LESBIAN VOICES

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The
POETRY
of
NORMA
STAFFORD

DEAR SOMEBODY; THE PRISON POETRY OF NORMA STAFFORD, published January 1975 by the Academy of Arts and Humanities through a grant from the Unitarian-Universalist Service Committee, was well worth the few dollars I paid for it. I read the entire forty-three pages of poetry the day I bought it and was left wanting more. Ms. Stafford's writing is, above all, authentic: I always felt that she was speaking from her own experience and feeling. At the same time, she is a skilled poet, whose imagery is so real at times that I felt I could touch it. I enjoyed her women-oriented poetry the most -- partly because of my own feminist-lesbian interests and partly because I do not share her political views. But even the poems I didn't agree with were still good poetry, in my opinion.

Ms. Stafford has spent a good amount of time in jails, of one kind or another including the psychological kind. The poetry in this book was written during her confinement at the California Institution for Women. Her work has been previously published by Ms., the Realist, the Crime and Social Justice Journal, and the Women's Press Collective in Oakland. In addition to her skill in writing, Ms. Stafford reads powerfully, warm, tender, and strong are the adjectives which come to mind when listening to her powerful, controlled voice. Maybe women in the budding recording companies will think of including her in some poetry recordings.

-- Reviewed by Rosalie Nichols

my blood leaves me
each month to flow
into the earth becoming
once again the power of
the universe without which
no man can be.

my blood has flowed
through the streets, has been
sucked up and burned in buildings;
it has flowed from behind bushes
pulled from my black body by jungle thorns
in my flight from the slave trader.
From treetops I have dripped
yet my death has never occurred.

when riddled or burned my body
is found by my sisters of Sappha's
genres and they follow me,
erasing the red of my blood
to regain strength passed on to them
from the witch hunts and massacres
of me in my innocence that still curse
the men in medical, religious and political places;
those men who try to hide from my swollen tongue
on the days that I was hanged in England;
trying to hide from the charcoaled bones
of my body the tines it was burned at stake;
trying to hide from my body brought up
in the cramped suffocation of water chairs
out of the depths of lakes and ponds
around Salem.

my blood has flowed each and every time
a child has been given life,
at the hand of the rapist
my blood has flowed without mercy
to be scorned and defiled
in the man-made courts of the land.

now, tired of my body being bled dry
I come back from places
that men cannot see
and claim this blood
that is me.
Sectarianism vs. Humanism
by Barbara Stephens

A lesbian counter-world? At first glance, it seems -- narrow, elitist, chauvinistic. After all, most of us are complex creatures, both in temperament and in lifestyle. For example, I am Caucasian and predominantly Celtic. My blood stirs to the sound of bagpipes and Welsh chorales; I delight in the poetry of Yeats and Dylan Thomas, the prose of Dunsany, Frances MacLeod and Arthur Machen. But faith and begorrah: must I cast out those who are non-Celtic, those friends who happen to be African, Arab, Jewish, Oriental, and American Indian?

By the same token, I am a chemist in profession; artist, writer and photographer by avocation; yet my sanity depends on a number of friends who are not artists or intellectuals, or even gay, and I am not about to give up these.

On the face of it, a cult seems inviting; yet inside, there unfolds a nightmare. Small persecuted groups can be treacherous, incestuous, paranoid, and self-devouring. What's true of Marxist-Leninist groups is true also of fundamentalist religious sects and many of the gay circles. My disillusionment with gay organisations can be matched only by my experiences with 'Socialism.' You have the 'leaders' out on their Big-Oaddy trip, and the little zombie robots out enforcing the rules. God help the non-conformist in temperament and in lifestyle. For example, I am Caucasian and predominantly Celt. I delight in the poetry of Yeats and Dylan Thomas, the prose of Dunsany, Frances MacLeod, and Arthur Machen. But faith and begorrah: must I cast out those who are non-Celtic, those friends who happen to be African, Arab, Jewish, Oriental, and American Indian?

So there are those who rule on hairstyle and clothes, and those who preach the butch-and-femme roles, and those who demand sales-act quota and hound the un-couples living alone. A cocoon can be a security-blanket against a hostile world, it can be an iron-maiden which is the irony and agony of it all.

Recently, tragedy has cast a long shadow over the East Bay liberation movements. Justifiably, one can despair over the treatment America has meted to the blacks, farmworkers, Indians, women, and gays. The inflation has been exceptionally brutal to the poor. Protesting is one of the prevalent solutions to an indifferent establishment. Such is the tragedy of the 30-year war, the Bolshhevik Revolution, the Manson Family, and the Symiwnne Liberation Army.

The ends are shaped by the means; the ends are corrupted, distorted, destroyed by means that involve violence and killing. A collective (of any sort -- religious, political, or sexual) numbs one to the humanity of the outsiders. Call them Kikes, or Gooks, or Injuns or Pigs, or Straights, the next step is elimination. Not aware of or realizing that terrorism corrupts, and absolute terrorism corrupts completely.

LESBIAN SEPARATISM: An Interview with Nikki Dark

(On the following is an interview of Nikki Dark, whose "My Utopia: Lesbian Nation" appeared in the March 1975 issue of LESBIAN VOICES. The interview was conducted by our editor Rosalie Nichols.)

Q. Why are you a Lesbian Separatist?
A. That is a rather complicated question, and I think you would do better to begin by asking me why I am a Lesbian.

Q. Very well, why are you a Lesbian?
A. Because what I desire in a friend and lover is someone who is warm, sensitive, understanding, intelligent, compassionate, gentle, strong, tender, ambitious, active, good-natured, generous, kind, loyal, pure of spirit, beautiful, soft, smooth, pleasant to touch, responsive, enthusiastic, alive, creative, wise, just, empathetic, moral, dedicated, benevolent, and therefore womanly, female. I have never found this combination of qualities in a male, and I am very skeptical that any such male exists. Since I have found these qualities only in a woman (not necessarily in all women), this makes it, by definition, a Lesbian: a woman who loves another woman.

