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the open door



A NEWSLETTER FOR RURAL FEMINISTS AND LESBIANS

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SOME THOUGHTS ABOUT "COMMUNITY"

by Judith Quinlan

A few issues of Lesbianews ago, a letter writer was bemoaning the fact that all women seem to talk about any more is "building women's community", and she wondered whatever happened to the idea of building a women's movement? That letter started me thinking, and I agree that the concept of women's community has coincided with the psychologizing of feminism. While it's an important feminist principle that the personal is political, this doesn't mean that the political is personal. Personalizing the political has led to women judging each other's personal choices and lifestyles, as either 'feminist' or 'patriarchal'. And this has led to some terrible abuses against women in the name of feminism.

Nevertheless, "community" is an important concept, and has played a role in connecting women to each other. Living rurally, I think, gives us an opportunity to look at this concept in different ways. Luanne Armstrong's article in the last issue was an eloquent description of one kind of community- one that is not available to our urban sisters. In cities, where people are largely alienated from their neighbourhoods, a "community" is a group of like-minded people, connected by a common lifestyle or belief-system, rather than by geography. Such communities can be very empowering, but also can become very rigid and exclusive.

Women have tried occasionally to transplant the urban model of community to rural areas. The result has been the sort of women's and lesbian enclaves that exist, mostly in the U.S., where a group of women live a ghettoized existence completely separate from their rural neighbours. There is a sort of "armed camp" feel about these pockets of lesbian nation, and many of them suffer from a sort of implosion of purpose that is reflected in their growing rigidity over time. The few that have survived have done so either because one or two women have eventually built a relationship with their surrounding community, or because they are close enough to large cities to attract a constant stream of "new blood".

A woman living in a remote area has two other choices. One is to "tough out"

her isolation and work hard on her long-distance connections with other women. The other is to become embedded in her local community. If she's smart and lucky, she will do both. But this is a very different model of community than either the urban meeting-of-minds enclaves, or the dyke-utopia-in-the-wilderness communes.

This sort of community- the rural model- may not be to everyone's taste, but it offers some unique advantages and challenges.

For me, it was difficult at first to accept that everyone knew my business- there are no secrets in a rural neighbourhood! (my "neighbourhood" spans several hundred square kilometers of wilderness and ranchland). It felt threatening to me that my life was an open book, and I resisted for a while by becoming even more secretive. People accepted that and left me alone. There are lots of hermits out here- one more was hardly news! Of course that didn't stop them from indulging in the time-honoured rural pastime of speculating about me. As I gradually became more open and friendly, I found that most people were willing to accept me as I am- lesbianism and wierd Wiccan beliefs and all! This was a very liberating experience. I learned that the "community standards" had nothing to do with who I love, what I believe, or how I choose to live my life. What is valued in this rural community are independence, a willingness to work hard, and honesty.

The down side is that it takes a long time to become an "insider". I had thought that without the traditional social routes of children, family or church connections it would take longer. But I don't think that was the case. I truly believe that the fact that I never pretended to be anything but what I am - I was open about my lesbianism from the start- scored me "honesty points" in a community of hard-headed pioneering types. Out here, the poeple are proud of their "eccentrics", and gay liberation isn't exactly unknown to them- they watch TV and listen to the radio after all. They are not unsophisticated backwoods people (nobody is any more) and they all know who are the dykes and faggots among them. Most of the gay people in this area are pretty closeted, so I think it was refreshing for my neighbours to finally

be able to acknowledge one. Of course, I have no reasons to fear homophobia. I have a secure job and no children to risk losing. All the same, I think that some of our rural closets are more a matter of habit than necessity.

In rural communities, which are built on geographic proximity alone, tolerance of differences is greater, I think, than in the cities. They have to be, or we'd all be isolated. There is a sort of "behavior code" out here that I really respect. On the one hand, people keep their distance and assume that you wouldn't be here if you didn't value solitude and independence. On the other, if you ask for help, or even hint at a need, they are eternally willing to pitch in. I feel safer here than I ever did living in cities. If I'm stuck in town, I know there are people I can call to take care of my animals or stoke my fire. My door is never locked. Kids in the area know they can come and use my phone in an emergency- whether I'm home or not. I get asked to help out in community events; help with repairs to the community hall; I'm part of the "sharing" network of tools, garden produce, salvage etc. I know if I was threatened by fire, accident, wild animals or people, my neighbours would come in force to protect me. Out here I feel less isolated than I ever felt in the middle of big cities. This is now my community.

