pressing importance to Lesbians.

Soon after that first day, we all bought cottages there and became neighbors and comrades in the building of our Lesbian nirvana by the sea. Marilyn was brimming over with ideas for her newfound community: an accessible space in our Center, making the space more aesthetically pleasing, re-doing our theatre to make it possible for more Lesbians to perform. Getting a new roof. She helped to make the Center renewal
was a priceless experience.

As so often happens in life, we don't always realize the gifts we have until we begin to lose them. Looking back, I would have to say that the France trip may have been one of the last times that Marilyn was at her peak. It seemed that shortly after the France trip she began her long descent into “the slow death that had no name.” It has been heart-wrenching to watch the slow deterioration of such a smart, vital, feisty woman. I feel privileged that I knew her at the prime of her life.

The life she endured the past few years was not one any of us would ever choose. It seemed so cruel that she would lose her most vital abilities and passions: to read, debate, analyze, speak forcefully, share stories, make us laugh, force us to examine our own biases and prejudices. She was trapped in her body and her struggle to remember simple words was heart breaking. Many of us became unrecognizable to her as she struggled to figure out who we were. Her frustration must have been unbelievable.

And so her life has ended. Of course there is a relief to be felt that her suffering has come to an end. But that doesn't mean that the loss is not real. I know for myself that the memories that I shall always treasure will not be the images of her last few years. Instead, I will selectively play back the “mind movies” of how I met her and how much I enjoyed her…

2/7/2004

Calafia: An Experiment in Feminist Education
Calafia Community

A Member of the Calafia Community was talking with a young, very politically active Los Angeles Lesbian-Feminist. She mentioned that our collective makes all decisions by consensus. The young woman was shocked. "Consensus. I can hardly believe it. I didn’t think anyone bothered with consensus nowadays."

This incident is a good introduction to the Calafia Community. We are considered an anachronism by some 1980s feminists. To most of the more than 2000 women who have attended Calafia Community sessions during our seven-year history, however, Calafia is a dynamic experience which changed their lives, or renewed their political fervor, or gave them a focus for political action, or enlarged their world view, or taught them hard truths about themselves. At Calafia Community sessions the Women’s Liberation Movement is alive and working its magic in women’s lives as powerfully in the 1980s as it did in the 1960s.

I credit the idea for a feminist education “something” on the West Coast to Betty Brooks. She had been talking about it at least since she and I became friends in 1971. In 1975 I convinced her to go with me to Sagaris, a feminist educational institute in Vermont, by telling her over and over again that she might learn how to start her own if she went. At Sagaris, Betty talked to other California women about a West Coast institute, and back home again, she practically forced me to attend planning meetings. I was hooked on the idea by the time she called a large public meeting, which 44 women attended. Although most of the initial collective members had not been at Sagaris, the Sagaris experience was the informing spirit of many of our decisions. We wanted to recreate the magic of Sagaris while correcting what we perceived to be its problems.
Califia Community is the daughter of Sagaris and, like most daughters, is both similar to and different from her mother.

**What Is Califia?**

Eleven months of discussions preceded the first Califia Community session of July 1976. Collective members belonged to the “Sisterhood is Powerful,” the “Personal is Political,” and the “Free Our Sisters; Free Ourselves” radical feminist persuasion. The transformation of radical feminist ideology into an educational program was an exciting and challenging experience, as it still is for each new collective as we plan our yearly program. We began this transformation with our name. **We call ourselves Califia because she is the legendary Black Amazon/Goddess for whom California was originally named. We call our organization Community to express our commitment to the development of an informed community spirit among Califia women which recognizes and affirms our differences as we celebrate our sisterhood. Califia Community is committed to the development of a multicultural community of the spirit of women through feminist education.**

Once we decided to make Califia Community our goal, the decision to conduct live-in sessions followed. “... An opportunity for women to participate in a dynamic process of creating and living feminist theory” reads our brochure. Also, we wanted Califia women to experience what Sagaris women had, “a glimpse of freedom in a feminist environment.” We rent California forest camps for our sessions. They provide natural beauty, privacy, facilities for work and play, and the opportunity for groups to do their own cooking. Unhappily, a camp setting and limited wheelchair accessibility often create additional barriers for physically disabled women. We hire ASL signers and charge no fees for the attendants of disabled women, but the fact remains that, at present, we often trade the comfort of disabled women for the advantages a camp setting provides for other women.

Irene had been there as a young woman but the rest of us had never visited. We embarked on a month of exploration with no set itinerary except to see the most of France that we could. Irene was fascinated with the Camargue region and the wild horses that roamed the area. I relish the memories of the four of us on a private jeep tour through the wilds of the Camargue viewing flamingoes, the white Camargue horses, the Spanish and Camargue bulls. It was terrific. None of us could speak much French. Mainly we knew “restaurant French” and as I say, “what more did we need?” Marilyn managed to find simple comfort food in the form of a “Croque Monsieur” sandwich (grilled ham and cheese). That to me is so “Marilyn”. She was a simple working class woman without pretenses. A grilled ham and cheese sandwich in France was her perfect meal. Top it off with a good cup of coffee or a sweet dessert and she was wonderfully satisfied. It
loss to know what to call their relationship. To see two fine, strong, smart, amazing women do their romantic dance together. It was not a “marriage” ... Marilyn would bristle at that description. But it was certainly a respectful and exciting union of two fine women. They were trying to build a relationship that was based on staying together as long as it was viable.

They were not to be bound together out of obligations, necessity, or any of the other labels that hold couples together. The debates on issues and the passion about feminism and lesbianism were building blocks. Not for a moment was their romance boring or blasé. Instead, their relationship was blazing, passionate and not without its conflicts. These two strong women had finally met their respective matches. There would be no "one-up-woman-ship". They were equal. They had both finally met someone smart enough, tough enough, feminist enough, lesbian enough, sexy enough and funny enough. They reached a home-coming that would endure for many seasons.

I moved away after a year with Marilyn, but my friendship did not end there. There were many years to come of sharing the changes in all our lives. There were good times and some very sad times. Marilyn and Irene retired and subsequently discovered the joys of RV'ing. They tortured me for years with postcards from around America and Canada, giving me tantalizing glimpses of dreamy places. I knew I wanted to grow up and become just like them ... full-time RV'ers.

After four years of being on the road, they settled in the lesbian haven of the Pagoda in St. Augustine, Florida. I was able to visit them about once a year while they were there. They were instrumental players in defining that community. Later on they relocated to Apache Junction, Arizona to join another women's community as well as part year at Discover Bay in Washington. The beauty of Discovery Bay resonated into Marilyn's being.

In retrospect, I was to have one final outstanding experience with Marilyn. I was lucky enough to have a terrific trip with Marilyn and Irene to France. We traveled for an

Sessions are of one week and long-weekend duration. We would like them to be longer, but most working women could not attend longer sessions. Our children’s community provides twenty-four-hour childcare for children three and over, and partial childcare for younger ones. Approximately 150 women and 25 children attend each Califia session. About 25 percent are women of color, 25 percent are Jewish women, 20 percent are women who lead heterosexual lives and 10 percent are disabled women. Women with working-class origins make up 40 to 50 percent of the community. At present, women over 40 comprise almost half of the Califia population.

We charge a regular-income fee and a low-income fee and encourage women to contact us if they cannot pay all of the fee. We then charge them only for food and their share of the rent and arrange for later payments if they wish. Fees for children are on a sliding scale. Califia women themselves, not the collective, decide which fee they should pay. We do not have work exchanges. We hire women to cook, coordinate childcare, sign, and lifeguard. All other work is done by all the women in the community. At least one-fourth of Califia women pay less than the low-income fee. The rest are divided more or less evenly between those who pay the low and regular-income fees. To keep costs down, the collective members get no salary for our work.

Califia attracts women with a varied history of political activism and awareness. Some Califia women have been involved in Communist Party politics in the 30s, and some come to Califia thinking “political” means Democrat or Republican. Young Amazons and original Daughters of Bilitis members come to Califia. Women who believe in "working within the system" and women who founded and/or work in alternative feminist programs meet and exchange ideas. Feminist activists in despair and newly politicized women attend. Socialist feminists and country dykes scrub pots together. NOW members and Lesbian-Separatist anarchists learn to respect at least part of the work the other is doing. From this diversity, Califia women experience the breadth of
the Women's Liberation Movement. Newcomers see the variety of ways they can participate in our struggle, and overworked activists realize that they are not the “only feminists in the world.”

**Structures and Activities**

We believe the success of the Califia Community experiment lies in our adherence to a preplanned structure. Specific workshops are given at specific times. Time is structured so we may teach and counsel each other. We can meditate, exercise, and learn to defend ourselves. We can entertain each other and meet in affinity groups. We can experience the power of sisterhood that does not assume we are all alike. We can solve the problems and disputes of community living in a sisterly way. No woman is made to do any of these things, but the structure of the week makes them all possible. Our structure enables a group of strangers to become a real community.

Because the collective takes responsibility for structuring each session, we have enormous power. At a collective meeting the day before the opening of the third session of 1977, some collective members suggested that we divest ourselves of that power. They believed we had no right to choose the issues to be presented, and that it was elitist to present any organized programs. Feelings on this issue were so strong that after ten hours of argument, consensus was impossible. We decided to vote, and the “no structure” side won. The following morning, 200 women, new to Califia, were met by exhausted collective members and a schedule consisting only of meals for the week. From the chaos of the next few days, after which the original schedule was followed, several Califia policies were determined:

1. A time and program structure for at least the first two days of a session is essential because it gives women a chance to become acclimated to their new environment and to realize that they have the power to make the session whatever they choose it to be.

**A Tribute to Marilyn Murphy**

Brook Shumway

It was early summer of 1997 and I had just returned to Los Angeles. I had recently experienced the soap opera break-up of my first lesbian relationship. This resulted in being kicked out of my apartment and needing a new place to live. Not knowing many people in L.A., I found myself walking into the Gay and Lesbian Community Center.

The first person I met was Marilyn. She was working at the Center. After a few minutes of explaining my situation, Marilyn revealed that she was in need of a roommate and wondered if I was interested. We had experienced an instantaneous connection. I felt I had just met my long lost sister. Little did I know that that moment would be a momentous one. My life was definitely taking a step in the right direction. Within a week or two of moving in with Marilyn, it was time for the Lesbian Feminist Camp named "Califia". She and Irene were founding mothers, and that camp was just the beginning of a wonderful year of living with Marilyn. I went quickly from struggling thru "Feminism 101" to taking a crash course in graduate level Feminism. The Women's Movement was charging full-steam ahead and so was Marilyn. Marilyn was involved with someone else when I first moved in with her. But about six months later that relationship had dissolved and she was soon spending increasing time with her friend…Irene. These were amazing, life-changing times for me and for her.

Living with Marilyn was a whirlwind of feminist and lesbian discussions into the wee hours of the morning, wonderful parties full of exciting lesbians, debates about topics I knew nothing about: racism, sexism, classism and all the other "isms". Being introduced to new books, new thoughts, undiscovered (to me) women authors. It was a life-changing year. It was the "best of times."

And then I had the privilege of being here to witness the blossoming of Marilyn and Irene's love affair. I am still at a
The women’s movement has sorely lost one of its icons. She was relentless in her quest to educate and change the lives of women everywhere. There is still much to be said about someone who loved women so much. Someone could write a book about it.

We are here to memorialize Marilyn as she should be. Her life was too short but somehow she made the most of every minute of it and the women’s movement is greatly enhanced by her participation.

We are all better because of Marilyn. I miss her.

2. Califia collective members have the right to have some of our political needs met -- in this instance, a structure that makes possible the examination of the issues of sexual preference, white racism, and class.

3. No structural or content changes will be considered at the last planning meeting before a session.

4. All collective decisions will be reached by consensus.

5. Collective meetings will end on time.

The collective power inherent in scheduling has not been seriously criticized since these events.

Practically every aspect of the Califia day-to-day activities has been questioned and reviewed, including the way we handle food preparation. We serve a primarily vegetarian menu, planned and carried out by two women hired as cooks. Each Califia woman signs up for four to six hours of food preparation and cleanup a week. Some of us were initially opposed to putting women in the kitchen at Califia since we spend so much of our lives in the kitchen at home. We were persuaded to give up our opposition not by the political reasoning of the rest of the group, but because of the practical truth that doing it ourselves was cheaper. However, even the pro-kitchen-duty members were surprised to see how women enjoyed the camaraderie of working in the kitchen with a group. The kitchen also became a refuge for women in distress. We now know to look in the kitchen for women upset by a presentation, a program, or the overall Califia experience.

The Califia experience is much more intense than we anticipated. None of us know when another barrier to consciousness will dissolve and leave us reeling with new awareness. Needing a structure to work out our distress, we developed Woman Care as the Califia version of peer counseling.1 We supply peer counseling guidelines in the registration packet, a signup schedule, and lots of encouragement. Women sign up for an hour or two at a time to...
sit in a quiet, secluded place, usually under a tree, available to talk with other women. This demonstration of women helping each other has become a valuable part of the Califia experience.

For the Califia children's community, we hire a child care coordinator and three to five assistants a session. They are responsible for scheduling activities for the children and for assisting, organizing, or supervising community members who do child care shifts of two hours each, two to three times a week. Since many women do not like to do childcare, or do not feel comfortable around children, we suggest they either trade for kitchen shifts with women who welcome the opportunity to interact with children, or do other services for the children's community like preparing their snacks or packing picnic lunches.

We have been criticized for not providing comprehensive educational programs for the children at each session. One year, the collective included Liz Bernstein, an early childhood educator, who developed a program which complemented the issues presentations of the adult community. Since her resignation, however, the collective has not included a member interested in doing such a program. We have tried to organize a task force of community women to develop an educational program that could be implemented at each session, but that has not happened yet.

At a 1980 Califia session, the children's community became an explosive issue. It started with the sexism presentation prepared by collective members Diane Germain and Betty Brooks about the patriarchal control of women's bodies. The program was to start with the film *Killing Us Softly*. Then Diane, whose art work had earlier been defaced during its exhibition at California State University, San Diego, planned to show her work and lead a discussion about woman-hating, demonstrated by the defamation. Next, Betty was to show slides from her "Women and Their Bodies" course, followed by a self-examination program by Califia woman, Wendy Votroubek. As we were introducing the program some women added poker night to the agenda, not naked. I am still doing poker night to this day.

Marilyn also started writing for the *Lesbian News* when Jinx was running the paper. Marilyn never failed to get her monthly column in and it was always the first thing I opened to when I got my copy. She had just been given a computer by someone and wasn't quite sure how to use it when I visited them at an RV park. Since I had just learned word processing by that time, I could share what I knew with her. That was something I was glad I could contribute to someone who was always teaching me.

An organization called Old Lesbians Organizing for Change, OLOC, began at this time and true to Marilyn's nature, she immediately became involved. She was not the age necessary to belong, but her partner, Irene, was. So Marilyn got to participate after all.

I attended the National Conference on Lesbians in Atlanta, Georgia and got to know OLOC's purpose at that time. They had a huge consciousness raising planned and it helped immensely to know how Old Lesbians are oppressed. I never look at a greeting card to this day without noticing its ageism.

Since Atlanta was so close to St. Augustine and the Pagoda where Marilyn and Irene had settled after a cross-country RV trip to look over the Lesbian settlements, I hitched a ride with them back to Florida. The Pagoda had the flavor of Marilyn and Irene there and the people there were much taken with these two high consciousness Lesbians. As you might know, they had the same kinds of meeting at their remodeled home there as they did in Sherman Oaks.