Q. Do you deny that any male could have those qualities, or are you merely saying that you have never met him?
A. That is a very important question, on which I have been thinking a lot over the past several years. There is a predominant view among feminists that men have been "culturally conditioned" to repress their emotions and to behave obnoxiously toward women. There is the alternative view that men have been "culturally conditioned" to repress their emotions and to behave obnoxiously toward women. There is the alternative view that men are emotionally deficient by nature, which would imply that there is no point in expecting them to change and that we should think only in terms of dealing (or not dealing) with them as they are. I am tending toward the view that there is a biological basis for their difference from females, possibly in their hormone balance or in early brain differentiation. But the evidence I have read so far is inconclusive, so I have to reserve judgment. If I ever meet the exceptional man, I shall, of course, have to re-examine my position. I'm not holding my breath.

Q. Then you don't believe that all human qualities and character traits are the result of early socialisation, of cultural conditioning?
A. No, I really don't believe in cultural "conditioning" in the absolute,
deterministic sense. I don't believe that an individual is only what her parents, teachers, peers, and the general culture have rewarded her for being. I believe in free will, in value choices and self-responsibility. Basically, I am responsible for who I am. Whatever I have made of myself or allowed myself to become, I must accept the basic credit and blame. If I'm not willing to take the blame, I'm certainly not entitled to take the credit.

Q. Then do you totally discount the pressures, bigotries, inequities (and iniquities), injustices, ignorance, and outright oppression of the surrounding culture as an influence on individual development?

A. No, I don't. While cultural influences are not deterministic, they are certainly to be reckoned with in the decisions and value choices made by an individual. The culture can impose limits on what we can or cannot do. A child can be punished by force or by threat of force or by threat of social ostracism. Also, it can impose censorship of ideas and push false information or propaganda which impedes the rational thinking of our young minds. Yet there are always at least a few brave and independent thinkers who are willing to challenge the status quo and break through to freedom.

Q. Can you give any examples as to how the culture may have tried to influence you in your Lesbianism?

A. Well, there is a pervasive implicit censure of Lesbianism in our culture, which sometimes becomes more explicit. I remember reading an article in a popular (Freudian) psychology magazine when I was thirteen which presented homosexuality as something very sick and disgusting. I remember having a strong emotional reaction to it. Then, when I was seventeen, I was picked up by the police for being out after curfew with an older woman. Perhaps the greatest blow to my budding Lesbianism was the rejection and disgust of my closest friend in high school. It's hard not to care what someone you love thinks of you.

Q. How did you overcome these influences?

A. I did a lot of reading and thinking about my Lesbianism, and I never could see any reason why it was morally wrong, so I don't think any of these influences ever succeeded in making me feel guilty about it.

Q. Do you feel you were influenced by the culture at all?

A. Yes, definitely. I learned, for practical reasons, to keep my closet door closed. What the culture could and did do for many years was prevent me from the open expression of my Lesbianism by threat of social ostracism, unemployment, incarceration, individual violence, and institutionalized violence. Even now, there are limits to how open I will be, depending on the context. I would try to avoid placing myself in a situation where I might be beat up and dumped in an alley. And I would avoid any situation where I might be arrested for violation of medieval laws. I would also seek to avoid being confined in a mental hospital, given electric shocks, or lobotomized.

Q. But you don't regard these as "conditioning" forces?

A. No, because none of these barbaric threats of brute force could change who I am or what I believe. Society can twist my arm, but it can't twist my mind, so long as I am willing to do my own thinking. I feel I can trust my own loyalty to my own nature, A human being has a specific nature which distinguishes her from a rock, a tree, or a zebra. A human being can think; a rock cannot. A tree can grow leaves on its limbs; a human being can grow leaves all over his body. A human being can think. Even now, there are limits to how open I will be, depending on the context. I would try to avoid placing myself in a situation where I might be beat up and dumped in an alley. And I would avoid any situation where I might be arrested for violation of medieval laws. I would also seek to avoid being confined in a mental hospital, given electric shocks, or lobotomized.

Q. You state that you believe in free will, but aren't your views on biological sex differences deterministic? Aren't you really saying, "Anatomy is destiny," only turning it around to support women and demigrate men?

A. No. What we are biologically is a given; it is the raw material with which we are endowed. What we do with our biology is a matter of choice. I am responsible for who I am. Whatever I have made of myself or allowed myself to become, I must accept the basic credit and blame. If I'm not willing to take the blame, I'm certainly not entitled to take the credit.

Q. Then do you totally discount the pressures, bigotries, inequities (and iniquities), injustices, ignorance, and outright oppression of the surrounding culture as an influence on individual development?

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materials as she can obtain because an understanding of the biological sex is essential to a solid theory of Lesbianism.

Q. Suppose that it should turn out that the present psychological differences between women and men are not biologically based. Then, would you not, logically, have to become heterosexual or at least bisexual?

A. No, because even if a male could become more feminine (i.e., emotional, empathetic, kind, gentle, warm, tender, etc.), there is still a great difference between heterosexual intercourse and Lesbian lovemaking. Most males still tend to think of penetration-type sex as the "real thing" even though studies indicate that women can only be left unsatisfied by the "real thing" but can actually be left in a painful condition of chronic pelvic congestion (cf. Ruth and Edward Brecher's book AN ANALYSIS OF HUMAN SEXUAL RESPONSE). Statistics such as the Kinsey Report and personal testimony of many women indicate that many males are unaware of or do not understand or desire the "real thing." I have heard the "myth of the vaginal orgasm." It is also testified that even men who should know better "can't be bothered" or just "don't want to." Women's sexual desires. I have often said that penetration-type sex is the "real thing" to men, but they apparently are so caught up in their own masturbation and their own fantasies about intercourse that they totally overlook or willingly ignore women's separate desires. And they have had the support of the Church and Western Culture to back them up in their preferences.