It is not, however, a "women's community", in the urban feminist sense. And I do crave the community of like-minded women. I meet this need in a variety of ways. By regular trips to cities for concentrated hits of women's "culture". By an ongoing correspondence with many women- some of whom I've never met face to face. By a regular influx of women's newsletters and journals- more than I ever read in the city. By making connections with women within a day's drive of here, who I share common interests with. And by keeping my land open to women, who come from all over to share this beautiful space, to experience the solitude, to do physical work. In many ways my "women's community" is now larger and more diverse than it ever has been before.

DEAR OPEN DOOR

Emma Joy sent me a copy of your newsletter and although I live in London, I really enjoyed it.

There is one thing that I'd like to point out about the Living Will in the winter solstice issue. The intent is good, as it should serve to clarify and make decisions easier for loved ones at a time of stress, but the wording is vague and therefore counter-productive. I refer in particular to the terms "medications, artificial means, or heroic measures." I would urge your readers to consider seriously exactly what circumstances constitute "enough is enough" for them, and word their Living Will accordingly. Would they want penicillin and other antibiotics for infection, or an oxygen tent to aid breathing, or oral nutrition and hydration? Some people consider that food and water are basics which a humane society cannot deny to anyone; others feel that nasal/oral tubes are a painful indignity amounting to force feeding.

If you don't define exactly what you mean and want, someone else will do it for you. I'm all in favour of "artificial means" to keep myself warmly alive in the winter, like central heating!

Good luck with your endeavors.

Roberta Wedge

TO WRITE...

I collect, steal
Acquire, am obsessive
about PENS.

I find drawers full of them
at work

Rolling round in the bottom of
a bag

In pockets

Many coloured

Variously inscribed

"Radisson Hotel"

"Mental Health Department"

"This pen was stolen from a lesbian"

"Union Bay Credit Union"

A story attached to each of them

If only I'd let them write it!

-by Emma Joy Crone

VOICE OF WOMEN: 30 YEARS OF PEACE WORK

Voice of Women is a feminist network of thoughtful committed women across Canada. VoW cooperates with women in Canada and other countries working for peace and social justice for all.

We believe that militarism, in all its various guises, is the basic underlying cause of women's suffering and insecurity today. War is no longer fought one-to-one on a battlefield- it is now fought indiscriminately by destroying whole cities and peoples. 80% of all war casualties in 1994 were civilians- mostly women and children.

Global arms manufacturers and dealers have no regard for human life. Poverty, family violence, mass migration of refugees, mutilation by land mines, rape and death are the consequences of militarism, war and repression, fomented and supported by the present monetary and economic belief system internationally.

Women are creators of life, not destroyers!

Women are 50% of the world's population. Voice of Women believes women must have equality economically, and in decision making. In many parts of the world today women are still considered chattels of their fathers and husbands. VoW believes that women's perspectives, abilities and experiences should be included in the agenda in international negotiations.

Women around the world long for peace.

Women's voices must be heard.

VOICE OF WOMEN NEEDS YOU- JOIN US!

All women are welcome.

Contact:

B.C. Voice of Women

P.O. Box 235

Nanaimo, B.C.

V9R 5K9

First they came for the Jews and I did not speak out because I was not a Jew. Then they came for the communists and I did not speak out because I was not a communist. Then they came for the trade unionists and I did not speak out because I was not a trade unionist. Then they came for me and there was no one left to speak out for me.

-Pastor Niemoeller (Nazi victim)

day one: Gulf war

poemless till now
i light a candle for my window
keep a vigil with my candle
pause and write
write and pause
shivering
breathing deeply slowly

i write
but words withhold themselves
scrawls still seem in short supply-
my notes are numbing tokens
hardly poems:
small comfort for my vigil

i pause again
to light another candle
for my window

will someone match my flame?

-by astra (c.)



Somalia Remembrance

In Flanders fields
the poppies wilt and die
and we remember
Why
each year
the honourable dead
still lie
uneasy
in their crenellated graves.

-by Judith Quinlan

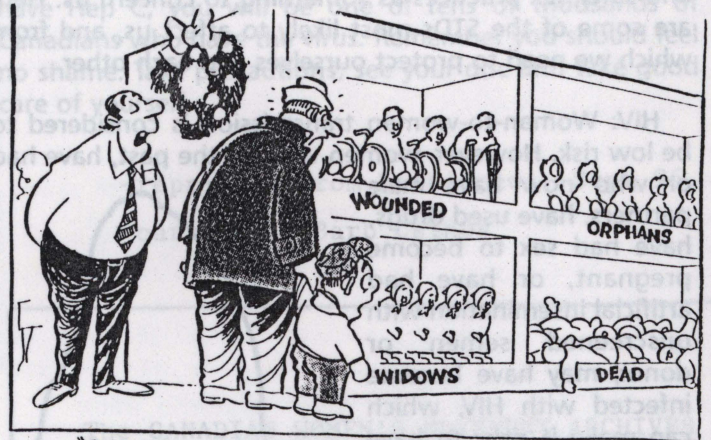
WOMEN'S EFFORT FOR PEACE

This, and the letter below, is being widely distributed to women of the world. It is not an ordinary letter, however; it represents a serious attempt to bring about lasting peace on earth.