Later they moved to a bigger community in the shadow of Superstition Mountain. Again, they remodeled and opened their hearts and house to the community. At Superstition Mountain RV Park, Marilyn began having trouble with reading and writing and with driving too. Nevertheless, when I visited her and Irene one weekend, Marilyn was again holding a session, this time on sexual harassment. Of course I knew I could still learn something.
Three marvelous tributes to Marilyn

Marilyn
One of Our Icons
Betty Jetter

I first saw Marilyn at a California NOW event. She was one of the entertainers that Saturday night, a poet. I remember listening to every word Marilyn said and was mesmerized by her eloquence. Marilyn was very eloquent about expressing women’s oppression and if you wanted to learn about it, she was there to educate. I saw Marilyn many times after that at many NOW events and we became quite close friends, so close that I was the very first person she told about her first Lesbian experience. She was beside herself with happiness.

That relationship did not work out as well as she had hoped and ended. That was when Irene Weiss came into the picture. Irene can better tell how she met Marilyn than I can, but one thing I want to pass on is that Marilyn thought that a Lesbian ought to have many relationships before she settled down and here she was with someone who turned out to be the love of her life. She jokingly told a few of us that “when she came back in another life, she was going to be a butterfly, flitting from flower to flower.”

Marilyn moved in with Irene and soon after there were so many people coming to the house that they decided to expand. They remodeled the garage into a meeting center/guest room/swimming cabana and started Saturday night sessions. About 20 to 30 women showed up at these sessions, myself included, and learned many, many things about the oppression of women. I know I really looked forward to these Saturdays. I was doing consciousness raising with SFV NOW for a while by this time, but I didn’t want to miss any new knowledge I could find, and with Marilyn, there was always some other way of looking at it. It was very helpful to me. And so in addition to the meetings and swimming parties, naked, of course, they then

said they felt uncomfortable talking about such personal things around children. Others thought the children could not be trusted to keep confidential what they heard at the group. A heated discussion erupted. In the interest of time we decided to discuss the issue at the community meeting that evening, to exclude the children from this program, and to do the program for interested children and their mothers after lunch.

At the evening community meeting, several important questions were raised:

1. Does the collective have the right to exclude children from a Califia program, especially when their mothers want them to attend?
2. Is it an infringement of children's rights to give only young women, twelve and older, the right to attend programs they choose?
3. Who has the right to make a judgment about what is suitable material for children?
4. When does “providing a safe place for women” become the female version of "protecting women for our own good?"

Because we could not reach consensus on these complex issues at the community meeting, the collective promised to discuss the issue fully and to put it on the agenda for the next Los Angeles meeting. (These meetings are called by the Califia collective for community input into the next year's programs.) At that later meeting, after much discussion, we finally resolved this issue. We admitted to ourselves that we were not specifically interested in planning programs for children. We agreed, though, that whenever possible, we would seek a coordinator of the children's community who could provide educational programs. We would also encourage community women to bring their programs to the children's community as well as to the adult community. However, the most we would promise was childcare in a safe environment with a feminist perspective.
That decision cleared the way for us to state that the children's community existed for the convenience of the mothers, not for its own sake. Califia Community is designed to be a place for women. At Califia, women should not have to sacrifice their needs for privacy and comfort to further the education of children, no matter how worthy the cause of children's education is. We made one of our few policy decisions. At Califia, women come first. Anytime a conflict arises between the rights and needs of women and those of children, women take precedence.

A vital part of the process of turning a group of strangers into a community is the nightly Community Meeting. Facilitated by two community members, it is scheduled for one hour -- after dinner and before the evening program. An agenda sheet is posted every morning, and women write their agenda items on it. Collective members attend but do not participate unless asked specific questions. The Community Meeting may become a forum to continue discussing presentations that took place in the morning, or it may be the place where the collective is criticized. Often the concerns of the community are aired: children's rights, picture taking that might jeopardize a job or a child-custody case, smoking, drinking, vegetarian meals, marijuana, man-hating, loud music and partying in the cabins, insensitivity to the needs of disabled women, the age at which boys become young men, and so on. By the time the meetings end, we are a most grateful and noisily appreciative audience for the evening poetry, music, theatre, and film programs. The Califia Talent Show at the end of the week is always a high spot. After a heated Community Meeting, it is a joy to experience the loving, humorous skits that poke fun at the week we have just spent with each other.

A relatively new Califia tradition is the Late Night Conversation designed as an alternative to the nightly dancing which takes place after the evening entertainment. The Late Night Conversation provides another structured opportunity for women to continue dealing with unfinished

that Marilyn compiled her *Lesbian News* articles into the book, *Are You Girls Traveling Alone?,* so the two set off on a book tour of women’s bookstores all over the U.S.

In 1995 they settled at Superstition Mountain Women’s RV Resort, in Apache Junction, Arizona, across the street from the Pueblo Women’s RV Resort. Lots of women there! These were not radical women like the Pagoda, but as Irene says, “I would not trade it for living out in the world again.” They found they could afford to live in two parks, so spent winters in Arizona and summers in Washington, at Discovery Bay Women’s RV Resort.

In 1997, Marilyn had a stroke affecting her cognitive powers, and Irene became her caretaker for several very difficult years. Marilyn died in 2004. In 2005, Irene became ill, and has since been physically restricted. She still enjoys being a part of the political situation, expressing an opinion, hearing what’s going on. She has been active in putting together an oral herstory of the Superstition Mountain Park. At all of the many places they lived, Irene enjoyed community building… she admits we don’t know how to be a community, but she never stops trying.

Living alone, she developed a rich interior life, reading, no technology (I’m a Luddite, she says.) Now, at age 86, she has fallen in love again! Much to her surprise and delight...

Irene’s feature taken from interviews by Arden Evermeyer (2001) and Marcia Perlstein (2009)

Compiled by Lee Lanning
many relationships, with students and patients. In 1948 she came out to her family, who were shocked, resulting in a move to New York City, where she worked in Mount Sinai Hospital. She hung out in Greenwich Village in the 1950’s and was part of the birth of the gay movement.

In 1951 she bought her first car, a 1936 Buick. She and a partner worked their way cross-country to California. There she worked in a nursing home, learned the business, helped to expand it, became director of nursing over the group of nursing homes, and ended up buying into the business. This was as a result of the help she always gave others, and some of that came back to her, enabling her to invest in the business. In those years she was able to work with the state health department improving nursing home standards. She remained in the nursing home business until she retired.

In 1976, at age 50, after a series of relationships, Irene met Marilyn Murphy. The last chapter of Marilyn’s book, Are You Girls Traveling Alone? tells the beginning of their love story. Marilyn was a member of the Califia Collective, and very involved in the women’s movement. Irene became a member and they spent the next 5 years doing women’s events, camps, workshops, addressing issues dividing the women’s community. Racism, Classism and Sexism were the central issues of their lives, holding discussion groups in their home as well as through Califia. Irene says, “It was the greatest learning experience of my whole life.” As a result they also were instrumental in starting the rape crisis center in their area, and the group, “Women Against Racism.”

In 1981 they took a year and traveled in a 17 foot RV. Here, Irene said, the two city girls discovered the outdoor world. (Although Irene had been an avid horsewoman earlier in her life.) They liked that so much they sold their house and traveled another three years. In 1984 they moved to the Pagoda, in Florida, a radical separatist women’s community. They lived there seven years, experiencing the difficulties of collective living as well as the joys of developing a theater there which attracted women performing artists. It was here business raised in the day's programs. Often women who have not spoken out strongly about the issues during the day come to share their views. For example, in our first Late Night Conversation, we met the women for whom our "women come first" policy was necessary. Fat women, women our society describes as ugly, women terrorized when they were children, and women who were physically abused as children came to say the things they feared to say in the large group: they hated or feared children after years of their own teasing and ridicule; they were afraid of the rage they felt around children; they were afraid they might hurt a child they were supposed to care for during childcare shifts. The women were expressing feelings they knew were “politically incorrect.” It was a freeing experience for them and a humbling one for the rest of the group, and Late Night Conversations became a regular part of our schedule.

Another program created for Califia is the Feminist Primer. Those of us who have been immersed in feminism a long time tend to forget how different our vocabulary is from the world around us and how differently we relate to each other. Words like “matriarchy,” “patriarchy,” “privilege,” “process,” and “separatism” roll off our tongues with an assumption of shared definitions. Consciousness-raising techniques (CR) of speaking one at a time and not interrupting with comments of sympathy, support, or disagreement are not familiar to many women. For women new to feminism, this lack of knowledge greatly increases their feeling of alienation. To overcome this isolation, we hold breakfast Feminist Primers where we can discuss a variety of feminist issues. As each woman realizes she is one of many, she begins to feel less estranged.

In Califia's seven-year history, the hour before dinner has been set aside for small groups. We see this as a way of building smaller support systems within the larger community. In spite of the collective's commitment to the small group, we have had to experiment and learn about an appropriate structure for the groups. Initially we randomly assigned
women to CR groups. Now we organize on the basis of geography or special interests so that women have a support group for work that they can continue after the Califia session.

**Collective Presentations: Sexual Preference, Class, White Racism**

The original collective decided that the issues of sexual preference, white racism, and class -- issues which often divide and separate us from each other -- should be highlighted by specific collective presentations. Since that time we have discussed making other issues such as anti-Semitism, body image, ageism, disabilities, and motherhood additional collective presentations. While it is tempting to add them to our Presentation, especially for those of us who are members of those groups, we have decided that to do additional presentations would leave little time for community workshops, and Califia would become a conference rather than an educational community. We depend on community women to see that these issues are addressed during the sessions.

**In our issues presentations, we begin with the assumption that as feminist women, we want to rid ourselves of beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors that oppress others.** We use the term privilege -- white privilege, class privilege, heterosexual privilege -- to inform each other of the profit accruing to members of oppressor groups, with and without our consent. We attempt to bring to consciousness the ways we have personally both actively and passively cooperated and still cooperate in the oppression of others.

The collective presentations begin on the first morning with an examination of the systematic oppression of women’s bodies. We remind ourselves of the oppression we share regardless of our race, class, sexual preference, religion, appearance, age, or bodily health. This first presentation is the easiest one for us to organize. We have more Ideas and material than we can possibly use. The program which is called “Misogyny” has been criticized as “man-hating.” We explore

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**All of Marilyn’s work is infused with the insights of her companion lover. We are delighted, here, to pay tribute to Irene. And to thank her again for making this volume of Marilyn’s work possible.**

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**Irene Weiss**

Irene Weiss was born in Pittsburgh, August 30, 1926, to conservative Jewish parents who immigrated from Russia. At age seven she was hospitalized for several months. Here she began her love of books, and probably her love of nursing as well. She thought of herself as a Lesbian at an early age. Her first sexual relationship was in nursing school, where she had
with the community what It means that a program on the woman-hating behavior of men becomes a program on man-hating in the minds of some women.

At present, the introduction to the sexual preference issue on the afternoon of the first day consists of a slideshow illustrating the relationship of Lesbianism to the liberation of all women by delineating the nature of compulsory heterosexuality; we show its oppression of all women regardless of sexual preference. After this introduction, we meet in small groups to discuss several questions we have formulated. All of the women discuss the same set of questions, but Lesbians and non-Lesbians meet and talk in groups separately. The discussion questions include: What was your reaction when you first realized that Lesbianism had some relationship to your life? What myths and stereotypes about Lesbians do you know, and what effect did they have upon that realization? After this exercise, we all view a slideshow, “Women Loving Women” by Lavender Horizons. We then share a brief summing up and a reading of “Applesource,” a short, humorous retelling of the Adam and Eve story which ends with Eve and Lilith walking hand in hand in the Garden of Eden while an apprehensive god and Adam watch.  

An important dynamic develops around the sexual preference issue at Califia. Women who are members of the oppressor group in the world are the 20 percent minority in the camp. This creates a wonderful opportunity for women who are not Lesbians to experience some of the feelings Lesbians experience in the real world and, as a result, to become firm allies of Lesbians in the struggle for Lesbian rights.

For this to happen, however, heterosexual women must learn to deal with the discomfort they feel during the first few days of the session. Lesbians new to Califia attribute this obvious discomfort to the women's homophobia and, in some instances, this is true. Usually one or two heterosexuals leave each session by the afternoon of the first day. But homophobia
is not a satisfactory explanation for the discomfort of many heterosexual women who attend Califia. These women often work in organizations with Lesbians and/or have Lesbian daughters, sisters, mothers. Their discomfort is a shock to them, and suspecting that undiscovered pockets of homophobia are causing their reaction, they become even more distressed. Lesbian and heterosexual collective members help them understand that what they are experiencing is a temporary loss of heterosexual privilege. In the world, they do not emotionally experience that privilege, though they may recognize it intellectually. Because heterosexuality is the dominant mode of affectional/sexual bonding, its privilege goes unnoticed. But when a woman “feels funny” mentioning her husband's name in conversation with her cabinmates at Califia, she is experiencing loss of privilege. When she connects that funny feeling with the everyday reality of Lesbians, she can make the quantum leap of identification and solidarity with Lesbians. She understands in her emotions and body the feelings minority groups have as they try to live in a world not designed for them. To facilitate this movement from discomfort to political awareness, we have developed some first-night get-acquainted exercises which enable women who are not Lesbians to see that they are not the "minority of one" they sometimes think they are. We make sure that community members know which collective members are not Lesbians. A heterosexual collective member is one of the facilitators of the Late Night Conversations on the first evening so that the subject of loss of privilege can be introduced. The sexual preference issue presentation the following day begins with the recognition and explanation of the difficulty heterosexual women experience coming to Califia for the first time.

The decision to examine class as an issue which divides women came out of the experience of collective members who had participated in the working-class caucus at Sagaris. Because class is such a hidden issue, we had to discover a method which would demonstrate that class, indeed, was a
**Are You Girls Traveling Alone**

Reprints

Ahhhhh, don’t I love photos. I am grateful to Irene Weiss for making the photos in *Marilyn Revisited* available to us. And to Brook, Betty and Lin for touching our hearts with memories of Marilyn.

In this next section, to create a broader context for *Marilyn revisited*, we are reprinting some material from *Are You Girls Traveling Alone*?

Jinx Beer’s original Preface tells us how Marilyn got started and the influence Marilyn had in California and beyond.

Marilyn Frye’s original Introduction is a marvel filling endless strokes of the picture of Marilyn, and all of us, in the unfolding's of the 80ies.

The Contents is included to pique your interest in the wide range of Marilyn’s analysis and recordings of our herstory. The Appendix gives us more ideas for exploration.

*Are You Girls* is available to you as a gift from Irene Weiss and Woman, Earth and Spirit. We really want you to have access to Marilyn’s works. A suggested price for either book is $10 ppd. However, we ask that you simply send what you can afford. That is the perfect amount. If you can, at least $3.50 for shipping is helpful.

Thank you for revisiting Marilyn’s and in the process all of our stories. Enjoy!

~Jae Haggard, Editor
Outland, New Mexico

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significant issue, and that most of us are unaware that a working-class upbringing fosters attitudes, values, and behavior different from those of the dominant culture. We needed to learn how to show that these hidden differences cause difficulty in the personal and political relationships among women, and that frequently women who think of themselves as middle class are from working-class backgrounds.