Q. What about the fully knowledgeable, fully "liberated" male who does not view other forms of sexual activity as threatening to his masculinity and truly desires to satisfy his partner?

A. I would say that, as commented in the Kinsey Report, "two individuals of the same sex are likely to understand the anatomy and the psychologistic responses and psychology of their own sex better than they understand that of the opposite sex." A woman can know by direct introspection what is pleasing and satisfying to a woman, both sexually and emotionally. Anything she has obtained through handbooks, horn manuals, classroom instruction, reading, or "directions" from her partner. I imagine that it is possible for a woman to have a full understanding of a man's medical lore of lovemaking and would almost certainly interfere with her enjoyment by disrupting the feeling of one-ness and total absorption which is ideal in sexual union. I have heard married women joke about knowing what page of the marriage manual their husbands were on. In Lesbian lovemaking, the women can sense each other's responses and desires directly, and there is nothing to interrupt the flow of feeling, the intense involvement, and the sense of union of the lovers.

Q. Still, could a woman, through experience, learn to perform well as a lover, couldn't she?

A. Yes, exactly -- he could "perform." That's not the same as making love. When a male does the pleasurable things that a woman desires, for instance, he regards it as "foreplay" and does it only because she wants it or in order to arouse her so that he can achieve penetration. At best, it's a form of Lesbian lovemaking, the woman can sense each other's responses and desires directly, and there is nothing to interrupt the flow of feeling, the intense involvement, and the sense of union of the lovers.

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Q. Do you advocate that straight women become Lesbians?

A. Not necessarily. I would like to see the sanctions against Lesbianism removed so that women with Lesbian desires could more easily pursue them. Too many women have gone into heterosexual relationships, long-term marriage and coitus, because of pressure, but from repression of their Lesbian desires and as a guilty concession to heterosexual society. These are women who were aware of their Lesbianism but became confused, adopted false moral ideas, or simply could not withstand the social pressure. I would like to see all women free to choose without prejudice. And I think the amount of social pressure against Lesbianism is an indication of the heterosexuals' subconscious awareness of its attractiveness. In particular, it is an indication of men's fear that women will find more satisfaction with other women than with them.

Q. What do you think of Lesbian seduction of heterosexual women?

A. I think it is degrading to a Lesbian to have to "seduce" a woman who arrogantly prefers men. I don't think most Lesbians are interested in trying it, but I have heard that there are some -- Lesbians who "prey" upon straight women in a time of confusion or try to "guilt trip" them into bed. A Lesbian who does not have a lack of self-esteem. She doesn't have enough confidence to want the straight woman to make up her own mind. Also, there are Lesbians who seem to prefer straight women: I think this shows that they basically feel straight is better.

Q. What do you think of heterosexual women who want to have an affair with a Lesbian?

A. I think they reveal a lack of self-esteem in their willingness to treat their own sexuality as an experimental laboratory, and I think they are oppressive to any sincere Lesbian they may be able to deceive into bed. I think the Lesbian is using the straight woman's sexuality in much the same way that a man might use a woman. I know of cases in which straight women try to get Lesbians into three-way relationships with husbands, usually just at the husbands' suggestion. You will find stag magazines loaded with stories of such affairs, and you will also find a great many "Lesbian" novels written by men for male readers, indicating the prurient interest of males in Lesbian sexuality.

Q. What about bisexuals?

A. Bisexuals should have their affairs with other bisexuals.

Q. At this point, can you relate all this back to the original question?
A. Surely. You see, if you are a committed Lesbian, then you are already a sexual separatist. If you are not a sexual separatist -- if you "relate" to men sexually, as the modern euphemism goes, then you are not a Lesbian; you are a bisexual. A lot of bisexuals and even heterosexual women are calling themselves Lesbians nowadays, for political reasons. I understand their reasons, but it does tend to cloud certain issues. A Lesbian is a woman who loves a woman. If she truly loves that woman, she isn't sleeping with men. So, at the very least, every Lesbian is a separatist in the sexual sense. The next question is whether to relate to men socially. As a feminist, I feel that any time I might be tempted to spend on men could be spent better on women or on work for the feminist movement. As far as having male friends, I don't feel they can have much to offer me, particularly in view of my feminist involvements. I do think that, as a Lesbian, I can work on limited projects with gay males, where there is a common goal. But, all in all, I don't feel that males, either gay or straight, can fill my social needs. Also, there is another thing I have thought about: Those of us who have grown up as female intellectuals and/or as little "butches" have tended to look toward males for intellectual friendships and/or for affirmation of our so-called "masculine" qualities. The relationship between Stephen and Martin in THE WILL OF LONELINESS is a good model for what I am talking about. I think this is wrong, not to mention fruitless. I think intellectual women should be friends with each other, if they can only get in contact. A stimulating friendship with an intelligent woman can be much more satisfying than intellectual intercourse with a man -- because, in the friendship with the woman, it is possible not only for ideas to be exchanged and understood, but also for emotional/spiritual understanding to occur simultaneously.

(To be continued in future issues.)

Reversion of You

by Dorothy Fields

(to a lesbian friend, thirteen years my junior)

Looking into the lonely mirrors
Of my mind,
Toying with reflections of the
Erotic,
Spilling out into words
On paper,
Leaves much to be
Desired
I assure you,
Not to say that I am not
Grateful
For the relief afforded me
By this vivid, overactive, limitless
Imagination
Of mine.

So
Give me your hands,
Won't you,
To press against
My (willing) lips,
And I promise to (only) wonder
How your mouth would taste
Against this other--
Incapable of even imagining the
Ecstasy
Of drinking
From the secret cup
Of your being,
Trapping
The syrupy juices that try to
Escape
From the gentle probing of this
Ever searching, velvety instrument
Of desire--
As your body moves to the
Rhythm
Of my heart's loving/resounding
Symphony.