If you agree with the contents of the letter, please sign it and send it to the Secretary-General of the United Nations. Before sending it, you are encouraged to make copies of the letter and this cover letter for as many other women as you are able to, and encourage them to use this opportunity to help bring peace to the world.

The purpose of this effort is to demonstrate the deep yearning for peace among women of the world and urge the United Nations to take steps to put an end to war. This project was initiated by a small group of women in Iceland and is not linked to any organization, political or otherwise.

For further information on this project, please write to:
Elsa Benediktssdottir
Women's Effort for Peace
P.O. Box 18,
14-602 Akureyn,
Iceland.



"BUT, SIR — YOU ASKED TO SEE OUR WAR TOYS."

To the Secretary-General of the United Nations
The United Nations, New York, N.Y. 10017 USA

WE, THE WOMEN OF THE WORLD, have observed with increasing horror, in one country after another, countless tragedies and catastrophes — the results of senseless, raging wars.

IT IS A FACT emphasized by the United Nations that most peace and human rights movements in the world are made up mainly of women. However, as the United Nations has also pointed out, women have unfortunately very little power or influence to decide about or prevent wars. Whether in victory or defeat, women and children are largely the innocent victims and their suffering at this moment has become unbearable.

THE TIME HAS NOW COME that we, the other half of humankind, will no longer tolerate war and its resulting disasters. We can remain silent no longer. War has never and will never solve problems or disagreements. Violence breeds violence. This lesson should have been learned a long time ago.

WE, THE WOMEN OF THE WORLD appeal with all our hearts to the United Nations to call together the leaders of all nations to a historic world meeting, the goal of which would be to discover, through sincere and unprejudiced consultation, the means of creating a lasting peace on earth.

WE ASSURE THE UNITED NATIONS that the establishing of such agreements for peace, safeguarded by international laws and strengthened by the willingness of all governments to abide by them, has our immediate and full support.

LET US BE THE GENERATION that will at last bring about these changes that tomorrow's generations will regard as the most significant in history. Changes which give every child in Humanity's future the hope of growing up in a secure and peaceful world.

WOMAN:
WORK:
COUNTRY:
DATE:

Playing safer -

by Taylor Margo

Lesbians are looking at sexually transmitted diseases and safer sex practices as something to concern us. Here are some of the STDs most likely to affect us, and from which we need to protect ourselves and each other.

HIV: Woman-to-woman transmission is considered to be low risk. However, women who, in the past, have had or who now have male partners, have used drugs, have had sex to become pregnant, or have had artificial insemination with unscreened semen or donor, may have become infected with HIV, which can make it risky to have contact with blood or vaginal secretions.

Prevention: The past of your sex partners - even ten years in the past, may be a risk for you now, today. A direct question does not always guarantee a true answer. Often, women infected with HIV do not know it themselves. Even if they think they may have been at risk, they may not be comfortable talking about it. The safest route to go is with "safer sex" but it is up to you to decide what level of risk and what sexual activities are right for you. HIV is passed directly from one woman to another via blood or vaginal fluids. Most women have heard about dental dams and latex gloves, but few (that I know of) are taking these precautions. After talking with a public health nurse at the Capital Regional District's (CRDs) Infectious Disease Clinic, I was advised that any use of sex toys should be safe-guarded by using one part bleach to ten parts water to sterilize them. Either that, or use a condom. In short, every time you have unprotected vaginal or anal sex on a casual basis, you are putting yourself at risk.