To accomplish these goals, we begin with an informal lecture on value, attitude, and behavior developmental theories as they relate to socio-economic class. We illustrate these theories with examples from the lives of working-class women and from the class conflicts we have experienced. The original lecture was written by Ahshe Green, from our first collective. It has been revised each year since then as we learn more about the subject and learn more effective ways to present the material.

After the lecture, we read aloud a list of 25 questions developed by the working-class members of the first collective. The list includes such questions as: When you were a child, did you have enough underwear and socks? Did you get regular medical, dental, and eye check-ups? Did you get a regular allowance? We ask about parents' job histories, about parents' aspirations for their children, and about use of leisure time. These questions are meant to be an experiential translation of some of the socio-economic indices of class. The women are not to answer these questions, just to think about them. The questions are designed to unlock the years of painful memories "forgotten" by many working-class women, especially upwardly mobile ones like ourselves. Unless we bring those memories to consciousness, we cannot use our past to inform our present, to change ourselves or the Women's Liberation Movement.

The immediate goal of the questions, however, is to prepare the women for *The Passing Game* developed by Mary Glavin. As a working-class woman for whom scholarships to prestige schools were the ladder to a Ph.D. and university teaching, she was acutely conscious
of her personal passing game. She thought that the concept of passing might be the way to break the silence of working-class women. So we had all the women sit in a large circle and answer, in turn, two questions: How did you pass as middle class? and, What price did you pay for passing? We explained that middle-class women were to be silent and listen non-defensively. We had no idea what we were unleashing as we sat in the circle at the first Califia. We expected women to talk as we had in the working-class caucus at Sagaris. But by bringing up passing, we had inadvertently caused women to remember not only the facts of their youthful deprivations but also the feeling of shame and humiliation they suffered lacking the “right” clothes, parents, accent, and vocabulary. It brought up their feelings of resentment toward and alienation from their middle-class friends, lovers and coworkers. The working-class women, including the collective women, were distraught; the middle-class women felt guilt and resentment; the class-confused women were even more confused. It took the rest of the week to heal the class split that resulted.

We have not had a class split since. Now we know to tell women what to expect. Many women now come to Califia because they have heard about the class presentation and want to experience its freeing results. Others, who have participated in previous years, come to continue their healing process; they give grounding to the large group. In addition, when the exercise is over, working-class and middle-class women meet separately to process the experience, allowing both groups time to relieve their feelings in safety.

The class presentation works well for working-class women, freeing us from our past and helping us to recognize behavior developed in the scarcity of our youth that is inappropriate for our adult lives. It has made us more aware of middle-class assumptions and of ways organizations structure out participation by working-class women. We have not been as successful in making the class presentation work for middle-class women. In 1982, Ian Hines and Suzanne Beford, middle-class collective members, devised a format for the middle-class group which enables the participants to move from guilt and resentment to understanding and positive action. This is an

family many women and some men are striving for. Our presence is a reminder to all that egalitarian, non-hierarchical relationships are possible.

Is it any wonder that feminism is accused of destroying the American home and family? Thank the goddess.

~ First appeared in Lesbianic Logic
View Section page 26 1983

Marilyn and Irene
women choose because they are free persons, not like heterosexual relationships of today where choice is an illusion conjured up by the patriarchs.

The Lesbian choice is crucial to this transformation. Lesbianism epitomizes the freedom of women to choose our own lives, even in this time of unfreedom. Because of the Women’s Liberation Movement, Lesbians, as we really are in our lives, are becoming visible. In feminist groups across the country, Lesbians are becoming known to women who live heterosexual lives. Lesbians are coming out at work, in print, on television. Women who are not Lesbians, who are struggling to liberate themselves and their intimate relationships, are realizing that their heterosexuality is not a sexual preference, a choice. Only when women are free to choose women as lovers are they free to choose men. That is a life-changing realization for women -- the knowledge of choice for all women.

Lesbians are crucial to the liberation of all women for other reasons. We are not John’s wife, John’s lover, John’s mother, John’s ex. As a women-loving-woman, a Lesbian must define herself. Non-Lesbians witness this Lesbian reality, woman as self-defining person in her own right. Lesbians are proof that the traditional definition, role and function of woman as man’s helpmate and service worker is a false construct, fabricated out of the male need for security and dominance. Lesbians prove that women are not “the other,” not beings without autonomous existence, not reflections of man’s need, not reactions to man’s behavior. Lesbians give lie to the belief that a woman without a man is a creature to be pitied. On the contrary! And there are so many of us!

So the Lesbian secret is coming out. Women who live with and love other women, who refuse to do “the right thing” for a woman, who have no King ordering them around in their castles, are alive and well and living everywhere -- and raising children too! In fact, it appears that home and family, Lesbian style, could serve as the model for the transformed home and important breakthrough for us and should make the class presentation even more powerful.

Califia’s white racism presentation has also had a stormy history. Each collective has renewed our commitment to examine racism as an issue which divides women. In the early years of Califia we made up programs by sharing ideas and theories that had moved us individually to take an antiracist stance. We read poetry by women of color. We organized white women into small groups to talk about their initial awareness of racism. We talked about the connections between racism and sexism, but the presentations lacked emotional intensity. We could dispense information about racism better than we could move women's hearts. Everything began to change when Maria Diaz and Gloria Rodriguez came to Califia in 1978 and saw its possibilities for women of color. Before the week was out, they had organized the women of color and some white women into a caucus and issued a statement of demands. These included having a Califia outreach to women of color task force by September of 1978 and three women of color on the collective by July 1979. Maria and Gloria took the responsibility for encouraging women of color to respond to our call for members on the outreach task force. The task force, composed of women of color and white women, worked to familiarize area women about Califia, to raise money to assist women of color to come to Califia, and to find women of color willing to risk becoming members of the all-white collective.

In 1978 and 1979, the collective was asked to do racism workshops for a number of Los Angeles women's organizations. In June 1979, Califia and the Los Angeles Lesbians of Color cosponsored a successful Racism/Sexism Conference at the Los Angeles Woman's Building. The collective members became more skilled in presenting antiracist workshops as a result of these programs. The 1979 and 1980 Califia white racism presentations were a joint effort of white women and women of color. They were more effective than our original presentations, but it was apparent
that the emotion and energy expended by women of color—participating in these programs took its toll. Once again we learned that women of color should not have to do white women’s work in the struggle against racism.

Irene Weiss has coordinated our white racism presentation since 1979. She and the other presenters experiment with exercises we have used before as well as with materials and ideas from several additional excellent sources. Irene introduces and explains the ideas and concepts that are particularly hard for well-intentioned white women to hear: that all white people are racist; that we have white privilege and the responsibility to use our privilege against racism; that the good intentions of white people often result in unintentional racism, and so on. She talks about the difference between racism and prejudice and presents the statistics of the physical, economic, and social costs of racism for people of color. Other collective members facilitate the exercises which follow the introduction. We use a guided fantasy which opens white women to the realization of their hidden, and not so hidden, pockets of racism. We use a variety of small-group techniques to facilitate the movement of women from guilty awareness to positive action.

At the four 1981 Califia sessions, collective members Carmen Silva and Anna Maria Soto began meeting daily with women of color. At those meetings the Califia Women of Color Network was founded. The Network inspired more women of color to join the collective. Also, the Network proposed that Califia sponsor a women of color only weekend, and over the 1982 Memorial Day weekend, 100 women and their children attended the first Women of Color Califia.

Additional Programming

Except for the issues presentations conducted by the collective, all educational programs are in the form of workshops facilitated by community women. We do not permit women to come to Califia for a few hours, present a program, and leave. We say that at Califia all women are the

Lesbian Freedom

The bigots and their many allies try to scare everyone by saying feminism is destroying the American home and family. This is a powerful and emotionally upsetting charge. Most thoughtful people agree the sense of belonging and acceptance that home and family symbolize. In other times and other places, our belonging needs were met by village, tribe, religious order and a myriad of other groupings in addition to or instead of home and family. However, the impersonality of modern life leaves us with fewer and fewer places to satisfy this human need, as it intensifies the need itself.

The enemies of women’s liberation use people’s genuine concerns about the home and family in our time to defeat our goals in the name of saving the family. They know the family power arrangement, in which women’s life is dedicated to the service of husband (and HIS children), is the model for all relationships between individual women and men and between women as a group and men a group. Our enemies do not intend to give up their power privilege at home or anywhere else. And they know the primary struggle takes place in the institution women and men could change most easily — home and family. They cannot let this happen because it is here where each generation learns that power is invested in the man and that hierarchy, with males in top positions, is the natural order in human life. The reforms we propose to equalize power in the home, the workplace, etc. threaten this bastion of male supremacy. Our revolutionary goal of control of our own bodies through reproductive and sexual freedom of choice, when reached, should end it.

The end of male supremacy should not be equated with the destruction of home and family. Feminism hopes for a transformation of the private and public relations between women and men, developing from their equality as human beings in the world. We can imagine a home and family within which female/male reciprocity and respect and cooperation are nurtured. We can imagine a female/male relationship which
hiker are presumed to be male and are used with the male
pronoun, “he.” Sometimes, however, the woman is turned into
an oddity for doing what can also be done by a man: woman
terrorist, lady lawyer, female plumber, and poetess, farmerette,
aviatrix!

Making the male into the human being has other harmful
effects. It turns everything which is strictly female into
something which is not normal, something strange, mysterious,
peculiar, odd, or not real. Our physical differences from males:
an organ, the clitoris, with no function other than sexual
pleasure, our insulating, buoyant, estrogen-producing layer of
fat which rounds our bodies, our differently distributed
musculature, are said to be unnecessary, unimportant and signs
of inferiority. Female bodily functions and capacities:
menstruation and menopause, pregnancy and lactation, our
sexual response cycle, are regarded as shameful, disgusting,
sickness, a joke of nature. In other words, all that we are and
can do that males are not and cannot do is perceived as a mark
of superiority for them, and one of shame for us.

And, they leer and shout, “Viva la difference!”

~ First appeared in Lesbianic Logic, March 1984

Pagoda, Florida 1970ies.

teachers and the taught, that no woman comes to Califia empty
handed, with nothing to share. To have an “expert” come in,
do a program, and leave, implies there is nothing important
that she can learn from the women she taught. We find it a
powerful experience for women to exchange educational roles
with each other.

Some women come to Califia prepared to do a program
and others call an impromptu group together after they arrive.
It is in workshops that women who are experienced organizers
share their expertise with others, where new women learn that
their personal experience is important, where burned-out
feminists are sparked by the vitality of newcomers to the
women's liberation movement and where new groups and
programs emerge.

All of us see Califia sessions as a time for women,
including collective members, to become more conscious,
better educated, politicized, and radicalized. Out of these
desires have come the SEA groups (Support, Education, and
Action). These small groups, organized on the basis of
geography or special interest, have generated specific actions
outside of the Califia session. The 1979 Northern California
SEA group became the organizing group of our first Northern
California Califia in 1980; and the 1980 Sacramento area SEA
group organized our second Northern California Califia in
1981. Members of the 1979 San Fernando Valley SEA group
began plans for a rape crisis service which was founded in
1980. The San Diego SEA group in 1981 resolved some
serious problems plaguing a San Diego lesbian organization.
Several 1981 Califia sessions have been educated by
presentations organized by Jewish women’s SEA groups and
by SEA groups of disabled women. White Women Against
Racism groups in the San Francisco Bay and Los Angeles area
were founded during Califia 1980 and 1981, and the women of
color SEA groups in 1981 developed the Califia Women of
Color Network which organized and conducted the first annual
Women of Color Califia Community in May 1982.
There are many smaller events which have become an important part of our program: our opening circle, where each woman calls out her name and the name of the women in her family; our closing circle, when we build an imaginary dome to house our Califia experience; the storytelling around the fire late at night -- informal, essential telling of our histories; our group photographs; the smoker's caucus, banished to a table under the trees; the obligatory popcorn during movies; the last night procession to the dining hall; the dining room, festively decorated by the children for our banquet.

It is almost impossible to recount the seven years of Califia collective meetings (approximately 30 a year), 17 Califia Community sessions, the formal meetings between the collective and community members, the written and oral community evaluations of each session, the Califia outreach to women of color meetings, Califia Women of Color Network meetings, the programs on racism and class we have conducted for women’s organizations, and all the informal exchanges between collective members and women who attend Califia sessions -- which produced the present Califia Community, its structure, content, and methodology. We call ourselves an experiment in feminist education so that we can feel free to change as we learn, so that we will be open to new ideas, so that we can welcome criticism and suggestions. The process by which women attending Califia sessions become responsible for each session has produced Califia members and collective members who are devoted to Califia. We all find satisfaction in the changes Califia has made in our lives in the organizations we work in, and eventually we hope, in the world we all inhabit.

NOTES
1. This program was started by Mary Glavin in 1978 and then formalized by Carol Rabaut in 1978 and refined in 1981 by Yvonne King.

Gaslight

All of our lives as female persons, women hear the “truth” about what women are like. This truth is usually delivered in relative terms, that is, in relation to the “truth” about men. For example, women are said to be less than: less smart, strong, talented, athletic; less brave, ambitious, dependable, sexual than men. At the same time, we are said to be more than: more sensitive, emotional, frivolous, vain; more devious, nurturing, passive, dependent than men.

Because this is the societal truth about women as a group, each female person is expected to express this truth, in greater or lesser degree, in her own life. Our relativity is refined in two important ways. First, if a female person is unquestionably smarter or braver than most non-women, for instance, she can get away with this superiority by becoming more sensitive or more frivolous, by balancing a non-female characteristic with an overrun of femaleness.

The second refinement of our relative truth is a balancing act of a different nature. This woman, who is smarter or braver than most non-women and who compensates adequately, can keep her “real” woman identity only if she does not appear smarter or braver than the men she relates to: father, brother, boyfriend, husband, co-workers, boss, especially in areas of male expertise in general, and in their areas in particular.

Neither of these balancing acts will really work if the woman refuses to dress and decorate herself as a “real” woman does.

By describing women in relation to men, the human male becomes the standard for a human being, the model for humanity. The human female is then perceived as a deviation from the “normal” human person in every way.

For example, the words “man” and “men” are used to mean all human persons, a practice which makes sense where women are not people, only a sub-category. A woman doing anything that can also be done by men is subject to a similar disappearing act. The writer, the drug pusher, the driver, the
Charlotte Perkins Gilman was one of the many nineteenth and early twentieth century feminists who pointed out and railed against the harm done women by men because of attitudes and behaviors developed in a system made of, by and for men. For example, in her book, *Man’s World*, written in 1910 and translated into just about every European and Asian language, she writes about the code of the “gentleman.” A gentleman, she observed, felt honor-bound to stop the impending marriage of a beloved sister, if he learned that sometime in the potential husband’s past or present, he was found to cheat at cards. Such behavior was indicative of weak character. That same gentleman would not speak out, would not be honor-bound to stop the wedding of his sister to a man who was known to frequent brothels, even though he knew that the potential groom could have and pass on syphilis, incurable and rampant at the time, to that sister and her babies. For men, she noted, frequenting brothels had nothing to do with a gentleman’s character. Enjoying pornography was a gentleman’s prerogative, not a character defect, in Gilman’s time, as was talking dirty to, and sexually harassing, his female employees. While gentlemen might regret the harm done an individual woman by any of these attitudes and behaviors, they remained more of less indifferent to women’s condemnation of such attitudes and behaviors. I guess things haven’t changed much, at least not in the gentlemen of the press and the gentlemen of the Senate of the United States of America.