(To be continued in future issues.)
Two Views of Monogamy:

Open marriage means an honest and open relationship between two people based on the equal freedom and identity of both partners. It involves verbal, intellectual and emotional commitment to the right of each to grow as an individual within the marriage. — Nena & George O’Neill

I’ve been considering alternative lifestyles since my recognition of myself as a lesbian — seeking out new models of more potential relevancy than heterosexual ones. Especially recently, the open marriage model has appeared with increasing advocacy, and I found myself getting involved with it from a position of dangerous ignorance and inexperience. Open marriage, I have since discovered, is an ideal. How could an "honest and open relationship" be dangerous? The danger lies in trying to achieve goals for the relationship which are totally contrary to the necessary principles of the open marriage.

If you imagine, as I did, that opening and transforming your present "traditional" or monogamous relationship will provide you with a solution to a feeling of stagnation, of staleness, you will be right, but not in the way you expect. Open marriage will not make your relationship more secure. If you seek a marriage of absolute commitment, oneness, and sharing, find some other model. Open marriage will ultimately subvert those goals and leave you standing alone and incredulous.

Open marriage is a process of relating which emphasizes the individual as a separate identity, responsible for herself. Open marriage is living in the present with realistic expectations for the future; it is not expecting permanence (cocoon of safety, protect me), total commitment, happiness, comfort, and security; it is taking advantage of one’s own privacy, respecting one’s partner’s privacy, and requires a strongly developed personal identity; it is not being uncomfortable alone or existing primarily as one half of a couple.

Open marriage requires open and honest communication, being fully aware of one’s needs and responses; it is an essential and involving process of self-knowledge, self-disclosure, and honesty. It is exploration and flexibility of behavior; it is not fixed, unchanging, separate and distinct roles. Open marriage involves open companionship, sometimes open sexuality, and is based on emotional security, independence and selfhood; it is not being superior or inferior to one’s partner or feeling threatened or jealous. Open marriage is founded on equality, identity and trust; it is not fearing inferior/superior, it is not being a couple first and a person second, it is not fear of change or pain.

Open marriage is a great deal more than two people exchanging permission to sleep with other people; it is an entire ongoing lifestyle half of the primary couple relationship as most of us know it. In my own experience, the open marriage can serve as a healthy transition out of relational stagnation, independence and evolving which it is not dependent minimally to their utmost and results in exposing incompetency, insecurity, and lack of commitment to oneself.

Try to keep your fears from controlling your life. — J. Harford

"To thine own self be true — and it must follow, as the night the day, thou cannot then be false to any (wo)man." — Shakespeare

Commitment begins, not with others, but with oneself. One cannot make a commitment unless one has a self to commit. The person who thinks of a monogamous relationship primarily as a commitment to another has probably never understood what a self is.

One’s self is one’s thinking and valuing capacity. To know oneself means to know what one’s convictions and values are: to know what one believes to be true and what one believes to be good. To be true to oneself means to be committed to one’s own values: to stand by one’s independently formed convictions, to fight for one’s concept of good, to live by one’s own chosen moral code, and to be loyal to one’s own person.

Without commitment, one can never accomplish anything in life, nor can one achieve one’s own happiness. Achievement requires the ability to set goals, to plan, and to make investments of time and energy. To accomplish requires confidence that one’s goals are proper and worthwhile, that one’s plans are realistic and feasible, that one’s efforts will not be wasted. One’s life (time and energy) is limited. One who values her life does not squander it on worthless goals, foolish plans, and fruitless investments.

To thine own self be true — one’s personhood must be taken seriously. One may hope for change toward them with total commitment. When she does this successfully, she may find herself in a more satisfying future.

Without commitment, no future can be projected, and one faces a blank wall of time. One lives from day to meaningless day, with no sense of purpose to shape one’s life. One cannot establish any priorities or know what is important to do. When faced with a choice, one will flip a spiritual coin and live randomly. Some probable consequences are boredom, alcoholism, and despair.

These same principles apply to a relationship. A noncommittal relationship will flounder and fall apart. For a lasting relationship to occur, one person must commit to another person of integrity who shares like convictions and values. Both persons must be worthy of a serious and lasting relationship. When they meet, their response is spontaneous, intense, and appropriate; because they are in love. Their sense of commitment is also spontaneous. To love without commitment is a contradiction in terms.

One does not betray one’s love because that would be self-betrayal. When one falls in love, one wants to express that love. One wants to express it by looks, by gestures, by words, and by physical touch. One wants that love to be reciprocated! and if one has chosen the right person, it is. Each sees her highest values personified in the being of the other. When this happens and when these two are united in spiritual sexual love, no third party and no power on earth can divide them.

True lovers do not need to write contracts, make vows of faithfulness, forge chains, wear blinders, or hire private detectives to spy on one another. Nor do they feel stifled or stagnant or need to "relate" to others romantically. They do not need to ask, "How would I feel if this relationship ended?" Such a question does not occur to them. They have achieved the greatest happiness that two persons can find in each other, and this happiness is their bond. It is a happiness that has no room for fear.

Perhaps, sadly, such happiness is not to be achieved by many; but it does exist. To the person who chooses only commitment is to a belief in its impossibility, I leave "open" relationships.

— Rosalie Nichols
The Poetry of Ellen Marie Bissert

words come as dreams
in flight
they ride up as effervescence
& I need a new poetry
for you
your skin
I inhale again
again
your hair
an etude on inner sides
sinks
blue air
into mine

what kind of poem
do I write
now that I've told you
I love you
I refuse an image
this is it you are a woman
as I
no metaphors can I use
to disguise this
I tell you here
as you sleep tonight alone
love
I cannot but do

it's my oldest poem
I can't sleep until I've decided
to leave tonight
as I sit beside my window
ice drips
slowly I beg
the song of your skin in my hand
& must leave/have left
the smell of Circe's song
pulling me down
down & in
to your deep brown hair

Me and Sarah

There's something about childhood friends that never leaves us, whether it's the remembrance of our own young innocence or whether it's shared guilt feelings over our first treasured transgressions against the adult world, I don't know. when I was a kid, I had a great pal named Sarah, who was my friend, my companion, and my accomplice. What can I say about the days with Sarah?