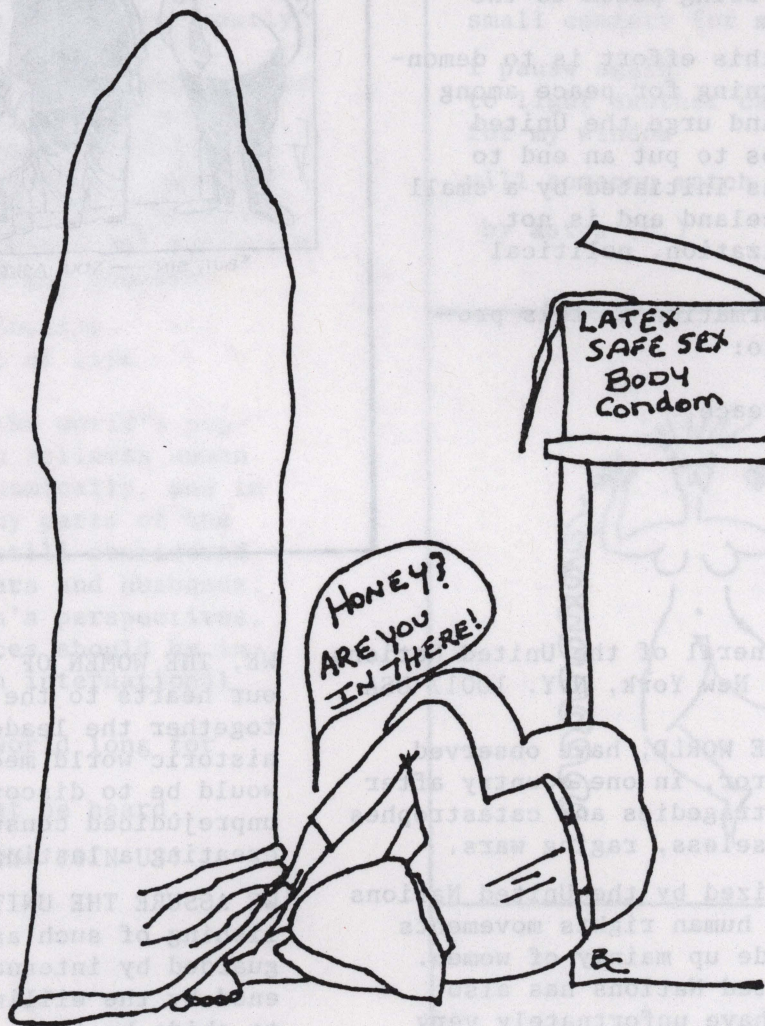
Herpes Simplex Virus: There are two herpes simplex viruses - herpes simplex type 1 and herpes simplex type 2. These viruses are very similar and either type can infect the mouth or genitals. Most commonly though, HSV-1 occurs above the waist and HSV 2 below. I wanted to make this distinction because many women are unaware that cold sores on the mouth are actually oral herpes.

Herpes is spread by direct skin-to-skin contact. So, if you have a cold sore and kiss someone, you can transfer the virus from your mouth to hers. Similarly, if you have active genital herpes, and your partner goes down on you, or there is direct genital to genital contact, you can transfer the virus. The same is true if you have a cold sore and you go down on your partner.

Herpes is most easily spread when a sore is present, but it is often spread at other times, too. Sometimes, small amounts of the virus may be present on the skin without causing any recognizable symptoms. This is called "asymptomatic shedding". Many genital her-

pes infections are spread from persons who have no symptoms at a given time but are "shedding" the virus. This virus can also be spread by people who simply don't know they are infected. I know many women with herpes who seem to always be aware of their symptoms and refrain from sexual activity, but, I've known others who unknowingly infect others with the virus because they didn't experience their usual symptoms.

Prevention: (a) Don't have sex. (b) have sex only with a



STD's and women

non-infected partner who has sex only with you—in other words avoid casual sex or play it safe. (c) In any relationship where one partner has herpes either orally or genitally, refrain from sexual contact the moment symptoms first appear. Some people notice itching, tingling, or other sensations before they see any changes on their skin. Herpes is most likely to be spread from the time these first symptoms are noticed until the area is completely healed and the skin looks normal again. (e) use a rubber dam and latex gloves if you have any doubts at all.

Hepatitis C: is one of several viruses that can cause hepatitis. It is responsible for the majority of cases of what used to be called non-A or non-B hepatitis. It is spread mostly through blood contact. Sharing needles is high risk. Before the availability of testing for Hep C there was also a risk from blood transfusions. There is also evidence for low level sexual transmission. The risk of passing it from oral sex is unknown but probably low. In general, the risk of transmitting this virus sexually is low compared to other agents such as Hep B or HIV. It is, however, diagnosed as frequently as Hep A or B. There is a test which can detect antibody to Hepatitis C virus in your blood. This test is capable of telling you if you have been infected by the virus. Unfortunately, it cannot tell you whether you are still infected and carrying the virus or whether you have cleared the virus from your system. At present, if you test Hep C antibody positive, it is best to assume that you could be a source of infection for others and to follow these precautions: Don't donate blood or organs. Never share needles with others. Discuss the matter with your sexual partner. While risk of transmission is low it is not absent. It may be best for them to be tested for Hepatitis C. If they are also positive and you are in a long-term, one-on-one relationship, it may not be necessary to change your habits. If your relationship is casual, use barrier methods of contraception, or practice lower risk activities such as oral sex and fingers. Ask your doctor for follow-up testing for signs of liver disease. Inform health care practitioners and workers. Avoid alcohol. Eat well.