~ First appeared in 12/91


3. Since Califia introduced The Passing Game, other groups have used this concept very successfully when doing consciousness raising about anti-Semitism and Lesbianism.


Former Califia Community Collective Members include: Dani Adams, Christina M. Alvarez, Margaret Barker, Liz Bernstein, Josie Catoggio, Dawn Darington, Sue Donne (Cybelle), Barbara F. Forrest, Norma Fragosa, Mary Glavin, Ahshe Green, Rose Green, Gail Harris, Kari Hildebrand, Donna Hill, Yvonne King, Cecilia Lami, Sidra Moore, Alice Myers, Carol Nelson, Lois Nevius, Glenda Osborne, Marilyn Pearsol, Anne Perna, Kathy Plowman, Carol Rabaut, Wanda Ross, Shari Schulz, Jody Timms, Shirley Virgil, Karen Williams, Sue Williams, and Denise Woods.

The Califia Community Collective dissolved itself in December, 1986. The June Mazer Lesbian Archives, in West Hollywood, CA 90069, has Califia memorabilia.
Did Your Mother Do Volunteer Work?

For the past fifteen years, at least, radical feminists, most of us Lesbians, have been/writing, speaking and conducting workshops about class in the United states as a major influence in the development of our values, attitudes, and behavior; as a system of personal and institutional oppression; as a cause of friction in our personal relationships; and as an issue which divides women and creates obstacles to our working together to liberate ourselves and our sisters from personal and institutional oppression of all kinds. Our other intra-movement issues: racism, internalized homophobia, ablebodyism, anti-Semitism, ageism, and fat phobia usually are acknowledged as issues if only by those women suffering from their effects. Even women who insist that fat women or disabled women, for example, are "misunderstanding" their attitudes, remarks, or behavior, will acknowledge that the issues do exist. When the issue is class, this acknowledgment is usually missing.

Before we can even begin a discussion about class differences and their effects, we have to demonstrate that they exist. We are willing to concede that the very, very rich and the very, very poor may not be like the rest of us, as long as we can keep our belief that the rest of us are pretty much the same. Most of us are middle-class, we say, not too rich and not too poor, more or less equal. This myth of a mostly classless society is an important factor for keeping our class system in place and unthreatened by revolution or trade unions. The invisibility of class oppression, this denial of "difference," ensures a cohesiveness of belief in the United States as a place where most of the people have a more or less equal opportunity to live the "good life." It intensifies the belief, congruent in a "classless society," that the only real barriers to success are laziness, ignorance, immorality, cowardice, heredity, lack of ambition or perseverance, and/or

Thomas, more than once, sexualized his relationships with his women employees.

It’s heartbreaking to realize, if the polls are correct, that many women didn’t believe Anita Hill or didn’t think Thomas’ behavior was a big deal, important enough to keep him off the Supreme Court. I think their attitude stems, for many women, from the low standards women have for the behavior of men toward women, including their own men and the men who rule the country. What’s a little harassment to women who’ve been molested, raped, pushed around, touched, beaten, been the recipient of dirty talk, dirty jokes, dirty secrets since infancy and childhood! Certainly men, and they should know, don’t think what happened to Anita is a big deal. Take Andy Rooney, for example. He’s important, respected enough to be on the TV news program, *Sixty Minutes*, every week. He says he’s worked in offices for forty years and never seen any sexual harassment. He writes, “…male penguins who mate on Arctic ice with female penguins test the availability of the females by seeing how they respond to dirty jokes. The pictures always show them posing and posturing in front of females just like men do in front of women in offices in warmer climates.” He wonders if Thomas was simply engaged in “relatively harmless male posturing? He didn’t rape her in the back room. Maybe he said some suggestive things and waited for an interested response from her.” He goes on to say, “Any woman knows when a man is putting the moves on her and she knows how to turn the man off. To call it sexual harassment seems a little strong to me.”

In spite of Rooney and his cronies, I don’t understand the notion of giving a Supreme Court nominee the benefit of the doubt. It is one thing for politicians to lie and cheat and behave improperly toward women. One should expect more from a possible Supreme Court judge. I wonder if Thomas would have been given the benefit of the doubt if the charge of sexual harassment had come from a man.
out that the Senate Judiciary Committee had not followed up on Hill’s charges, she thought the members simply did not understand how serious and wide-spread sexual harassment is. She began calling senators, Republicans and Democrats alike, those on the committee and those not. They told her they did know and recounted incident after incident told them by their wives and daughters. Some of their families’ perpetrators, like Baucus’, were their Senate colleagues. Baucus realized then that, regardless of what happened at the hearings, the outcome was inevitable.

I was shocked that the Senate Judiciary Committee did not verify Thomas’ sworn testimony. His assertion that he has never discussed Roe v. Wade is so impossible to believe that one would think any reasonable person would doubt his veracity about his behavior toward Hill, too. Why didn’t the FBI check on all this? Didn’t anyone care that he might be a liar, even if they didn’t care about pornography or sexual harassment? There was an article in the Washington Post about a newspaper reporter who had obtained a list of the pornographic movies Thomas rented from his local video store, only to have his publisher decide his actions were an invasion of Thomas’ privacy and refuse to print the story. The FBI could have learned about that, couldn’t they?

I couldn’t believe that no senator asked Thomas about his alleged fondness for viewing and discussing pornographic movies when he attended Yale. Surely, there must be some former classmates who would tell the truth! I thought these youthful indiscretions were as serious as the pot smoking of Reagan’s hapless nominee, Ginsburg!

Then I was shocked again when the Committee did not call Angela Wright and Sukari Hardnett to testify. Wright and Hardnett worked for Thomas, and both swore he behaved improperly toward them, though not improperly enough to be called sexual harassment as the government defines it. Surely, in fairness to Anita Hill, their stories needed to be heard. If nothing else, their testimony would have confirmed that the inferiority of one’s sex, race, ethnicity. It teaches us that “anyone” can make it in America just by “wanting it enough,” by working “hard enough.” Because even members of oppressed classes and groups internalize these beliefs to a greater or lesser degree, they are more likely to think of themselves as “failures” than as members of an oppressed class -- and so are their oppressors.

Also, U.S. residents who experience oppression for other, more apparently “obvious” reasons than class, such as people of colors, Jews, Lesbians, disabled people, usually do not attribute their problems to their socioeconomic class, or they believe class oppression is not important in light of their other oppression. In a certain sense, this is true. Racism, for example, limits the participation of people of colors in institutions like unions, which are organizations of and for working people. Therefore, it is difficult, and does not seem particularly profitable, for people of colors to try to separate racism from class oppression.

In addition, the upward mobility, whether real or imagined, of some poor and working-class people whose teachers or social workers chose them for “special” treatment when children, or who received scholarships, grants, loans, the GI bill and/or who worked and sacrificed for an education, who made money, who were lucky enough to become rich as athletes or entertainers, who marry up—like Cinderella—convinces most Americans, including the upwardly mobile and those they leave behind, that class differences and the resultant oppression do not “really” exist. It also masks the reality that upwardly mobile poor and working-class people bring to our lives the values, behaviors, and attitudes we learned in our childhood and youth, that we are living middle-class lifestyles with a poverty or working-class perspective, that we are frequently out of sync with our new environment.

My purpose in writing this paper is to share some of what I have learned from my own personal experiences, from academic study, and from the women I have worked with in creating, facilitating, and participating in feminist programs on
class differences since 1975. This paper continues to be a “work in progress,” changing as we learn more, as we refine our ideas. Much of what follows are generalizations, fitting the experiences of some women more or less than others. This is not an exercise in comparing oppressions or blaming. We are not responsible for the privileges of our birth. The class system exists for the benefit of those at the top, and is designed to keep the classes separated and antagonistic. I offer these thoughts as an exercise in understanding.

I hope this paper helps women with working-class and poverty origins to identify some of the values, attitudes, and behaviors we learned during childhood. With this knowledge, we can abandon those which are no longer appropriate in our lives and those which are oppressive to others. We can recognize and cherish those others that vitalize and enhance our lives, our relationships, and our struggles to eliminate the oppression of all women. I want poverty and working-class women to recognize when our "out of sync" feeling comes from class differences so we can let it go as “inappropriate,” when we need to, or to stand firm for what we know from our life experiences is right and true. I hope middle-class women will become more class conscious, ridding themselves of values, attitudes, and behaviors that are oppressive to working- and poverty-class women and to the hidden, upwardly mobile poverty and working-class women in their midst. I want them to be able to catch themselves when a woman's style, grammar, clothes, or “deportment” inclines them to dismiss the ideas she presents. I’d like to see middle-class women remember that their feeling of confidence in the “rightness” of their rules, decisions, and judgments comes, at least some of the time, from their class privilege. In these ways, all of us can learn to work, love, and relate to each other in more authentic, more powerful ways, as allies and sisters in the struggle for our liberation.

In every human society, family and society teach children the values, attitudes, and behaviors necessary for their survival. In the United States, these survival skills differ markedly

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A Plague On Both Their Houses

On the day Clarence Thomas was sworn in as a justice of the Supreme Court of the United States of America, another related ceremony was going on in New York City. The organization, One Hundred Black Women, whose membership includes well over one hundred distinguished African-American women, chose this day to honor Anita Hill, to thank her, in person, for her courage. I felt a little better for knowing that this personal “day of infamy” for Anita Hill was transformed into one of honor and respect by the thoughtful activity of her sisters.

I don’t feel a bit better about being a woman in a sexist society, however. I was demoralized by the spectacle of all those powerful men in government and the media, men whose decisions significantly affect the lives, health, safety of just about everyone on the planet, trying to say something, do something about the exposure of another man’s dirty secret. Granted, some of the demoralizing was my own fault. When the drama was over, I realized that, in spite of all I know to be true about men and government, a part of me still believed they would respond with integrity to Hill and her story of sexual harassment by Thomas. I felt, now feel, my alienation from my government in a more profoundly personal way than before the Senators confirmed Thomas. I guess I identified too closely with Anita Hill, remembering experiences with my professors and the chair of my Ph.D. committee at Cal State, Long Beach, and the university of California, Irvine, to not take their contempt and irresponsibility personally. So I had to learn again that by, for and of “the people” does not mean us women. To them, we really are a “special interest group,” like the National Rifle Association, only not as well-funded or powerful!

I suspect Wanda Baucus feels at least as demoralized and alienated as I. She is an artist, married to Senator Max Baucus, D-Montana, and a woman who has endured many episodes of unwanted sexual touching and harassment. When word leaked
The end came when Irene and Bobo were planning a big party. By the morning of the party everything was ready except for the purchase of food, drink and party favors. Bobo was going to do that while Irene was at work. When Irene returned Bobo was home, drunker than Irene had ever seen her. She was without the food, the drink, the party favors, and the dog and all the money. What she did have with her was a stranger, a man, a “new friend” with whom she spent the day drinking. She barely finished the introductions when she staggered into the bedroom and passed out. Irene was left alone with her fury and a man with a ménage a trois on his mind. He was becoming aggressively amorous, so she tried to get Bobo on her feet to help her. That was impossible. Irene had to fight him off by herself. In the time it took her to forcibly eject him from the house, Irene lost what hope she still cherished for Bobo and for their relationship. Bobo’s morning after apologies and promises were in vain. Irene packed her belongings in her Plymouth and left for good.

That was not the end of Bobo in Irene’s life, of course. Irene moved back to the rooming house, to the cheapest room, the attic. She was deeply in debt and worked double shifts often, paying for all the extravagances Bobo had bought and rented in her name. Still, whenever Bobo called or dropped by, needing cash and comfort, Irene lovingly gave them to her. When she quit getting in touch, Irene tried to find her. Years went by before she heard the news. Bobo died of liver disease, cared for by friends who found her fascinating to the end.

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Depending on one’s class origins. In fact, in our country, class origin is the predominant factor in the development of values, attitudes, and behaviors, more so than religion, sex, ethnicity, education, or geographic region. Only for American Jews and people of colors do religion and ethnicity modify the impact of class origins. This is so no matter how often we say or are told that we all learn “middle-class values.” We are taught middle-class values, attitudes, and behaviors in school, but poverty- and working-class children have already internalized their class values by then. Only middle-class children really learn values in school because, for them, learning and experience are congruent. The owning class, of course, is not educated in public or parochial schools. I think we can assume their education is congruent.

The owning class, those who own most of the wealth of the world, are the people who make policy. In this country, they make policy for a constitutional, capitalist, hierarchical democracy. Middle-class women and men are expected to be the managers of our society, to make and enforce the rules that implement the goals of the policy makers. They are expected to keep the country orderly so that business can be conducted with the least amount of interference by the workers, both the employed and the unemployed. They must set the behavioral standards most conducive to order in the society and ensure those standards are conformed to by those in their charge, the poor and working-class people.

Middle-class people are expected to embody, in their very person, the standards that poor and working-class people are supposed to emulate. To do this, middle-class children are taught to respect those standards and rules. Beyond that, they are taught to respect the authority and the right of the middle class to make, to model, and to enforce their rules. Therefore, this respect must be internalized by the middle-class child. The middle-class child is expected, not only to conform to standards of behavior set by her class, she is also expected to conform in attitude to those standards, to believe in the intrinsic value of the standards. She is expected to experience
guilt when she does not respect authority enough to conform to it. Great stress is placed on her intention when she does not conform. The question is why she did this or did not do that. Attitudinal conformity is the goal of middle-class childrearing.

The working-class child learns to obey authority, learns that disobedience gets her in trouble, gets adults in trouble, gets the family in trouble. For example, the working-class parent is less concerned about why a child stole than about the possible consequences of the act. We are taught to hate and fear the “real poor,” to be grateful that we are “not like them,” that we are “better” than they are. Children whose parents want to "better" themselves or want the children to have, the “chances” they “missed,” are urged to behave, speak, make friends, “be like” the middle-class children they know. Upwardly mobile or not, working-class parents know, and working-class children learn, that rebelliousness can bring swift punishment, expulsion from school, job loss, eviction, poverty. Outward conformity and obedience to authority is often accompanied by contempt for middle-class people.

Poor people, at present 15% of our population, neither respect nor obey the rules, nor teach them to their children. They learn to do whatever is necessary to keep themselves alive. They are contemptuous of working-class attempts to “better” themselves by following the rules, by hard work. They “know” that respectability is a veneer that covers middle-class corruption and hypocrisy. They “know” that their chances of making it rich by their wits and luck and crime are better than trying to make it by following the rules, by working long hours as day laborers for minimum wage or less.

With understanding and a commitment to change, our class differences about rules could create new ways of having a revolution. Feminists and Lesbians are attempting to change or overthrow or amend the rules of the patriarchy, that is the values, attitudes and behaviors that oppress us. But even in the Women's Liberation Movement, middle-class women usually “know” the rules by which to do this. They know the “right

her food. In fact, before Irene had made even one payment on the piano or the Afghan, she realized she was doing a lot of worrying about Bobo. She was beginning to notice that Bobo drank, that she drank a lot, and often. Then, one Saturday morning when Bobo’s check was late and she was reduced to Gallo’s cheapest, Irene was deflected from early morning amorous intentions by the sight of her lover clumsily swigging Tokay from the half-gallon jug she’d left by the side of the bed. No one was talking Alcoholics Anonymous or the Twelve Step Program in those days, but Irene knew she had a problem on her hands. Behavior she had thought of as winsome, as scatter-brained, as charmingly eccentric took on sinister overtones when seen as alcohol-induced.