There was the time when Sarah and I were about five or six years old and buried ourselves in the back yard -- really a harmless activity, as we saw it (we did leave our heads out). For some strange reason, our parents were very upset about it. They were screaming something about our taking all our clothes off and were accusing one another of not raising their children properly.

Probably around nine or ten years old was an exciting period of life with Sarah. There was the time we decided to make some money: Our plan was to give a variety show in my garage. We knew we were very talented and all the people in the neighborhood would be delighted to pay to see us perform -- but just in case they didn't really appreciate our great talent, we felt we should have an added incentive. We got very busy making posters advertising the fact that we were going to charge only twenty-five cents admission, and the added incentive was the beer that we were going to sell for only twenty-five cents a bottle. Enter once again, irate parents.

Around the same period of our young lives, we were introduced to the marvels of machinery by a neighborhood father with a dump truck. He would raise the dumpbed, allowing us to slide down and out. Then the day came when he made the MISTAKE: He let us play in the cab of the truck (careful to take the keys). What harm could possibly come from allowing two ten-year-olds to play in your truck? Well, let me tell you... I don't know what harm it did him. As for Sarah and me, we lost the comfort of sitting for a while, just because we wanted to be very professional drivers. You see, it went something like this: We looked in the glove compartment for maps so we could be very professional, right? The problem was that we found this package of balloons, blew them up, forgot about driving the truck, and proceeded to entertain the neighborhood with our "balloons"... Enter, you know who...

After the balloon incident, Sarah and I were subjected to very close scrutiny by our parents, and tho' it slowed us down a bit, it didn't stop our inventiveness -- or rather Sarah's, I should say. Being a very curious little girl, Sarah had discovered that baths were not made for getting oneself clean -- rather they were made for making one feel good. Well, almost needless to say, you know who got very suspicious when we two little girls started taking two and three "baths" a day... and while enjoying our bath one fine afternoon, in walked my grandmother...

That caused a break not only in my friendship with Sarah, but for almost three years, our families feuded like the Hatfields and the McCoys, when they decided to call a truce, I was allowed to go away with Sarah and her mother for a weekend. That weekend, Sarah and I discussed how bad we were and made a pact sealed by our combined blood never to even think our evil thoughts again.

Twenty-five years later, I fell in love with a woman, a woman who taught me to love and admire my disowned body -- and only then did I remember... Sarah... Sarah, wherever you are... I hope you are happy and have found a love that has set you free.
WASTED

Hot ice-thoughts melted
to an inept dribble.
Unspoken, wasted.
She sighed her thoughts
and longed to speak her tears.
But who to listen, not hear?

--- Gay Pay

Even in my pain, my anger,
I cannot shut off
The love I feel for you
(The love which you denigrate,
Which you deny.)
Even now
With these tears
Smarting my eyes
These pains
Constricting my heart
Even now
I think of gifts
I want to give you.

--- Barbara Lipschutz

dark house--
a cold echo,
frost and wine, white hands, hair "soft as silk"
in this house all my hope in spilled
here we were two galaxies, two grails, angels spiced with curiosity
---strange dogs,
every cough of leaf shifting
jolted our poised bloods.
the papery leaves quietly surrounded us, assembling,
with the last stars and smoke of autumn, and the cold spores rooted
on the panes
now is the need for smoke,
for a drug-stoked blood
t'aint the mediocrity
& point the head's own Enterprise
green-programmed to clotted stars.
so comes an hour as cheap as poetry;
so comes a voyage
back past Liberty, old torchlight peerer,
to the giggling trees;
to with any luck visions and degeneracy to crash
in stinking midnights of song.
It's ME:
inhaling dictionaries cross-referenced to Ind & Arcturus
it's me invoking the sulky slinky & green-eyed muse used to hang around
down here

--- Mog Duff

Terry, caught up in the corners of your smile, buffeted by your
happy winds
---blow through me like a March day, the scrubbed skies and the
bushes whipping on the hillsides
stuck with kites and crocuses---
a month in cap and bells,
a month with a secret---
(last year on a day like you, I almost learned to fly).
Come sit crosslegged and giggling, hair shining and lifting, turning
your teeth to the wind:
jingle me like a hillful of daffodils, tumble me like a cloud of
last year's leaves---
together we'll be invisible as children,
spy from the ridges laugh lying on our stomachs in the stiff tan field.

--- Mog Duff
In Defense of Bestiality
by Barbara Lipschutz

As an open-minded individual, I am willing to entertain the proposition that men are human beings. I've yet to personally encounter research that is as compelling as the record of man's inhumanity to woman, and also to man. However, I concede that it is possible that primitive or experimentally raised men may have human characteristics. As a pragmatist, I admit that this question is academic. The following essay accepts the de facto status of men and attempts not to liberate them but to gain civil rights and acceptance for the people who consort with them. — B.L.

Many women find it necessary or even desirable to form relationships with men. Some people feel that this necessity or desire makes these women the enemy.

Granted, bestiality isn't the best of all possible worlds. But is it fair to discriminate against someone solely because of this deviation? Our foremothers fought for the right to control their own bodies, P.P.*, through contraception and abortion. Aren't we violating this sacred right by condemning a woman because she has sexual contact with a man? The woman who fucks men has enough problems without being castigated by the rest of humanity. Tolerance and understanding can help a miserable, dysfunctional, potential suicide become a competent, reasonably happy human being.