Prevention: Don't have unprotected sex with your partner if she's menstruating. Don't share razor blades or toothbrushes or scissors. Don't get tattoos or pierce your body under less than sterile conditions. If you find you have Hep C, you will be one of tens of thousands of Canadians who have the virus. Remember you should feel no shame. Take precautions, see your doc and take good care of yourself.

-reprinted from Lesbianews, Sept.96

-cartoon by Barb Csinos

The CANADIAN WOMEN'S MOVEMENT ARCHIVES continues to thrive at the University of Ottawa. The CWMA contains records from the contemporary (post-1960) Canadian women's movement. These include over 2000 files on women's groups, coalitions, and events from across Canada, along with buttons, t-shirts and other memorabilia. The collection is open to the public for reference purposes.

The CWMA is a unique collection, preserving valuable records of women's history. There are many research possibilities here!

In 1997, the CWMA will celebrate 20 years of existence. We don't want the shirt off your back, but we will accept donations of *t-shirts* buttons* banners* posters* handwritten notes, minutes from women's groups* anything from women's events, projects, conferences... so check your attics, basements and drawers for archival treasures.

Send material to the Canadian Women's Movement Archives, Morisset Library Room 603, University of Ottawa, Ottawa, Ont. K1N 9A5 or call for more information: (613) 562-5910.

NOTE: The CWMA has a good collection of materials from major urban women's groups and media, but is especially interested in records and memorabilia from smaller and rural women's groups. For the sake of our daughters and grand-daughters- keep the memories alive!

GAY? LESBIAN? UNSURE?

Talk toll-free from anywhere in B.C.

at 1-800-566-1170

-information, referrals and support

Monday-Saturday: 1-4 P.M.

Mon, Wed, Fri: 7-10 P.M.

THROUGH THE EMPTY

window I see echoes of another life
phantoms surfing the wind
my belly full & alive
eclipsing my waist I am
awaiting your hands your rubbing
of kisses into my skin & under
my swaying skirts & I am
walking through a field
sun weeping light across my forehead
encircled by our land
across the field I see you
stepping through circles of grass
or maybe I am navigating through
rotting foods and buuts along the Drive
& I see you in the bakery shop
we meet on the corner eyes ripping off
the asphalt around us as I sip
from your lips and you say
"get in the Volvo baby"
your attention shimmering blue
my heart entangled on your quixotic brow
we fold ourselves into the
corduroy seats you splay
the long moments of your day onto my lap
& I sew the pieces together
handing them back to you
intact your hand slipping
onto my belly "what a kick
our little one will be feisty"

or maybe there is no child
within or outside of us yet
but our cats are lined up
three in a row
in seat belts & we ride
two in a row
in the front seat looking out
the window full of green.

-by Emilie Kirk, 1996



COWBOY BOOTS FOR WINGS LIKE MERCURY

I used to walk home
with fears that seem easy now-
will he be asleep dare I
risk the centre stair will he
smell of the liquor if I wake him?
Sometimes my friends were shadows;
I'd wake up with grass printed on my face.

Walking you home, my fears
are mad angels who fight
like children in my belly-
do you love me,
can you smell an emotion
or only imagine its decay?
Shadows take me in violence,
silent as awe-
even your voice is weak when you call.
You believe I have another lover.

Consider what it might be.

-by M.A.Eshom, 1985

IRRATIONAL NUMBERS

While you were out
I wrote you a letter
answered it myself

I liked what you
had to say
it felt like
we'd be together forever

which is a word
you would never use
even I couldn't force
onto the page.

The other day you said
you loved sixty percent of me
one hundred percent

I said six tenths then
you said that's the closest
you'd ever come
to a whole number

and there it is

me trying to write
in infinity
you just approaching
one.

-by P.A. Webb

CANADA: HUMAN RIGHTS GAINS AND SETBACKS

reprinted from "Together for Human Rights"

In a free vote on May 9, the House of Commons changed the Canadian Human Rights Act to include "sexual orientation" as a prohibited ground of discrimination.

In face of opposition within his own party, Prime Minister Jean Chrétien seemed poised once again to abandon his pre-election commitment to provide protection against discrimination for lesbians and gays. When the Canadian Human Rights Commission released its Annual Report, pointedly criticizing the Liberal government's failure to keep its long-standing commitment, Chrétien changed his mind and introduced the amendment.

The government is hardly showing courage. Over the past twenty years, eight provinces and territories have changed their human rights laws to include sexual orientation. In addition, the Ontario Supreme Court has already ruled that, in order to comply with the equality provision in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the Canadian Human Rights Act must be interpreted as including sexual orientation as a prohibited ground of discrimination.

While much attention has been given to the need to protect the rights of gays and lesbians, others have been forgotten.