Take Bobo’s attitude about the dog, for example. She walked the dog every day as she visited shops and friends and bars while Irene was at work. When Irene returned home, and Bobo was there, Kim frequently was absent. Where was the dog? Bobo did not remember. Was she left in a bar, on the street? Who knew? Unfortunately, the police often knew! They would call and Irene would drag her tired body down to the animal shelter, pay the fine, and bring the Afghan back to Bobo. Irene didn’t mind playing Knight Errant for her long-limbed princess; but what if Bobo was no more than a careless drunk? Oh dear!

Irene began to feel a heaviness in her chest. When Bobo called her at work to tell her “where the party was,” Irene found herself thinking “drunk again,” instead of feeling flattered that her elegant lover wanted her company. She began to resent Bobo’s nonchalant assumption that Irene would pay for all their living expense, including the piano, the dog and the two hundred dollar a month telephone bill on her nurse’s salary. “Why,” she whispered to herself, “doesn’t Bobo pay her share?” Anger surfaced. “Who does she think she is!” Still, Bobo was charming, and perhaps all she needed was the love of a good woman. So Irene would sigh and write to the phone and piano company and work double shifts.
the subject, had come to no conclusion, though Irene was fantasizing a trip to the pound, and a small dog curled on her lap. One evening, when the sight of the piano was no longer a shock, Irene was greeted at the door by the sound of barking, loud barking, big dog barking. Seeks friends of Bobo’s, a Lesbian couple who owned a kennel, had a year old, pedigreed Afghan, beautifully trained, that she could have for only $200. They said she could pay it out a little at a time. Irene was disappointed; but she sighed it away when she saw Bobo, with Kim on the leash, striding ahead of her as they took their walks. A woman like Bobo was meant to walk an Afghan!

For a while, Irene lived a dream come true. At work she was learning the skills for the field that was to become her lifework, the care of elderly people and the administration of facilities for such care. Her employers praised her, and her patients responded warmly to her care. She felt fulfilled and was enthusiastic about her professional future. She was on her way toward proving to her parents (and herself) that she could be a “success,” even though she was a Lesbian.

At home, she was already a Lesbian success. She lived with, slept with and made love with a princess, a princess who sang and murmured to her in French! She was learning to be comfortable with Bobo’s classy friends, to order the proper wine, to use the proper words. Once, when the lovers were coming home, disheveled and damp from a morning’s ride, Bobo voiced the desire for lunch at a very ritzy restaurant. Irene demurred, mentioning clothes and sweat. “It’s not the clothes you wear. It is the way you carry them,” Bobo insisted. “Watch me,” she said, and waltzed into the place like she owned it. Before one could say, “Katherine Hepburn,” she was seated at a table overlooking the ocean, smiling and patting the place next to her so Irene would sit close.

Irene and Bobo didn’t cook much. Irene always ate at least one meal at the hospital, had for years. Bobo’s idea of “food in the house” was saltines and peanut butter. Protein! So they ate dinner out, most often in restaurants near the apartment. Not that Bobo ate much. She worried Irene, the way she picked at way” to do the “right activity” to accomplish what they perceive to be the “right” goals for all women.

Working- and poverty-class women of colors and white women are frequently frustrated, disgusted, and angered by the use of parliamentary procedure by the more traditional feminist organizations, the National Organization for Women and the National Women’s Studies Association for example, especially when it is used to thwart our efforts to be heard. The “leadership” of NOW and NWSA are notorious for complaining that “they” (women of colors and working- and poverty-class white women) are trying to destroy “our” organization by “their” unreasonable demands.

Women, mostly middle-class, who developed what we know as “feminist process” knew how systems accomplished goals through hierarchy and rules of order. They tried to change the methods so that women could accomplish our goals by empowering, egalitarian means. We rotated facilitation, spoke from the “I” position, gave every woman her chance to speak, spoke one at a time, did not interrupt, talked about our feelings. We made decisions by consensus.

Sometimes working- and poverty-class women of colors and white women interrupted, spoke more than one at a time, expressed our feelings of excitement, enthusiasm, disagreement, anger in what was perceived as a disorderly/disruptive/violent manner. Then, often, “feminist process” became rules for behavior enforced by middle-class women for their comfort and as an example for the rest of us. A process that could be a liberating means in the struggle for the liberation of all women frequently became oppression for some of us.

Because middle-class women are expected to administer the rules, to teach adjustment, conformity, and compliance to others, their students, clients, patients, cases, clerical staff, salespersons, domestic workers and children, they are more severely conditioned to be “ladies” than the rest of us. Middle-class women are taught to express their “appropriate” feelings
in a calm, quiet, ladylike manner. They learn authoritative intonations and body language that can bring order out of chaos created by persons whose emotions, sometimes, are out of control. They learn to smile and give the impression of reasonableness and fairness in their personal and their private lives, no matter how they really feel.

The Women's Liberation Movement exposed the programming of all women, but especially that of middle-class women to be ladylike, that is, to be “out of touch” with real feelings. When middle-class feminists began to get “in touch” with their real feelings, they still expressed them in a calm manner. They didn't get angry in ways poverty- and working-class women understood: raised voices, yelling, saying words they might be sorry about later, jumping up and leaving the room. Instead, they tried to teach us to say, as they were learning to do, “I feel angry because you did …” Then, instead of giving us a chance to respond, their “feminist process” made us wait until everyone before us in the circle had their chance to speak. Then, we were expected to express ourselves by saying “I feel…” Rigid adherence to these rules controlled and eliminated passion. This process only works when the poverty- and working-class women don't really care about the issue being discussed. Our attempts to modify this process, to have it meet our needs, were, and continue to be, dismissed as un-feminist by those who “know.”

Some middle-class feminists did try to express feelings the way they thought we did. They talked tough, yelled, made threatening gestures. We thought they were acting, were insincere, were demonstrating a different form of the intellectualizing of “I feel anger because.....”

Women raised in crowds know how to talk loud, to yell when necessary. We learn to follow more than one conversation at a time, interrupt in order to get our two cents in. We communicate with our hands and faces, too. Our language tends to be colorful and descriptive. We express ourselves differently than women who grew up in large homes, where children have their own rooms, where conversations can take place in various rooms, where the families are small and nuclear, where individuals are not meal, make love and sleep, with the fire and candles their only light.

The lovers eventually decided to live together. Irene rented them a ground floor, nicely furnished apartment on the beach at 24th Street in Venice near a couple of Bobo’s friends. This was early in the fifties, and there was nothing chic about Venice then. It was a depressed area with few inhabitants and nothing gentrified, yuppyfied, upscale about it. This was even before the Beatniks came and gave the area a flutter of notoriety. And it was winter. Winter on the beach in Venice is chilly and wet, grey with fog, hushed, ghost-like. Still the apartment was nice, and Irene didn’t think she’d mind the thirty minute drive to work. She was driving a creamy yellow 1941 Plymouth convertible at the time, a real California car. The top went up and down with difficulty when it first got to Venice. Before long, with no garage to keep it dry, it was down for good. Irene had trouble that winter, trying to drive in the rain while keeping her starched uniform from giving in to the moisture. She learned to leave her car safe at the hospital. A snapshot of Irene in her uniform, capless, in that convertible is preserved forever in the film Before Stonewall.

So there they were, Irene and Bobo, settling into happily-ever-after coupledom. Bobo, who played beautifully, decided their love nest was incomplete without a piano. There was no dissent from Irene, dreaming of romantic music-filled nights with her elegant lover. She admits to being a little taken aback by her first sight of the enormous baby grand piano, blackly gleaming in the bay window, with the Pacific Ocean its background. Bobo explained that one should not compromise when choosing a musical instrument. As for the price, that was no problem. She hadn’t bought it, only rented it, using Irene’s name and place of employment. Seems you had to have a job or credit to rent a Steinway. Irene was delighted by Bobo’s acumen and quickly became accustomed to the sight of such majesty in her home. And when Bobo played…. Ah, bliss!

To complete their little family, the two honeymooners decided they needed a dog. They had a few conversations on
husband did something for a living that kept him away from home most of the time. Irene believes the wife probably lived a Lesbian life before her marriage. Mary seemed too comfortable with her Lesbian tenants to be inexperienced. Every morning and evening, except when Jake was home, Mary and her tenants sat around the kitchen table drinking coffee and smoking while kibitzing for hours about love and romance and work and clothes. It was not unusual for lovers to stay overnight in the bedrooms, and with no raised eyebrows greeting them in the morning! The women entertained in the living room on the wide, shaded porches and in the tree and flower-filled back yard. As for the daughters, they moved through the house and the women, stopping to talk, or not, as if living with Lesbians was the norm. Mary’s place housed mostly single Lesbians. Now and then a couple would move in and stay a while, but not often. More frequently, a woman became coupled while living at Mary’s and left to set up housekeeping with her lover in a place of their own. That's what happened with Irene and Bobo.

Bobo came to the house in her riding clothes, a guest of one of the residents. Irene saw her and heard her speak and was reminded of Katherine Hepburn. She was overcome with a variety of desires, all of them burning. Bobo responded appropriately and, before the week was over, they were an item. Bobo, who was living with friends in the Valley, began sleeping over sometimes. Sometimes Irene joined her at the friends’ house. However, Bobo had the key and permission to use a place belonging to other friends. The house, old, vacant and for sale, was in an orange grove at the far western end of the Valley in horse country; Chatsworth. Bobo taught Irene to ride a horse. She bought Irene jodhpurs and English riding boots, boots that Irene kept more than thirty years, long after they were unwearable, as a reminder of those heady days. Sometimes, on weekends, after riding, they would go to that orange blossom-scented house, build a fire in the fireplace, unroll their sleeping bags in front of it, and eat their picnic competing for attention. These differences are interesting. They need not be oppressive in our groups or in our love and friendship relationships.

White middle-class women's unconscious assumption of “rightness,” their arrogance, often silences poverty- and working-class white women and women of colors in feminist and Lesbian organizations, friendship circles, and love relationships. Some of us conform, agree, “pass,” manipulate consciously for our own financial, career benefit, for love and friendship. Others of us do this unconsciously, living out our internalized oppression, still hoping to become the ideal woman we've been imitating, always on edge, out of sync, afraid of being “found out” and “disgraced.” The rest of us join organizations, make friends, become lovers across class lines, then argue, feel hopeful, hopeless, furious, and despairing; or we give up the struggle again and again and again as matters of feminism and love move us.

Financially privileged people of colors and Jews know how easily racism and anti-Semitism can sweep away privilege. This knowledge causes them to have some of the values, attitudes, and behaviors common to people of colors and white people whose family of origin is working- or poverty-class. Their privilege simply allows them to live in a more “affluent neighborhood” in “Scare City, U.S.A.” than the rest of us. Our growing up is a lesson in living with scarcity (living in Scare City). For some of us, food was scarce, or clothes, or space in the bed or at the table. Some did without beds or tables. Some had just enough of everything, except maybe underwear and shoes. Some of us had parents who were skilled workers, putting money away for the rainy day, the next depression, the factory closure, the crop failure. Most lacked regular medical and dental care, did not get music or dancing lessons or go to summer camp.

Some of us are in and out of foster homes, relatives' homes, reform school, or juvenile hall. A lot of us did some,
much, or most of the care for younger siblings, the cooking, grocery-shopping, housework. If we had jobs, most of us had to give all or some of our earnings to the family. Some of our parents worked more than one job at a time, some of our mothers did ironing and child care in our home. Few of our parents did “volunteer work,” unless for the church or the trade union. Our working parents usually were paid by the hour, were sometimes injured on the job, often had special work clothes or uniforms, and experienced or feared layoffs or seasonal, intermittent, or chronic unemployment. Some of us lived on welfare or “relief.” Some of us stole, and so did our parents.

The fact or fear of deprivation, the experience of “never enough,” of making do, of resources carefully counted, apportioned, and stretched to meet needs, of limited time and space, of doing without, develops an attitude, a feeling state of scarcity that can haunt poverty- and working-class children all of our lives. This internalized feeling state of scarcity makes us very different from middle-class women. The difference can be described as growing up knowing there was more cake in the kitchen if you didn't want a piece at dinner, or knowing if you didn't eat it now, it would be gone. It is the difference between “there's more where that came from” and “a bare cupboard,” between an internalized belief in abundance and internalized scarcity.

Women raised in “Scare City” have our own food issues to add to the issues common to all women in our country. We try to eat everything on our plates, even if we don't like it. We worry about getting enough to eat. We bring a stash of food when we attend conferences, festivals, gatherings that include meals. We feel anxious in food lines at such events, worry that the food will give out before we get our share, take less if it looks like there won't be enough for those behind us, wish the organizers would serve “family” style. When Lesbian-feminists first made vegetarianism a feminist issue, I was angry, called it a “middle-class affectation.” I know better now, but I still equate meatless meals with poverty. I've not been able to change that yet, and I suspect this attitude is horses. Over the years, complaints about her treatment of her employees and her neighbors when she was drinking, and when she was not, multiplied. Finally, after she rode her horse into church during Sunday mass, the Mexican government acted. She was expelled from the country and forbidden to return.

How Bobo felt about this expulsion, or the one from her family, she never revealed. Booze had become her family and her country. From it she received unconditional acceptance; and for it she would do almost anything. She was charming when drunk, not as charming as when she was sober, but still charming. She had the knack of making friends and attracting lovers. After Mexico, she acquired few possessions, no more than fit into two suitcases and a steamer trunk. She spent her stipend on “entertainment.” For food and shelter and other mundane needs, she visited friends and “stayed a while.” She had learned to “travel light,” though, to tell the truth, she seldom had to leave in a hurry. Bobo was the kind of woman who inspired an almost irresistible desire to “help” in the hearts of other women.

When Irene first met Bobo, she didn’t know that Bobo’s primary relationship was with alcohol. Irene was twenty-five at the time and fancied herself a sophisticated Lesbian. She liked to think she left her naïve, self-conscious, working-class, Orthodox Jewish self back home in Pittsburgh. Hadn’t she lived almost three years in Greenwich Village before coming to Los Angeles! As for romantic adventures, hadn’t she already enjoyed more than her share? She was temporarily single, ready for new adventures, a successful, popular Dyke on the prowl.

Irene was a nurse, working in a nursing home within walking distance of the rooming house she called home. It was big, an old Victorian on St. Andrew’s Street, just south of Olympic, with three floors and an attic, and many large rooms and porches. The family who owned it, wife, husband and two adolescent daughters, occupied all of the first floor and part of the second. The rest of the house was filled with Lesbians. The
Bobo

When Irene talks about her, she always says Bobo was a fascinating woman. Bobo was born and raised rich, Eastern seaboard rich, horsey set rich. She had every advantage, including the finest education available to women at that time. Her speech, her bearing, her arrogance all reflected her privileged background and upbringing. She was tall and slender, long-legged and fair-skinned, a woman for whom riding clothes, jodhpurs and knee-high boots were designed. She looked like the American aristocrat she was bred to be.

Bobo was a Lesbian and refused to live the life she was born into. That's about all we know of her youth. Was she a scandal in college, charming sorority girls into her bed? Did she shock her family and their social set by flagrant behavior with parlor maids or other long-legged aristocrats? We can be sure, because of her later well-developed flair for the dramatic, that her behavior must have created talk. Poor Bobo! She was born too early or too late. One could imagine her in Paris in the twenties, a valued addition to the Natalie Barney circle of Lesbian expatriates, riding with them down the Champs Elyssee on a horse. Had she come of age in the sixties, she might have led a Women’s Liberation Movement march down Fifth Avenue riding a horse and waving a lavender banner, “DYKES UNITE! DYKES IGNITE!”