I speak from personal experience. I work with a heterosexual. She is conscientious and reliable. Since I have gotten to know her, I can honestly say that I believe in equal rights for straights, as long as they are not in occupations which involve children or national security. Yes, the civil libertarian in me hopes that heterosexuals can live in Gay Gulch. When they reproduce, we will negotiate a trade agreement with them. They will provide sperm and receive male children to raise. We will keep the female children.

I used to be a humanist (and therefore a bisexual). A humanist, for those unfamiliar with the term, is a woman who believes that men-are-human-beings-too. If you believe that men-are-human-beings-too, then it doesn't make any sense to exclude them from your sex life, so you should become non-discriminatory or "gender-blind" in the same way that non-racists are supposed to be. Acting on the premise, I went around for several years treating ( ) as human beings — talking to them, listening to their ideas and concerns, sympathizing with their problems, giving them affection — but then I noticed that these ( ) didn't even seem to reciprocate this kind of concern and understanding when it came to my ideas and my problems — and eventually I couldn't help wondering if it had something to do with their being ( ). I decided it did. And that's why I'm not a humanist anymore.

-Nikki

THE MAN-HATER'S PAGE

When I was a kid, I had this barometer -- it was a little house with two witches in it. When it was going to rain, one witch swung out of the house door. If the weather was dry, the other witch swung out of the other door. But always one witch or the other was visible.

Men have something like that -- a sort of built-in sexual barometer -- and they seem to spend a lot of time consulting it. If it's up, they have to worry about some way to get it back down again. And if it's down, they worry about how come it isn't up.

I'm sure glad my barometer isn't that visible.

People are always asking us lesbian separatists what we're going to do about reproduction if all women become lesbians. Women sometimes answer with sperm banks, parthenogenesis, cloning, etc. But there is a much simpler, logical solution. When all women are lesbians, all men will become homosexuals -- by default, if for no other reason. We will live in Lesbian Nation, and they will live in Gay Gulch. When we reproduce, we will negotiate a trade agreement with them. They will provide sperm and receive male children to raise. We will keep the female children.

-Nikki
Two Letters on Anarchism & Feminism

Barbara Stephens

January 10, 1972

Dear Rosalie,

Thanks for your letter. I've become a quasi-anarchist myself, as a result of several things:

1. My experience with political tyranny in the Socialist Movement, which in Berkeley and San Francisco was completely overrun with Trotskyists, Stalinists, and both Marxist-Leninist types.

2. My experience (over thirty years of it) of personal tyranny from pests and busybodies who are commonly called "neighbors."

3. My repeated confrontations with sexism in the radical movements, in the Negro and Mexican militant movements, and even among my ideological colleagues, the Pacifists. I experienced frightful harassment when H.A. crashed at my place in 1965 and began to treat me as he would have treated his present or previous wives. So this is that "glorious institution" called marriage I have to slave, honor and obey! Ha!

My experience of living in a brutal neighborhood. Much as I have disliked the police, I have preferred their presence to that of the psychopaths, drug-freaks, and juvenile (Negro and Chicano) rapists, muggers and murderers, and a witch-hunt against all quasi-straight people, such as the working class; and more crimes against women, the aged, the helpless, the sick.

I greatly fear the idea of total complete anarchy, born out of the experience of living in a brutal neighborhood. Much as I have disliked the police, I have preferred their presence to that of the psychopaths, drug-freaks, and juvenile (Negro and Chicano) criminals that have terrorized Berkeley. I'll live again like as a recluse, an anarchist, but will work politically toward an enlightened liberalism that will allow one all forms of harmless, non-intrusive eccentricities, and at the same time protect all of us from violence, crime, pollution, and infringement of our privacy.

Yet I cannot accept your total anarchy, for damned, not all "anarchists" are responsible. I have had some terrible neighbors whose version of anarchy is their "natural right" to meddle in my affairs, throw trash on my garden, keep noisy dogs that bark, howl and scream all night and all day, and crap all over me in a dozen different ways. The hippy movement originally produced some beautiful creative and responsible anarchists (1) but brought to mind of H.P.A. -- noted author, social critic, political activist, and hater of women. He had a most astute political mind, and politically was a communitarian-anarchist. Domestically, he was an idiot -- though being married and divorced many times, this man as a natural servant-class whom God ordained to serve man and who should have no more function or interest than servicing the man and not the woman he served. His wife complained to me about his coldness, lack of emotion, affection, and urged me to try to influence him into a more human direction. I tried. And he answered, "All human relations are confrontations!" I saw much for relations of men and women.

(2) My experience with political tyranny in the Socialist Movement, which in Berkeley and San Francisco was completely overrun with Trotskyists, Stalinists, and both Marxist-Leninist types.

(3) My experience (over thirty years of it) of personal tyranny from pests and busybodies who are commonly called "neighbors."

...
In the job market, (male) employers want their (female) hirelings sexy and dumb -- which leads to incompetences of service which costs their firms money and loss of growth as well as smoke-screening the bosses' inadequacies. A feminist might quote the slogan of the United Negro College Fund, to repeat: "A mind is a terrible thing to waste."

I have some future letters in mind -- for example, my ideological war against the Gay Liberation Front, and a dominant faction of Berkeley Women's Liberation. I was pummeled verbally and in the press by the Maoist and Stalinist factions of both movements. Later, in a published letter to the Berkeley Barb, I condemned the Black Militant movement as being sexist and anti-homosexual, reserving my hardest blows against Eldridge Cleaver (case of Cleaver vs. Timothy Leary in Algeria).

Briefly, I supported these positions:

(1) Lifestyle: a tolerant society that appreciated as well as legalized homosexuality, heterosexuality, bisexuality, and celibacy. I condemned violence, cruelty, dominance, and the entire Macho cult.