Since 1986 both the Liberal and then the Conservative governments made commitments to bring in much needed amendments to strengthen the Canadian Human Rights Act. For ten years a package of amendments has been ready that would prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, political belief, source of income and a criminal offence not related to a job or service sought.

The package of amendments included an important provision to require that employers and service providers accommodate the needs of persons with a disability.

At one point the previous government was prepared to introduce the amendments - all except the inclusion of sexual orientation. Human rights groups gave the government a clear message that the package should go forward including sexual orientation, or not at all.

Now, in order to rush the sexual orientation amendment through the House and thus avoid division in the Liberal

party, the government has abandoned the other issues.

This means that the amendment, promised for ten years, which would strengthen protection of the rights of persons with a disability, has not been enacted.

This means that persons on Social Assistance continue to have no protection under the Canadian Human Rights Act. Banks across Canada, for example, can continue to discriminate against persons on social assistance, forcing them to turn to money marts, who charge exorbitant fees to cash their cheques.

Anti-poverty activists note that in the current Canadian climate, where stereotyping, prejudice and poor-bashing are more and more common, it is crucial to provide human rights protection to persons on welfare.

The long-awaited package of amendments also included important changes to the Act's enforcement system, such as creating a permanent Tribunal to hear cases. Presently cases are heard on an ad hoc basis by part-time members, which leads to delays.

Write to Minister of Justice Allan Rock (House of Commons, Ottawa, Ont. K1A 0A6, no stamp needed) and urge that the full package of human rights amendments be introduced immediately.

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

THE OPEN DOOR welcomes submissions from women on topics of interest to rural lesbians and feminists. In particular, future issues planned will include the following topics:

Inter-generational Relationships : lovers, friends, mentors etc. who are far apart in age. How do these relationships enrich us? How are they difficult? How do we manage to span the 'generation gap'?

Dykes in the Family : sisters, mothers & daughters, close relatives, who are lesbians. How does this change our family connections? Do we relate to our sister differently when she comes out? How do lesbian mums with lesbian daughters get along?

Send your writings on these topics, or any others. Hundreds of women are waiting to hear from you!!

Web of Crones



SIGHTS, SOUNDS AND SENSATIONS - A VISIT
TO AUSTRALIA JAN. 1996

-by Emma Joy Crone

"Min Mara Gun Gun" ('A Place where the spirits of Women rest'). This was the message on the brass plaque at the Pioneer Women's Memorial Fountain and Park, in Perth, Western Australia, marking the end of my six week stay on the diverse Continent.

At this park on the 18th of Feb. '96, on visiting a concrete monument depicting Maidens, Mothers but NO Crone, my friend Lesley who had discovered this omission suggested we perform a brief ritual, dedicating the space left blank to the Crones of the world, in particular our aboriginal sisters whose spirits linger in this sacred space.

It has been very hard to ground myself after this visit to the other side of the world. One filled with hospitality; visiting lands that felt the thud and thump of Kangaroos (an unforgettable sight, one morning early when I took 2 dogs for a run.)

I was met in New South Wales by a long time friend whom I'd not seen for at least 12 years, spending one night in Sydney before heading off to the Blue Mountains and Wentworth Falls- aptly named for the distinctive blue haze that enveloped this amazing sight of bush and trees- visiting the Three Sisters- monolithic rocks rising 100 feet from the floor of a valley.

Meeting many dykes and having dinners at Yvies with Alison who works on a Co-op Radio Women's Program, Margo her Duth partner, Lana working on a Restoration 'claiming the bush' program. Being taken to some magnificent caves by Debra.

I don't think I'll easily forget the diversity of climate, of birds, of land. Jarrah trees, whose wood is of a reddish brown, the forests of Keri through which we passed, the size of the gum trees, and the fact that there are 450 varieties.

LANDS SHARED BY WOMEN: We visited Moonraker Farm, in Kangaroo Valley. A valley of lush, green rolling hills, fertile from past volcanic action. Here were two women Kay and Andrea living on a 37 acre organic farm where they teach permaculture and organic gardening. We talked of LOOFAHS (Lesbians on Organic Farms as Helpers). They have a caravan and train carriage where women may stay and do work exchange or pay. They've also compiled a book- "Women Travellers Accomodation and Directory" - an essential guide for women travelling in Australia and New Zealand. (cost is \$10 Australian [about \$13 Candian] plus about \$3 for shipping and handling) PO Box 186, Berry, New South Wales, 2535. Australia. Fax: 044-651073.

They have three Guernseys, chickens (known as chucks in Aus.) and plan on horses being part of their farm at some future date.

Another piece of land shared by women, was at a place 4 hours from the Blue Mountains. Here we swam in the water hole, gave each other mud baths. Here the terrain was dry and it needed shade houses for plants- warning always that where one walked were poisonous snakes and spiders and other creepy crawlies!