Bobo grew up in the twenties and thirties. The Roaring Twenties were over. Pre-World War II Depression days was a time of worry and fear, not flamboyances. This was not an era of tolerance for the antics of rich eccentrics, Lesbians or not. For reasons we can only guess, Bobo took to the bottle young. Was that why her family decided they had had enough of their erratic girl? We know they gave her the choice of behaving herself in familiar surroundings, or receiving a monthly stipend for life somewhere far from home. She opted for exile and the cash. Portends of war kept her from world travel, the more usual occupation of aristocracy’s remittance “men.” Bobo went to Mexico instead. She leased a ranch and raised underneath much of the resistance to vegetarianism in the Lesbian-feminist community.

Everything relating to money and material possessions is emotionally charged for those of us who were raised in scarcity, but who live our adult lives in a middle-class environment. In our childhood and youth, we sometimes, often, or always experienced shame and humiliation about our clothes, our house, our neighborhood, especially if we had privileged friends, and/or were the “poor kids” of our high school or college. To us, even now, having the “right” clothes is so anxiety-producing that we can’t bear to shop, wear the same “good” clothes for years, affect a “style” of our own, compulsively buy clothes and/or never go anywhere unless we are sure we will be properly dressed. Not to be “properly dressed” implies that we are “too poor” to wear the “right” clothes or too ignorant or have “bad taste.” These are occasions of shame, to be avoided at all costs.

Of course middle-class women sometimes dress improperly for a particular event, but their embarrassment is situational, not a resurgence of internalized oppression.

Some upwardly mobile poverty- and working-class women are frugal to the point of stinginess. Some of us deprive ourselves of the “luxuries,” like Birkenstocks or tickets to a Lesbian event, in a vain attempt to have enough money in the bank to feel “secure.” Others can’t save, spend what we get as soon as we get it. We “know” if we don’t spend it now, some family emergency will occur, mother’s car or sister’s teeth, and the money will be gone anyway. Others save and save and then splurge or give the money away. Sometimes we buy something, a car, for example, and get one with a stick shift because it is cheaper, even though we want an automatic and even though we can afford it! Or we will buy a refrigerator without the icemaker we really want, not because it is “frivolous” or because we cannot afford it. We pull back because we feel like “spendthrifts,” and that makes us feel guilty, guilty! These behaviors are mostly irrational responses to internalized oppression, to our internalized belief in
scarcity. They are different from the behavior of middle-class women who are thrifty or who are simply poor money managers.

When upwardly mobile poverty- and working-class women need to borrow money, we resist asking middle-class friends. We know that somewhere inside middle-class women is the belief that poverty is the fault of poor people. We don't want to risk a friendship by asking. Better to ask one of our own, who may turn us down, but won't patronize us while doing it. It would be nice if middle-class women with a friend in need would offer to help her, in a sisterly way, and save her the feeling of shame her oppression taught her.

When we lend middle-class friends small amounts of money or objects that are not expensive, books for example, and they are not returned in a timely manner, we usually are ashamed to ask for their return. Asking causes us to feel petty, small, “in need.” After all, our friend treats the situation as minor, else she would return what she owes, wouldn't she? We feel ashamed that we remember the debt she has forgotten.

Women from poverty- and working-class families have mostly poor people or people with limited means for relatives. These kinds of people often cannot afford health or auto insurance. Their savings “for a rainy day” disappeared in the last storm. These are ordinary people whose lack of material resources escalate family problems to one family crisis after another. They expect, and usually receive, help from their upwardly mobile daughter, aunt, or grandchild. It is insulting to us when middle-class women assume such families are “addicted” to crises, that they bring them on themselves. Middle-class people have their sorrows and tragedies too, but their privilege, money, connections, knowledge protects them, keeps their problems from becoming overwhelming crises.

On a related subject, the unexamined belief that formal education and intelligence are synonymous is oppressive to people denied that education by class and race oppression and is self-aggrandizing to those whose class privilege ensures an education they could not earn by intelligence. We all know the truth of this after a moment's reflection.

Looking For Lesbians

Looking for Lesbians is a hobby I share with my companion lover. It is an amusing pastime when we are at home, surrounded by women we know are Lesbians; but when we go traveling the back roads of North America in our motor home, looking for Lesbians becomes serious business. We usually stay in campgrounds in national, state, provincial, and county parks far from urban centers. As a result, we are not able to consult a phone book and then casually drop in at a local women’s bookstore, bar, center whenever we need the sight of other Lesbians. We started our RV expedition firm in the belief that “We Are Everywhere!” Over the years, we have honed our looking for Lesbians skills to a fine art, and to our delight have found us everywhere.

So what does a Lesbian look like? I smiled and smiled at a stunning, short-haired woman standing alone at a scenic view pull-off on a Vermont highway. She was wearing highly polished, flat heeled shoes, a blazer, a tailored silk blouse and sharply-creased pants. She slipped her hands, fingernails short and manicured, into her pockets and smiled back at me. We saw her again when she passed us on the road in a white Cadillac convertible with the top down. I honked and she smiled and waved as she sped by. Irene agreed the woman was a Lesbian and called me a “flirt.” She knows my fondness for the “blazer dyke” look.

The Lesbian clues here were more subtle than clothing. The fact that this Lesbian did not “soften” the severity of her clothes with a “feminine frill” was encouraging. For us, the clincher was the way she flipped that jacket behind her hip bone in an unmistakable dykely way as she put her hands in her pants pockets.

~ From Are You Girls Traveling Alone?
I think that a Lesbian who finds herself attracted to men could use the experience to better understand her still-enslaved, non-Lesbian sisters, but it is not in her best interest to go with her feeling. That is worse for her than going back to cigarettes; the odds of harm coming to her body are higher with men!

I apply the same reasoning to feelings of sexual sadism and masochism. Some Lesbians go with those feelings by incorporating humiliation, physical pain, verbal abuse and bondage into their sexual activity. This, too, is harmful to their physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health. Play-acting “scenes” which parody the sadism inflicted upon women, children, people of color, Jews, disabled and poor people, desensitizes the actors to the real humiliation, physical pain, verbal abuse and bondage suffered by a people in the bottom roles of our society. In similar ways, children are desensitized to the horrors of war and other kinds of violence by playing war, cops and robbers, and cowboys and “Indians.” Here again, feelings can’t be trusted. Like feelings for men, these feelings, if acted upon, can put women in danger.

~ First appeared in Hot Wire, 1/94

Yet uneducated and poorly educated women continue to be objects of ridicule. Grammar and pronunciation mistakes by self-educated people cause laughter in women who are otherwise polite and sensitive. Women like myself, growing up in families or neighborhoods without educated English speakers, learned "correct," mostly accentless speech the hard way, by reading and imitation. Usually, we have a reading vocabulary that is much greater than our speaking one, in part because we are unsure of the pronunciation of words. Years ago, I used the word pseudo in conversation with educated people, but pronounced it “swaydoe.” The laughter that followed taught me to check with educated allies, though I still make mistakes and cringe at the laughter.

Money issues in inter-class Lesbian relationships can be pretty terrible, especially since the middle-class woman “knows” what is right, and her upwardly mobile companion lover cannot explain her own money behavior in rational terms. The middle-class partner “knows” that they will be able to go on the Olivia cruise, for example, if they are careful in their spending and if each saves so much a paycheck. That is how she and her family managed to take vacations regularly. Her working-class partner has good intentions, but she “knows” something is bound to happen that will eat up their savings. So, when she goes shopping for a Sunday brunch for friends, she buys bagels and lox, those little pastries that cost eight dollars a pound, and three bottles of nice, not “good” champagne. An argument about money will spoil that party. Also, she is proving she can afford to feed her friends “the best,” and that she knows what is “the best” for brunch. Of course, the working- or poverty-class woman will have a hard time taking her companion lover seriously, and taking her advice, when she says, “Don’t worry. Everything is going to be fine,” upon learning the IRS threatens to put a lien on their house. This is especially true when the former has evictions and homelessness in her past.

Another class difference related to scarcity that can cause problems in inter-class love and friendship relationships is “support.” When a middle-class Lesbian expresses her support for a friend or lover, she usually does so by listening, by
sympathy, by soothing, loving words, by remembering she is having a problem, asking her how she is feeling. This behavior can leave a troubled poverty- or working-class Lesbian feeling unloved, uncared for, and unsupported. Where she grew up, “support” means sympathy, but also material help. If she's having trouble at work, she expects suggestions for solving the problem, discussions about changing her job, offers of financial assistance. If it's love problems, she expects advice, ideas to solve the problems, reminders about other women who have eyes for her. After all, that's what she gives when her lovers and friends confide their troubles to her. She knows that words are nice, but only action pays the rent! Her middle-class friends and lovers usually feel overwhelmed and unsupported by her businesslike response to their wish for sympathy and love.

Working- and poverty-class women worry about the finances of organizations and groups of which we are members, while our middle-class sisters are nonchalantly ordering a better grade of paper for the flyers. Class issues of scarcity and abundance need to be discussed in order to have a spending policy all the women can be comfortable with. We argue with middle-class women about requiring “proof of need” (which implies “merit,” like the deserving or the smart poor) to be eligible for sliding scales and fee reductions, and work exchange, by which poor women do much of the work that all the women attending the event would have been obliged to share. These issues are especially difficult for us because we know from experience that women who need assistance are seldom the ones who “take advantage” of financial aid.

Work itself is a class issue. Working- and poverty-class women “know” what work is. We saw our parents or our neighbors work or come home from work. We “know” work is physically hard, often dirty, sometimes dangerous, and always exhausting. Sometimes work is interesting, but usually it is not. Work is where you go even when you feel terrible unless you have a job that allows sick days. Work can ruin your health and

Resources and Off Our Backs. Gloria Steinem liked my book enough to write about me and my writing in Revolution From Within, and let me quote her on the new cover of the second printing. Robin Morgan told me that she and her lover fell in love with me while reading my book. (Now, isn’t that a reason to write!)

I was fifty-nine years old when Are You Girls Traveling Alone? was published. Its publication fulfilled my lifelong ambition to be a “real” writer, to have a book published. The book fulfilled another need, one I didn’t know I had. I have been an active participant in the adventure known as the Women’s Liberation Movement since 1969. I have done just about every type of action except menstrual extraction, but there is no record of that work. Are You Girls Traveling Alone? Adventures in Lesbianic Logic is tangible, material, durable proof that I was here, doing my share, at this crucial time in history, when women/Lesbians were creating our freedom. I love knowing my name will always be on the book lists, somewhere, as long as there are books.

But what about the Lesbian who says she has met a wonderful, “special” man for whom she has strong feelings? She thinks she should go with these feelings. When I express horror at the prospect, she says I am no better than the Jerry Falwells who do not want us to act on our Lesbian feelings. This line of reasoning is the result of faulty logic. Living a lesbian life is good for women. Lesbians are physically and mentally healthier, are happier, more self-reliant, more independent, enjoy higher self-esteem and a more satisfying sex life than women who relate to men. In addition, relating to men is dangerous. Women who relate to men suffer physical, mental, emotional and spiritual abuse regularly. Even those “special” men we hear about drain a woman’s energy, insult her intelligence and expect her to serve them as their “privileged domestic,” (a term I’ve stolen from Dr. Joyce Brothers who coined it in her 1984 book on men).
experience. In the two and a half years since the book’s been out, I have received no nasty letters, not a one. Isn’t that odd? I am still not used to the absence of character assassination and vilification. Readers say my love for Lesbians comes through in the book. It warms them. I don’t know if that’s the reason for the loving response my book is getting, but I am grateful for it. Radical and not-so-radical Lesbians are giving the book to their mothers, sisters and non-Lesbian friends so they can get the “feel” of what it is like to be a Lesbian. I can hardly believe it. I keep hearing how funny the books are, how Lesbians read it out loud to each other, and laugh. Women who don’t usually read books say they can read my book because the selections are short. I have actually received fan mail! After years of writing in what seemed to be a mostly hostile environment, I am joyful in the knowledge that Lesbians are reading and enjoying my work.

During my years of Lesbian feminist political action, I have been very lucky to become acquainted with Lesbians whose work enriches the Lesbian community, Lesbians who encouraged me to write. Some of them have praised the book in print. I am a mostly unknown writer, published by a very small press, so their endorsement helped a lot in selling my book. Their willingness to put their praise in print has had a profound effect on me, personally. Now I feel like the professional writer I am. Marilyn, author of The Politics of Reality and Willful Virgin, wrote the introduction to the book and organized it into chapters. Julia Penelope, author of Call Me Lesbian and co-editor of Lesbian Culture, Finding the Lesbians, Found Goddesses, and the Coming Out Stories; Alix Dobkin, singer, songwriter, educator and writer; Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin, authors of the classic, Lesbian/Woman; Catherine Odette, publisher of Dykes, Disabilities & Stuff; and Sandra Pollack, essayist and editor of Politics of the Heart, all wrote blurbs for the back cover of the book. Jan Meyerding, essayist and peace activist, and Carol Anne Douglas, author of Love and Politics and long-time member of the Off our Backs collective, wrote reviews praising the book for Lesbian

kill you. Most upwardly mobile working- and poverty-class women feel like frauds in our middle-class jobs. The jobs are not really work to us. We feel guilty about the money we make, so much more than our parents made for standing on their feet all day and taking abuse. Women like us tend to work too hard and work when we are sick. We usually do not respect middle-class women when they complain how hard their jobs are, when they stay home from work for “mental health” days. If we could overcome our prejudice and follow the example of our middle-class sisters, we might live longer, healthier lives.

Part of the problem women like myself have with work and some middle-class women is their belief that they, and their families, “worked hard,” and, therefore, “earned,” and so “deserve” the status and money and refinements they enjoy. We grew up with people who worked hard, who worked long hours, and did without things others consider necessities, who suffered and died to provide for their families. For their efforts they received little money and no refinements or status. Is this what they “earned,” what they “deserve”?

When middle-class women ignore the advantages their class privilege provides, they erase the power of class oppression in their imaginations, but leave it flourishing in the material reality of poverty- and working-class women's lives. We all become equal in opportunity, but inferior in achievement. This erasure by middle-class feminists is particularly painful because of our continuing common struggles against the societal erasure of sexism and racism and their effects on the aspirations and achievements of all women. We must unlearn classism and learn to cooperate across class lines, respectfully sharing our privilege, knowledge, and experience with each other before our actions will reflect our rhetoric. Free our sisters! Free ourselves!

NOTES

The Hidden Injuries of Class, by Richard Bennett and Jonathan Cobb, and Worlds of Pain: Life in the Working-Class
Family, by Lillian Breslan Rubin, are well worth reading. For those of us who were encouraged by our teachers to rise above our origins, Hidden Injuries, although written about boys and men, is particularly insightful. Fear of Falling: The Inner Life of the Middle Class, by Barbara Ehrenreich, is an interesting, witty, brilliant, scathing analysis of the middle class by one of its own.

This paper began as the introduction to an experiential, two hour workshop on class created by the working- and poverty-class Lesbians on the Califia Community Collective, of which I was a founding member, in Southern California in 1975. Califia Community, named in honor of the brown-skinned goddess for whom California was named, was a feminist educational organization that did much good work during its ten-year existence. Three articles about Califia Community and the programs and processes we created, including how we did the class presentation, are included in Learning Out Way, edited by Charlotte Bunch and Sandra Pollack, published by Crossing Press.