(2) Personal development encouraging sensitivity, creativity, intellect, rationality, cooperation, consideration and common human decency. I made a special case for rejecting terrorism as a tactic. For terrorism can become a habit, and a Che will not wither away; it merely matures into a GPU (or KGP as it now is named).

I dropped out of Women's Lib due to long work hours and discouragement over the hostility greeting my "sweet plea to reason." In 1972, or 1973, J.B. (reporter for the S.F. Examiner) wrote of her experience in the Berkeley Women's Lib, wherein she refused to accept the dogmatic position that all members of Women's Lib be compelled to live a bisexual lifestyle. Ms. B. said that her idea of liberation was freedom from coercion and pressure.

The rest became international headlines: the rise and fall of the Symbionese Liberation Army, which still has supporters in some feminist and Gay Liberation groups. I feel an urgency to publish the importance of political positions and rational thinking as an attempt to counteract suicidal totalitarian tendencies disrupting the gay/fem freedom movements.

P.S. Anarchy is wonderful, in the words of Bertrand Russell. However, not all anarchists were Russellites. Proudhon (father of French anarchy) was puritanical, anti-feminist, and anti-homosexual. Some major French and Spanish anarchist groups recommended lynching as an alternative to State-directed capital punishment. In the 1930's, Spanish anarchist communes pushed a hairshirt style of living, forbidding alcohol, tea and coffee, personal property (books, records, furniture, etc.), non-reproductive sex, non-marital sex. Neighborhood vigilantes spied and pried as a form of community law enforcement. If you recall the novel and movie, "For Whom The Bell Tolls," you'd never forget the anarchal mode of people's punishment: briefly -- a kangaroo court, followed by running the gauntlet, and ye-heave-ho -- over the cliff! Well, so much for anarchy!
I have written the title and by-line of this piece in big letters, and I have sat and looked at my name for a long time before starting.

This isn't the first time I've ever written something with my name on it, but it's the first time in a long, long time. My name. My own name.

This isn't the first time I've had to scrawl painstakingly at the upper corner of the page with a flourish, when I was twelve years old and thought that someday I would go to college, after years of work and struggle.

This isn't the first time I've practiced writing different ways, in first-grade penmanship. The name I engraved on my leather sliderule cover in high school. And the name which was engraved on my diploma when I graduated from college, after years of work and struggle.

And I began to write. I had written all through school, of course — poems and essays and term papers — but this was different. This was the real world, and my writings were no longer private exercises to be read, corrected, and graded by a sympathetic — or not so sympathetic — teacher.

When my first article was actually published with my by-line on it, I felt so pleased with the neat, black letters. It was strange and exciting to think of all the unknown persons reading it in all parts of the country.

I thought about that, too, when someone would write to me to say, "Yes, I've thought about that, too," or "You've stopped to consider this," or "Your story made me laugh and laugh," or "Your poem made me cry." What was really exciting, too, was receiving my first check for a paid article, made out to "Ramona Roark, author's fee."

During all that time, I never gave much thought to the fact that I was female — at least, not in connection with my writing. In school, I was a brilliant student, and I thought of myself as that — a scholar first and foremost, a female only as an after-thought, as something to be dealt with someday in the distant future. In school, it was my intellectual ability that counted. We didn't have two grading systems, one for boys and one for girls — although, looking back on it, I'm surprised that we didn't.

The world of the intellect has no gender; thus I was (implicitly) taught and thought about that, too, or "You've stopped to consider this," or "Your story made me laugh and laugh," or "Your poem made me cry." What was really exciting, too, was receiving my first check for a paid article, made out to "Ramona Roark, author's fee."

It was a tremendous amount of reading, trying to catch up on all the frustrated avenues I wanted to explore, now that I was no longer confined to "required subjects, was not really a movement at all, but a conglomeration of publications and organizations consisting of anarchists, libertarians, socialists, individualists, retreatists, and science fiction fans. I was an individualist, and so was Nathan, but we came from opposite poles politically.

I had come from the civil-libertarian left. I was from a poor public sense of the word. But we did each have our own following in the movement. We met in the anarchist movement, which, in the manner of anarchists, was not really a movement at all, but a conglomeration of publications that consisted of anarchism, individualism, and science fiction fandom. I was an individualist, and so was Nathan, but we came from opposite poles politically.

I had come from the civil-libertarian left. I was from a poor
family and had worked my way through school. I was dark, an American Indian and I was an atheist. I had the advantage of not having had any advantages. And I knew from my own experience what conformity, snobbery, and persecution are all about. Nathan had come from a very different personal right. His family was not well-to-do, and he knew what it was to be poor, to feel what it was to be dark, an American disadvantages. And I knew from my own experience what conformity, snobbery, and persecution are all about. Nathan and I had in common was a deep concern for our dwindling political freedom, our anxiety about the size and power of government in the United States -- that, and our admiration for each other's writings.

At the time that I met Nathan, I was barely getting started with my writing; I had written perhaps half a dozen articles which were published in scattered publications. Nathan was a little better established and was proud of publishing a small newsletter of his own. It didn't have the circulation that some of the others had, but I thought it had much better quality, both in content and format. Nathan was very careful and particular about what he published and how it was presented; he wanted a magazine he could feel proud of. He had taken an equal amount of Nathan's poetry which was sensitive and powerful, so I wrote him some comments. He responded, saying that he had been following my articles and found them very stimulating, and agreed to meet and soon were good comrades.

Those of you who were active in or sympathized with the New Left in the late 1960's and early 1970's will remember the amount of focussed tension during those years. I was not involved in the activities of the New Left, but they certainly had my attention. I was glued to the television news, the daily newspapers, and the underground papers. I was trying to see what was going to happen. Everyone was talking of The Revolution. The Revolution was going to happen any day now. There was violence, there was The Revolution, and the underground papers were filled with what was going to happen. Everyone was talking of The Revolution. The Revolution was going to happen any day now. There was violence, there was The Revolution, and the underground papers were filled with what was going to happen.