Our only adventure with the wild life was bumping (literally) into an iguana in a picnic ground, where Kangaroos played when I visited my friend Fiona on the South Coast of New South Wales, where we swam in rolling surf, and where I was dumped unceremoniously on the ocean floor then tossed back up on the beach.

We then crossed the continent to Perth. Here the heat was 40 degrees (the worst in 34 years we were told), so after lying under a fan, unable to move or go out, except to visit the museum and library we headed off to the South Coast once again where cool winds prevailed.

On the way we stopped off to visit a 'cow-girl', Jennifer- a woman who works on a farm weaning cows. She looks after 80 calves and a herd of 180 cows, which she milks. We spent an enjoyable and very fun-filled evening at her house, next morning meeting Flossie, her pet cow and Sarah her friend. On through the Keri forest to Denmark, to yet another piece of land lived on by a woman. A different but once again beautiful terrain, magnificent beaches - here Marlene on her land has hibiscus, lavender, nasturtiums, lemon trees and petunias even- she struggles to keep it moist and cool with rocks covering the ground. We even ate zucchini from her garden! The one beach we visited that I found gratifying was one preserved by a Trust. 1,563 acres of beauty where I finally found a placid pool to swim in! The heat left for a couple of days, to be replaced by hanging mist, low grey clouds - a scene not unlike B.C.

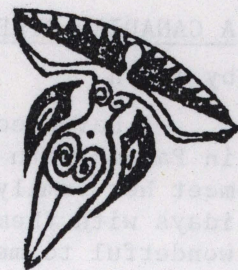
Walking here in the bush was unlike anything I've experienced in a while, except perhaps in Mexico. Crackling fronds from palm trees, chopped down brush, gritty sand, pebbly rocks and smooth white sand - all catching under my sandals! Parrots, green, yellow and red, strutted around marlene's garden, and provide a constant background noise, as does the raucous call of the kooka-burra.

Back to the heat of Perth, where I was fortunate to catch a meeting of the Matrix Guild of Western Australia. (see Winter 1995 issue of T.O.D.) I met 5 women (my friend Lesley included) who started this project in 1989.

Membership is open to all women who were born female and identify as lesbians. They are proposing a Women's Community Centre Project to provide accomodation and care for aged lesbian women, including those who are disadvantaged and disabled. They are fundraising and working to make this dream a reality. And so back to B.C. and 5 inches of snow on Hornby Island. Unbelievable!

I'd be happy to loan the "Travelling Women's Guide" to anyone who is going down under.

Write to Emma Joy Crone
RR 1, Hornby Island. B.C.
VOR 1Z0



AMAZING GREYS IV GATHERING

The fourth annual "Amazing Greys Gathering" will once again be held at the Island Hall in Parksville, B.C. on October 25 to 27, 1996. "Amazing Greys" began with the first edition of Betty Nickerson's book, "Old and Smart" which discusses aging in a very positive manner. The book struck a chord with the readers and Betty received well over 400 letters from women, asking if there was some way they could get together to meet their age-mates. During this time, Betty had a dream, in which she was addressing a group of grey haired women, and as she looked out over the crowd, she thought to herself- "these women are amazing" and so from that dream, the name of the group was born.

The letters and the dream spurred Betty to try and organize a gathering. She, along with her good friend Paulette Smith, found a venue, prepared brochures and sent them to the 400 letter writers. The response was overwhelming and on the last weekend in October, 1993, 180 women gathered at Island Hall Beach Resort in Parksville, B.C. to celebrate their age, maturity and wisdom.

Once again this October women will gather in all their diversity to discuss issues that are of importance to them and to explore with joy, curiosity and openness, the life-enhancing opportunities that aging offers. The registration fee remains low (\$70.00) because this is a non-profit event run completely by volunteers and there is no outside funding.

Highlights of the gathering will be "Telling your Story" - talking circles, workshops on relevant issues, poetry reading, a banquet and the "Croning Ceremony". An excellent selection of books and women's crafts will be for sale.

For registration and accommodation information please write or phone
Shelagh Wilson
Amazing Greys IV
453 Sunset Blvd.
Parksville, B.C.
Canada
(604-954-2395)

A CANADIAN DYKE IN PANAMA

by Taryn

I have recently spent 2 months in Panama with my lover. We went to meet her family and to spend the holidays with them. Her family was very wonderful to me and I have grown to care about them.

Our relationship isn't something that was ever talked about. I was told that this would be disrespectful, like airing dirty laundry. They treated me like part of the family and I am sure they know who I am to their daughter.

The City of Panama is a place of International Business and Trade. Stores, businesses and banks are everywhere. But I found Panama City to have a small town feel.