In its present form, this paper owes much to the insight, clarity, ideas, and editing skills of Irene Weiss, a working-class woman and my companion lover, with whom I have discussed and argued class issues for many years.

Lesbians who choose to wear cosmetics, dresses and high-heeled shoes, they are not passing as heterosexuals, are harsh too, though they are not as condemning as the letters I get from Lesbians who disagree with my belief that Lesbian sadomasochism and Lesbian sex are two different behaviors.

I seldom get letters of praise from readers of “Lesbianic Logic,” and when I do, they are usually sent to me, personally, not to the letters section of the paper. I am puzzled by this difference in letter writers. Once I received a letter, at my house, from a Lesbian who wrote dreadful letters to the LN about me all the time. She sent a sealed, stamped envelope for Jinx to address and send on to me. She wrote, “I loved your column, ‘Looking For Lesbians,’ thought it was one of the funniest things I ever read.” Why didn’t she send that to the paper for everyone to read? Another letter-writer said, “After reading your column, ‘Homophobia and Death in the Closet,’ I came out to my mother. She is fine about it. Thank you.” I wished I’d read her letter in the pages of the LN, instead of in the privacy of my kitchen. I’m told that people who agree with a columnist seldom write letters to the editor. Still, for years, I worried that the only Lesbians who liked what I wrote were my companion lover, Irene, Diane Germain, a few Lesbian writers I’d heard from, a stranger or two, and two of my three Lesbian sisters.

Then, in June, 1991, Clothespin Fever Press published a collection of the best Lesbian News columns from my first eight years, Are You Girls Traveling Alone?, Adventures in Lesbianic Logic. (The title is taken from one of my columns about the adventures Irene and I enjoyed while RVing Lesbian style). We attended the American Booksellers Association’s national convention, in New York City, to witness the book’s debut. I was breathless with excitement. I signed my book for almost two hundred people. – Be still my heart!

So far, every woman who mentions my book says she loves it! I am ecstatic about this change in “feedback.” Giving readings and signing books in fifty-some bookstores and coffee houses around the country has been a most gratifying
is a weird experience. I can read one of my pieces, say, “This is good, really good,” and not feel like I’m showing off. However, when I am unhappy about the way a piece turned out, I feel covered with shame each time I see it.

Being an opinion columnist is an interesting adventure. Usually, I won’t know when someone is mad at me for something I wrote -- in last month’s column or in one I wrote last year or even ten years ago. As a result, I’ve had some unexpected and unpleasant encounters at parties and meetings. I’ll see a Lesbian I know, or one I don’t know, and I’ll smile and make eye contact. I’ve been doing that all my life and I almost always get a smile back. Since I’ve been writing my column, the recipient of my smiling attention sometimes returns eye contact with a squint, a scowl, a cold shoulder or an angry retort. At a small dinner party I attended, one of the guests, a stranger to me, was a Lesbian whose homophobic son had stormed out of her life when he turned eighteen, never to be heard from again. She was heart-broken and guilt-ridden about the situation. My column describing the reasoning which led me to absent myself from my son’s wedding had enraged her. When she realized who I was, she was after me, trying to get me to admit I was a “bad” mother, turning every subject of conversation into a dig or a lecture on mother/son relations. What a terrible evening that was.

I’ve had my share of nasty letters, too, letters condemning my opinions and vilifying my character, letters published in the papers for all to read. I’ve been described as bitter and sick, as a traitor to the women’s movement, as “worse than the Ku Klux Klan.” Most of my hate mail comes from Lesbians and married women who are defending men, in my opinion, trying to prove to themselves and others that they are not man-haters. They become enraged at the mention of our need for woman-only, girls-only space. When I suggest that living and/or having sex with men might not be physically, emotionally and politically healthy for women, married feminists, women who used to be Lesbians and now identify themselves as bi-sexual, and liberal Lesbians can get pretty abusive. Letters from

Home Sweet Roam:
RVers

Before she fell in love with a machine, Carol was a more or less conventional middle-aged woman. She was a high school teacher whose youngest of three children, a daughter, still lived at home, and whose husband, while amiable enough, was dull, dull, dull. She had a few interesting women friends, time for reading and gardening. Life was pleasant, was comfortable. She thought she was content.

Carol took a different route home from work one afternoon, and there “it” was, on the corner, in a recreational vehicle sales lot. The RV was tiny, no longer than a big car. Later, Carol was unable to clearly articulate what it was about the RV that captivated her. All she remembers is her intake of breath and pounding heart when she first glimpsed the machine. In a moment, she was parked and in the lot admiring the tiny treasure.

Inside, the micro-mini motor home was even more adorable than Carol imagined. It was a house in miniature. A bed was built over the cab of the small truck chassis, and in the seven feet wide, nine feet long, six feet high body of the unit was tucked a stove, a sink, a refrigerator that ran on gas or electric, a table with two upholstered swivel chairs, an enclosed flush toilet, a closet, a pantry, a gas heater and an electric air conditioner. Across the back stretched a six foot long, narrow couch, just right for Carol's spare, five foot, nine inch frame. There were sky lights over the bed and table and windows at the side and back. The salesperson told Carol the RV was “self-contained,” had holding tanks for fresh water and for sewage and sink water, and a second battery to power lights and the water pump. “Being self-contained means you can go to wilderness areas, to bird watch or something, and not need to hook up to water and electricity for up to a week, if you're careful.” That said, he exited the RV and left Carol alone to imagine birding in the wilderness with her new love.

Carol’s husband was uninterested in the little RV. He didn't care that one could see the stars while lying in bed, that it got fifteen miles to a gallon of gas. He did not want an RV,
didn’t need an RV and further more, neither did she! No! He would not go out to look at it, not tonight or tomorrow or anytime. And, don’t talk to him about getting close to nature. What on earth was the matter with her? Had she lost her mind?

Carol, of course, had not lost her mind. She had lost her heart. She began driving past the RV lot on her way home from work. She took her daughter and her friends to see it. She wrote for information on Oregon’s parks and wilderness areas. She did not discuss these activities with her husband.

One afternoon, the RV was gone from its corner location. Carol rushed into the sales lot and breathed a sigh of relief when she saw it in the service area being washed. The next day, she withdrew some of her retirement money from the credit union and bought the RV. That purchase was the first independent act of her 26-year marriage. Others followed. She began exploring her home state on weekends, sometimes with her daughter or friends. Often, she went alone, cherishing her solitude. Meanwhile, her husband waited for her to return to “normal,” to get over what he described as “menopausal” acting out. He was shocked when she told him she wanted a divorce, and when she got one.

When her daughter left for college, Carol spent a six month sabbatical traveling. On her return, she resigned her position, sold her house, banked the money and now lives on the interest plus her reduced pension. She’s been traveling full-time for seven years now. She enjoys her brief visits with family and friends, attends cultural and educational events, wherever on the continent they occur, and renews her spirit with weeks of “self-contained” solitude in North America’s wilderness areas. She is pleased to be sixty and eligible for Elderhostel programs. Her first Elderhostel course was a great adventure, scuba diving in the Florida Keys. Carol loves her life. She is a happy, independent, traveling woman.

Carol’s response to her RV is not unusual. Irene and I fell in love with our first RV, one that was a sister to Carol’s. We also fell in love with RVing, though we didn’t know it at the time. It was early spring in 1983. We were living in Los Angeles and realized that work and our

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Lez-Be-Opinionated

I always wanted to be a writer, but the circumstances of my life, poverty, early marriage and children, thwarted my ambition. In 1965, I divorced my husband and went to college. There, my writing skills were praised by my professors, and by the students who typed my papers in exchange for me writing theirs. When the second wave of the Women’s Liberation Movement exploded around us, I was ready to make my opinions known, in person (as a member of the speaker’s bureau for the Orange County Women’s Liberation Movement Center) and in print. I sent articles and letters to the editors of feminist and Lesbian publications, and many of them were published.

Over the years, I achieved a certain notoriety for my spoken and written opinions, opinions I considered to be logical, reasonable Lesbian feminism. In 1982, Jinx Beers, founder and publisher of the Los Angeles Lesbian News, suggested I write a monthly opinion column for the paper. I was thrilled and said “Yes” quickly, before she changed her mind. I have written for the LN ever since. I’ve also written for New Directions For Women, MS, and many other Lesbian and feminist newspapers, magazines and journals. “Lesbianic Logic,” my column’s title, came from the unique imagination of Diane Germain, cartoonist and founder of Intellectuals Anonymous.

If it hadn’t been for Jinx’s offer, I would have remained an amateur writer. A deadline, and the fear that Jinx might cancel the column if I missed a month, kept my laziness in check. To tell the truth, I’d much rather read than write. I’d much rather talk my ideas than write, as well. In fact, I usually hate to write, in part because I never learned to type. However, I do love to “have written,” love seeing my name in print. What an ego trip writing is! Once the column appears in the paper, I usually feel completely separate from it, as if its creation happened by magic. I forget the misery I suffered while writing and editing the piece, over and over and over again. It
turn on those of us who won’t be compromised or co-opted. “Sappho Save Us!”

Because Lesbians/women are everywhere, our issues include those specific to all women and Lesbians, control of our bodies, for example, plus the issues of all other oppressed people, since at least half of us are women: racism, anti-semitism, class, ablebodiedism, ageism, plus peace, pollution, and everything else.


Lesbian and feminist political activities kept us too busy. We needed to get away once in a while. A friend offered us her truck camper (a small RV which slides into the bed of a pickup truck). We went to the Anza-Borrego Desert State Park. We took long walks, watched the desert flowers bloom, sat in lawn chairs, reading by the side of a stream. When it rained, we were cozy in Bev’s little house. Except for the sound of the park ranger’s truck, as he made his daily rounds, the only noises we heard were natural ones: birds, wind, rain, the stream, critters rustling in the thickets. Each of us have always lived in large cities and had not “communed with nature” before. We were surprisingly content.

Home again, we were restless and discontent. We wanted a truck camper. Irene’s (early) retirement money and what I earned teaching part-time could not stretch for payments on a truck and camper. Then, luck intervened. A woman’s $7000 loan we had given up as lost. Quick, before we could do something “serious” with the money, we began looking for a used, $7000 truck camper. We found our tiny, used motor home instead. It was love at first sight.

We continued to be too busy to get away. We started saying, “It would be easier to leave for three months than for three days.” Then we talked about six months, then a year. A friend put us to the test. Her sister was coming to L.A. for post-graduate work and would rent our house for a year. Were we interested? HAH! By August 24th, we had settled our affairs, had wills, living wills and medical powers of attorney drawn up, and were on our way. If we hate RVing, we reminded each other, we could rent a couple of rooms in San Francisco or New York City.

~ First appeared in MS in May/June 1992
Sort of a Love Story

The two women I most respect and admire of all the many women I know are my present and former companion Lovers. They are powerful, loving, gentle and independent women. Both are life-long Lesbians who never married or tried to pass as heterosexual. They successfully defied the power of poverty, sexism, anti-Semitism, racism, and homophobia to limit their lives and grind them into submission and passivity. They educated themselves, supported themselves, and, against all the odds, became leaders in their professions. Their success did not make them hard: they did not develop an “I did it, why can't you?” attitude. Instead, their suffering engendered in them an empathetic consciousness, causing them to do what they could, personally, professionally, and politically to alleviate those oppressions for themselves and others. At present they are more or less retired, and are employing their formidable talents and abilities to foster the liberation of all women. To me, they exemplify the truly womanly woman.

Womanly woman! What image does the term WOMANLY WOMAN evoke in the mind of the reader? I would not be surprised if the image was much different from mine. Men have been defining WOMAN and WOMANLY for so long that we have difficulty seeing beyond their corruption of our very selves. I suggest that the time to begin is long overdue.

Over one hundred years ago, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, one of the founders of the first women's liberation movement, wrote and spoke on the subject of womanliness. Her words are as poignantly pertinent today as they were in her time.

“Some men tell us we must be patient and persuasive; that we must be womanly. My friends, what is man’s idea of womanliness? It is to have a manner which pleases him -- quiet, deferential, submissive, approaching homophobia and sexism might be causing their vehemence, that such Lesbians might feel less “queer” when their political and/or social life is heterosexual. In other words, they may be Lesbians, but they are not the “queerest” of the “queers,” not those separatists, always carrying on about Lesbian/women-only space, not-- shush! -- manhaters. When we object to the addition of men to Lesbian/women-only projects, events, etc., or the removal of the title “Lesbian” from a project, etc., that is going coed, perhaps we remind some Lesbians that they are, or at least had been, enjoying separatist space, Lesbian/women-only space. If they don’t do something, defend men’s rights to be wherever they want to be, and/or condemn our desire for Lesbian/women-only space, some women may feel “wrong,” even “queer.” After all, taking care of men’s physical and emotional needs is “women’s work.” In addition, working with men’s interests is “normal” work for women. Men “respect” us for it. That work is always more important, offers more attention, praise, money, legitimating for women than working with and for women, even in the Gay community. Just think about the Girl Scouts, women’s athletics.

I believe the divisive issue in the Women’s Liberation Movement, for Lesbians and non-Lesbians alike, is not separatism. Separatism is the smokescreen, the reversal. The divisive issue for us all is men. I know that other movements of oppressed people have a similar issue about how to relate to members of the oppressor class. However, I doubt if there is any class of oppressed people who take better care of our oppressors than Lesbians/women. We expend a lot of time and energy trying to have a revolution, trying to liberate ourselves and our sisters without hurting the feelings of the class of people who oppress us personally and institutionally. We are not even supposed to mention who they are. We do not even have a pejorative term for those of us who support our oppressors, who take their side against us, who work for their projects, who praise them for their least good will, who put that ahead of the interests and desires of our own people, who
visible Lesbian community, in its multiplicity, for more than twenty-five years. What have we, and our women-centered achievements and activities, to do with racial violence and hatred?

I am curious about Lesbians who get so angry at Lesbians like me. Plenty of Lesbians do political work with men and have Gay men friends without being bothered by the lives or politics of Lesbians like me. They don’t carry on about the “divisiveness” of our support and endorsement of time and space for Lesbians/women/girls to work and play separate from men. We don’t harm any Lesbians/women by the way we live our lives. So why do some Lesbians get abusive when Lesbians like me suggest Lesbian/women-only time and space is good for us? Understanding their attitude is really beyond me.

I grew up with four sisters, went to schools with nuns, who live in woman-only space, attended a girls’ high school. I was married for years, so I socialized mostly with women. I’ve always loved woman/girls-only space. Lesbians whose lives have been different from mine suggest that internalized

Amazons On the Move 1970ies

him as a subject does a master. He wants no self-assertion on our part, no defiance, no vehement arraignment of him as a robber and a criminal… While every right achieved by the oppressed has been wrung from tyrants by force; while the sorriest page on human history is the outrages on women -- shall men still tell us to be patient, persuasive, womanly?

What do we know yet of the womanly? The women we have seen thus far have been, with rare exceptions, the mere echoes of men. Man has spoken in the State, the Church, the Home, and made the codes, creeds, and customs which govern every relation in life; and women have simply echoed all his thoughts and walked in the paths he prescribed. And this they call womanly! When Joan of Arc led the French army to victory, I dare say the knights of England thought her unwomanly. When Florence Nightingale, in search of blankets for the soldiers of the Crimean War, cut her way through all orders and red tape and, with vehemence and determination, commanded those who guarded the supplies to “unlock the doors and do not talk of proper authorities when brave men are shivering in their beds,” no doubt she was called unwomanly. To me, “unlock the doors” sounds better than any words of circumlocution, however sweet and persuasive. I consider that she took the most womanly way of accomplishing her object. Patience and persuasiveness are beautiful virtues in dealing with children and feeble-minded adults, but when dealing with those who have the gift of reason and understand the principles of justice, it is our duty to compel them to act up to the highest light that is in them, and as promptly as possible.”