The people I met were mostly middle class, educated, interested in outdoor activities and passionate about local and global politics. I spent time with women, many of whom were tolerant of my sexuality but were obviously uncomfortable when the topic came up.

I was fortunate to get to know 3 wonderful dykes. It is illegal to be homosexual in Panama. Those traveling or living abroad bring and/or send information about other homosexuals for eager eyes. Homosexuality has become more visible due to satellite TV and to the gay participation in AIDS awareness campaigns.

It is very difficult to meet other lesbians. The problem is finding them. There are a few bars and a disco in the city. Only one of these was in a safe area. We never took a cab there, we only went together in someone's car.

This particular bar consisted of 2 small rooms. The first was very dark with a few tables and bar stools set up around the bar. The second room was brightly lit. It contained a pool table with benches along the walls. One had to be very careful when taking one's turn at the table.

Those few women at the bar protectively kept to their own. It would have taken more time, more drink or braver souls to break through the barriers.

The unwritten dress code for Westernized Panamanian women is fem-

inine blouses, dresses and make-up. Slogan T-shirts, triangles, or other items are not visible. I was told that finding other lesbians or a mate "is a matter of luck and flirting with people one finds attractive."

Close circles of lovers, seps (exes) and friends socialize in each others homes, at resorts and in public restaurants. Small public gatherings are possible because greeting each other with kisses on the cheek and some touching is culturally accepted between women. These women publically express their affection for each other through their eyes, words and via considerate action.

WOMEN IN MUSIC

The Society of Women in Music is a resource and education organization that aims to increase the contribution and recognition of women in all aspects of music.

JOIN US TO:

- Educate ourselves and the public about current research and writing on music by women.
- Participate in our concerts, workshops, forums and musical events.
- Exchange ideas and information through our newsletter and gatherings.
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- Discover women's contributions in different musical genres and explore women's contributions in different musical fields.
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SEPTEMBER PLUM POME

Whenever
I
eat a yellow
plum
the sun laces through yellow syrup
hitting my face and splattering the clean
purple T-shirt
put on for this occasion
sitting
in emerald patterned
alfalfa, itchy bum,
lots of wasps
sharing the afternoon
light chewing through a
translucent syrup laced
yellow plum
which dropped, into my hand
mine now,
to eat and eat,
this
blood and flesh
of her body
golden
moments, eating the whole wide fragile
plum begotten earth
every day for
all of my years.

-by Luanne Armstrong



MOLYVOS, Full moon in Virgo

Mother Ocean calling
me on this magical isle
glinting in the sunlight
so powerful, so beautiful,
so energetic.

Alone on
beaches and cliffs
sniffing the scent
of
Wild Oregano
I Search

For Sappho

But find no lingering trace

Sadly, I watch
black-clad women
sweeping out their doorways

While their men loiter
drinking in bars.

Where are you, Writer
of Songs
of Poems

Lover of Women?

-By Emma Joy Crone, 1978

Just a rural grrrl, with the best of intentions. I glisten my independence; flesh as tender as spring's growth, with arms and shoulders molded by the labour of this life-land. My love as clear and precious as water. Energetic and graceful as the butterfly moves. A dyke as sure and solid as a rock basking in the sun all day... hot and radiating warmth. As the day wanes, I let water wash over my body ...cold, it trickles from my nipples...riverlets run down my thigh. The moon rising and with the pond still the sight of myself is reflected.

From above the keen eye of the butch eagle spirals down on me I reach out and stretch up one hand while the other slides down my body to the place that is still warm, like that penetrating heat of the rock. I drape my body in soft dark cloth, dreaming of feather caresses and the pulsating beat of those eagles' wings. The quietest moan escapes my lips, knowing one day she'll spiral down and enfold me in her wings.

s.m./6/96.

GOD TO THE SERPENT

Beloved Snake, perhaps my finest blueprint
How can I not take pride in your design?
Your passage without hoof or paw or shoe print
Revels in art's and nature's S-curve line.

No ears, no whiskers, fingers, legs or teeth,
No cries, complaints, or curses from you start;
But silence shares your body in its sheath,
Full-functioning with no superfluous part.

Men try to emulate your forked tongue,
Their prideful prick dwarfed by your lordly length.
Two arms for blows or hugging loosely hung
Are mocked by Boa Constrictor's single strength.

How dare men claim their image as my own,
With all those limbs and features sticking out?
You, Snake, with continuity of bone
Need but a spine to coil and cruise about.

Men fear the force of your hypnotic eyes,
Make myths to damn your being wise and deft.
You, Snake, not men, deserve my cosmic prize.
I'm glad you stayed in Eden when they left.

-by Virginia Hamilton Adair
(written at age 82)

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