I am positive that Elizabeth Cady Stanton, wherever she may be, looks with admiration and respect upon Irene Weiss,
Lynne Harper, and all those other powerful, womanly life-long Lesbians in our community who, instead of being “mere echoes of men,” are demonstrating in their lives new definitions of WOMANLY. I am sure she sees them, as I do, as a foreshadowing of the women of the future. It boggles the mind to contemplate what such women might have been if so much of their psychic and physical energy had not been needed to overcome their multiple oppressions. If these are womanly women, can we imagine what Woman Power is on the horizon?

NOTE
Readers who wished to discuss, argue, exchange ideas, or learn more about the subjects in these columns, joined in discussions through the Southern California Center for Women's Education: Lesbian Rap Groups, Women’s Herstory, Feminist issues.

~ First appeared in Lesbian News, page 11

Lesbian/Women-Only Space and the Ku Klux Klan

I am continually puzzled by the aversion some Lesbians express toward the very idea of intentionally doing or having a something, an event, a chorus, a political activity, a festival, only with Lesbians/women and girls. I am even more puzzled by their hostility toward Lesbians like myself, who prefer to socialize with women, to spend our entertainment money on events for women only, to do business with Lesbian/women owned businesses and workers, to use our resources for Lesbians’/women’s political work. We experience our behavior as a powerful celebration of our woman-selves, our Lesbian-selves. Also, we think it is good politics to support working Lesbians/women whose gender, sexual preference or politics limit their opportunities to make even the 70 cents to the dollar (2012 figure is 84 cents) that men make. We believe, as well, that it is in the best self-interest of Lesbians/women to work on issues that affect our own lives just like other oppressed people do.

I don’t understand why our desire to be with, to work with and for Lesbians/women only, infuriates some Lesbians enough to write such terrible statements as, “…I have about as much desire to be in your womyn-only space as I do a Ku Klux Klan rally.” (Letters, Lesbian News, March, 1991). To equate us with the Ku Klux Klan is the profoundest of insults. Such a comparison is also a profound insult to all African-Americans, and to other peoples of color and Jews (especially those who are Lesbians) who have been targets of the Klan’s hatred and violence. The equation trivializes, erases, the murders, rapes, tortures, mutilations, lynchings, bombings, imprisonments, intimidations, burning homes and crosses and all the other outrages of the Klan during its hundred-some years of terrorist activity in this country. Lesbians like me and my friends, and Lesbians unlike me and my friends, birthed and supported the Women’s Liberation Movement and the
conveniences. She controls her epilepsy, more or less, with drugs and lives with their side-effects and the ever present danger of seizure. She does not drive.

Connie and Rebecca, both in their late thirties, have been Companion Lovers for several years. Their house is large enough for Rebecca, a psychotherapist, to see clients at home without disturbing or being disturbed by Connie working on her book in another part of the house. Much of their time is “wasted” in struggle with the bureaucratic red tape, computer errors, policy-changes and life-threatening mistakes of the federal, state and county agencies which are supposed to assist disabled people to live productive and independent lives.

If ever two Lesbian-Feminists had good reasons for being too busy or too tired to do no more than struggle through their days and socialize with friends in what little leisure time remained, these two have. But, instead, they are more politically active than most temporarily able-bodied Lesbians. Connie is the founder of the Disabled Lesbian Alliance: She organized the Disabled Lesbian Conference at the Michigan Women’s Music Festival in 1981. She and Rebecca are busy revising mailing lists of disabled Lesbians, organizing actions on disabled person's issues; writing letters, articles, books and advising about disabilities, Lesbianism, feminism, attending marches and demonstration. In their “spare” time, they organize Sullivan County women and men in a Disabled in Action Group. They are “Raising Hell,” as Mother Jones put it—and having an interesting and exciting life in the process.

Because of their many activities Rebecca and Connie keep a rigid schedule. There is no “dropping in” for a visit with them. “Come to tea from two till four tomorrow, Connie said. “We are free for company then.” Feeling like frivolous idlers, we were prompt.

~ First appeared in Lesbianic Logic, Views Section page 22, 1983?

**Women’s History Month**

Due in large part to California feminist Molly MacGregor’s indefatigable energy, dedication, and sense of humor, and to the Women’s History Project she founded, March has been officially designated Women’s History Week and then Women’s History Month since 1981. As a result, feminists, historians, writers, teachers, and community activists have brought to the attention of our nation thousands of women who managed to achieve greatness, in spite of the barriers patriarchal laws and traditions imposed upon them. Because of their efforts, we have learned about women whose names and/or achievements were erased, “forgotten,” appropriated by historians, husbands and male colleagues. We have learned to assume “Anonymous” was a woman. We are re-defining the standards of excellence, honoring women scorned by those whose standard is based on the assumptions of male supremacy. We are empowered, enlivened, thrilled and inspired by all we are learning about women in U.S. history. The re-definition of “woman” that we are struggling to codify into law and establish as custom, is becoming possible, in part, because of all we’ve learned of the hidden history of women.

But what about Lesbians? The history of women includes the history of Lesbian women. Many of the women whose achievements are celebrated during Women’s History Month lived Lesbian lives, but that fact is seldom mentioned in print or in public or during Women’s History Month. All those wonderful Lesbian women, not dead, cannot come out of their closets, now that they are safe, because the usual treatment of Lesbianism, whether possible or proven, of women in history, is silence. Lesbians are accused of seeing Lesbian clues in the lives of many achieving women, and of wanting those clues interpreted in a positive, Lesbian way, as if there was something wrong about that.

We need Lesbian history for the same reasons that we need Women’s history, and more. Women need Lesbian
history to help us destroy the definition of “Lesbian” as monster, the definition which causes most Lesbians to live a double life and most other women to live lives of compulsory heterosexuality. I think many of the women who could make Lesbian history visible do not do so because they do not recognize that they will have the **choice** to live a heterosexual life, **only** when women are free to live a Lesbian life without punishment. Many women believe heterosexuality is “normal” and do not want to “normalize” Lesbians. The belief that only Lesbians are interested in reading, writing or speaking about Lesbians, that is, fear of the Lesbian label, also keeps some women from making Lesbian history visible. In addition, some women fear that even a hint of Lesbianism will invalidate the achievements of an historic woman. Therefore, when they do mention her, they “spare” her memory, her family, her fans, by covering up her “guilty secret.” In fact, they often cover it up even when she is out in print.

Barbara Deming was revered by civil rights and peace activists around the world, for her lifetime of activism and writing. She was a closeted Lesbian until 1977, when she began writing letters and articles about her Lesbianism as the source of her life’s work, now collected in *Remembering Who We Are*, (New Society Publishers, Philadelphia). In 1984, when she died, most obituaries did not mention her Lesbianism. Neither did they mention artist Jane Gapen, her companion lover of many years, in the list of family members she was “survived by.”

I know a Lesbian feminist who moved to another state recently. She had a long, anxious time finding another teaching job. At last, she was hired to teach creative writing and theater, her specialties, at a small, private high school. One day, Paula was in conversation with her principal, with whom she is on good terms. The subject was pornography. Paula was talking about MacKinnon/Dworkin’s ideas about suing pornographers for damages, when the principal said, “My husband thinks you have Lesbian tendencies.” Paula stopped breathing. The principal laughed and then, with revulsion obvious on her face

Pagan and Kady live in a hundred and twenty acre woods, mostly maple. Their cabins are in a clearing fifty yards from a fish and beaver-filled pond. The woods are alive with animals and birds (we came upon deer while out walking—they stared at the strangers but did not run). Walking in the woods and gazing transfixed by the beauty around them takes a lot of their time. They also pump water, garden, gather and chop wood, cook (a little) and participate in the neighborly exchange of services which seems to be the norm in Sullivan County, NY’s twelve member Lesbian community. Part-time typing by Eileen and sales of Kady’s jewelry bring in enough money to keep them in food, but not enough to pay for subscriptions to Lesbian/feminist journals, *Signs*, and *Common Lives* for example, or newspapers (Kady’s been getting mail from women responding to an article of hers in *Big Mama Rag* which she hasn’t seen because she cannot afford a subscription.) Still, the time and peacefulness their life gives them for study and writing is worth it. Besides the librarian in Monticello eventually gets them the books they read.

Kady and Pagan represent us at the many marches, demonstrations, and other actions designed to show Lesbian-Feminist opposition to violence against women and to nuclear weapons, and nuclear war. Kady has been jailed many times on our behalf. She has trouble with her eyes from the flickering mercury lamps, kept on twenty-four a day during one jailing. The idyllic country life sustains these women warriors between their confrontations with those who would destroy the planet and keep us enslaved until then.

Like most Lesbian feminist activists, Pagan and Kady love their lives and cannot really understand, in their hearts, why all Lesbians are not activists. “We could trip over patriarchy in one year,” laments Kady, “if only….”

Connie Panzarino and Rebecca Clare live up the road from Pagan and Kady, but there can be no Country “roughing it” for them. Connie needs an electric wheel-chair, a respirator, and twenty-four hour attendant care to live and to do her work. Rebecca, too, needs the less strenuous life of modern
are always full. She is an out Lesbian and strolls arm-in-arm with her Beloved Companion through the campus and the town. Together she and Carolyn brave the tedium of obligatory university events. Dr. Frye and Ms. Shafer! Don’t you love it?

Marilyn’s book, *The Politics of Reality*, is just like her. It is unassuming and does not frighten a reader, new to feminism, with large unknown words or pretentious titles. It delights us old-timers with its fresh approach and new ideas. Marilyn writes with such intelligence and common sense that her work is accessible to women who are not “formally” educated. I think this book is essential reading for all Lesbians/women who are trying to understand our lives. Reading the book is a way to meet these two wonderful Lesbians. Both of them are very present in it.

By mid-October, we need another “feminist fix” so parked the camper between the log cabin home of Eileen Pagan and the pole barn cottage inhabited by Kady Van Deurs in the foothills of the Catskill Mts., New York. Pagan and Kady have famous faces in Lesbian circles. Theirs are the photographs by J.E.B. on the front cover of *Eye to Eye: Portraits of Lesbians* and on the back cover of an issue of *Sinister Wisdom*. Pagan’s the one with white hair.

Irene and I met Kady when she attended a Califia Community session in 1977. Kady, as many of you know, is the author and subject of that fascinating book, *The Notebooks Emma Gave Me: The Autobiography of a Lesbian*. Multitalented, as are so many Lesbians, Kady is a gifted silversmith as well as a writer, and is especially known for her Amazon axes. She calls herself, Kady: Axe Maker to the Queen.

Pagan and I met when we were roommates at Sagaris, the five-week feminist institute we attended in 1975 when we were both housewife/student, suburban married ladies. I visited her once, in her Levittown four bedroom, three bath house. Now she wears orange overalls, carries water from the pump and gets her writing and her face published in *Sinister Wisdom*. She revels in the change.

and in her voice, said, “I told him not to worry. You are nothing like them.” What was Paula to do? She could have said, “You must have an incorrect idea of what Lesbians are like. Most of us are loving and caring, high-minded, ethical women whose work makes a positive difference in the world.” -- and lost her job. Instead, she said, “It’s not unusual for people to believe all feminists are Lesbians, but that is not true.” Later, she told me, “I’m in a moral dilemma. I can do the work I love, only if I’m passing.” Paula is a dedicated gifted teacher. Still, she wants to find some other way to make a living. The price she pays to teach is too high.

Suppose Paula’s principal knew Barbara Deming, knew about her life. Might her attitude about Lesbians be different? Probably not. Barbara would be the exception, not like the depraved murderers, seducers and child molesters she thinks we are. Would she have a different attitude if she had learned about women in history who were Lesbians, in school, on television, in movies and books, in ordinary conversation with family and friends? If she knew about Lesbians like Jane Addams, founder of Hull House and recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize, and Carson McCullers, who wrote the play *Member of the Wedding*, and Katherine Lee Bates, who wrote “America the Beautiful,” and all the distinguished, innovative educators, writers, nurses, doctors, athletes, lawyers, scientists, businesswomen, political and social reform activists that I could list, would she have a more positive attitude toward Lesbians? Yes, I believe she would. Knowing she admired so many women who were Lesbians would shake her uninformed, grossly inaccurate beliefs about Lesbians.

Of course, if Paula’s principal learned about achieving, important women in history who were Lesbians in the ordinary, everyday way people learn things, everyone else would have learned about them, too. Lesbians would know about all those respected women in history, too, and we would feel proud. Emboldened by our proud past, we would be more likely to risk coming out. As more and more Lesbians came
out, which would happen in an atmosphere of acceptance, we would all notice how many of the admired, influential, distinguished women living today are Lesbians. Soon, everyone would know who among our family members, coworkers, acquaintances, neighbors, ordinary women, women like, admire, and even some we dislike, live Lesbian lives. The myths about Lesbians, the dreadful lie that we are monsters other women must fear, will disappear when Lesbians are free to be out without punishment. Because Lesbians do not bear any resemblance to patriarchy’s mythical Lesbian, we need do nothing, but be seen, to redefine the concept of “Lesbian.”

The process of being seen has already begun, as more Lesbians come out, in person, in print, on television, and in the courts, as we sue for our rights as citizens of the nation. However, we are becoming visible without our past to support and protect us. We need that past to give us substance as well as sustenance. The myths about Lesbians are not stereotypes gone mad. They are bulwarks of patriarchy because they teach all women to fear and dread women who are sexually and emotionally independent of men. They control women’s bodies as surely as anti-abortion laws, church and state marriage laws, rape, incest and wife battering do. Lesbian and non-Lesbian feminists have worked together on all these issues, for many years. Now, more than ever, when our increasing visibility is met with violence and hatred, we need allies, feminists who are not Lesbians, to bring the same dedication to Lesbian issues as Lesbians bring to the abortion issue.

Marilyn and Carolyn, both in their late thirties, have been Companion Lovers about eight years. They live in a more-or-less modernized farm house that is long on charm and very short on space. They are building a new front porch, doing all the work themselves. Their vegetable garden is about the size of a Southern California lot; they preserve what they grow. They are conscious of their lives as Lesbian-Feminist activists and base their decisions, including those about money, on Lesbian-Feminist principles as they understand them. Because their principles grow from respect for women, their attitudes are accepting rather than judgmental.

Carolyn is quick to smile and laugh, talkative, sharp; of white ethnic, working-class Catholic origins; a painter and sculptor of large pieces which, like their creator, attract attention. Marilyn, in contrast, seems to be a woman as precise, deliberate, understated and unassuming as impeccable middle-class WASP origins and a Ph.D. in philosophy can produce. Given food, wine, and the possibility of a difference of opinion, and Marilyn is in there with the rest of us, raising her voice, waving her hands -- unruly, and funny as hell! Irene and I loved them both by the end of our first evening together. We had three eighteen-hour days of talking feminism, talking Lesbianism, stretching minds, arguing, laughing. We’ll never forget the experience.

Marilyn is a tenured Professor in the Philosophy department of Michigan State University. In traditional philosophical circles, she delivers and publishes articles on oppression, racism, Lesbian-Feminism. She teaches courses in feminism for classes with enrollments of sixty and her classes...