Nathan and I were not so much with The Revolution, as with what was going to happen after The Revolution. I was interested in reading "Nathan and I were not so much with The Revolution, as with what was going to happen after The Revolution. I was interested in reading up that time, the women's movement hadn't really gotten off the ground yet.

We tried to keep our arrangements as equal as possible, each of us working on the magazine. We were each employed and made equal investments of capital in our new publication. Working together on something we both loved was an exhilarating experience. Our personal relationship grew out of our common dedication to our cause. Soon we were living together, and then we decided to formalize our relationship by legal marriage.

That was when I first started giving up my name.

It didn't happen overnight. Unlike the traditional "bride," I didn't rush to become "Mrs. Nathan Keating." I hadn't really intended to give up my name at all. Originally, I hadn't even intended to be married. But with all the legal and tax disadvantages of being two single persons, marriage seemed like a much simpler and more advantageous arrangement.

It was to be a marriage in the legal sense only, and not a melding of two into one person. Once legally married, I found that it became very difficult to get other people -- family friends, creditors, insurance agents, subscribers, suppliers, printers, everyone we did business with -- to recognize my separateness, my individuality, in their eyes. I became an adjunct to my "husband" and became a "wife." So, even though I never referred to myself or signed myself as "Mrs. Nathan Keating," that was how I became known. I learned very early how they addressed me. I had written several articles to write to Nathan would close with, "Say hello to the wife," or "Best regards to the Mrs." He would apply the "Mr." to himself. And in his employment information, and the credit cards would arrive bearing the name, Mrs. Nathan Keating. I think the worst example was when we bought house in Marin County. It was to be 50/50, both equal amounts, but I insisted on putting it out to "Nathan Keating et ux" (a Latin abbreviation for "and wife"). So, by that one act of legal matrimony, I had been reduced in the eyes of the world from Ramona Roark, scholar and writer, to "et ux."
who had come up with which ideas. It didn't seem to matter much, as long
and to work on the magazine. Writing is a way of thinking about things, and
occurred to me at that time to feel "exploited" by Nathan. I loved to write
I felt I benefitted by everything I wrote. I also derived satisfaction from
end of publishing. It even reached the point where I actually wrote some of
of our just, our own, plus handling most of the editorial and clerical
in the magazine. It didn't seem to matter much, as long as long

At first, Nathan was grateful for the extra work I did. Then,
gradually, he seemed to begin to take me for granted. Finally, he started
that. That was when I began to resent the lack of recognition for my contribu-
to be more and more sensitive to the sexism of our male readers and col-
leagues. I had tried not to blame Nathan for other men's chauvinism -- but
it bothered me that he never seemed to understand or thoroughly empathize
with my feelings. It was so exasperating to me, to feel so slighted for such
little incidents. Nathan thought I was hypersensitive or over-reacting, and
he didn't want to be distracted from the large problems, the broad issues of
the day such as high taxes, anti-trust suits, the price of gold, and
whether science fiction could be considered great literature. What was the
question of my identity and just recognition of my work beside such weighty
matters?

In our third year of publication, we decided to put out a book,
a collection of articles we had written on various issues. I wasn't
abale to take a chance, with something as big as our first book, of having people
regard it as his book. I insisted on using my own name, thinking that
readers would be more likely to notice that there were two authors. When we received
the first advance copies from the publisher, I was really pleased. I kept
looking at the cover: "THE NEW INDIVIDUALISM, by Nathan Keating and Ramona
Roark." It was such a feeling of completion, of accomplishment, to see our
name, 'Keating, Nathan, et al.' I looked in BOOKS IN PRINT and found "Keating, Nathan, et al." So --

less married? How does a member of an oppressor class admit the oppression
of an oppressed class without losing face, being saddled with guilt, or
becoming obsessed with proving anyone ever wrong? It seemed to have
occurred to me at that time to feel "exploited" by Nathan. I loved to write
seeing the magazine improve and grow. As time went on, I was doing more and
more of our just, our own, plus handling most of the editorial and clerical
end of publishing. It even reached the point where I actually wrote some of
Nathan's articles for him. Strangely, I noticed that if I wrote something
under my name, it was received much more seriously than if it were published
under my name. I began to understand firsthand why women writers have often
used male pseudonyms.

As I wrote the above paragraph, I could hear Nathan saying, "Oh,
but you weren't really oppressed: You didn't have to marry me: Nobody
forced you! It was your own choice:" That's the sort of thing Nathan would
say. He calls it "logic."

Ironically, Nathan's actions during our divorce proved the oppression
of women. When we finally split, the women were treated as if not only as if
does not have control over their own property; and without property
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forced you! It was your own choice:" That's the sort of thing Nathan would
say. He calls it "logic."
male-dominated anarchist movement — and of our country's legal system —
by the time I was finally a free woman again.

Throughout the period of my divorce, I had become more and more
aware of feminism, both as an issue and as a movement. Probably my growing
consciousness of feminism had something to do with my refusal to tolerate
any more marital self-sacrifice. After three years of marriage and six
months of divorce, I felt literally as though I had been tied to a post and
whipped — not so much by Nathan's actions, as by a system that approved of
female subjugation and by my own inability to communicate my sense of injus­
tice effectively. I was glad to be out of an oppressive situation, but I
began to recoup my jolie de vivre. The effects of injustice hang on
for a long time; one doesn't automatically spring back. I needed to regain
a healthy sense of myself. I needed to re-establish my identity, revitalize
my creative capacities, and enjoy myself. And I needed to know that human
relationships need not be oppressive. I hoped to find among womankind
the confidence that I had lost in mankind.

My first foray into the women's movement was an instant failure.
It was known among the local anarchist cadre that other women were
suspicous of me. There was a very dominating woman who was a fervent
Marxian collectivist and who must have hated me on sight, since her political
philosophy was the exact opposite of mine. I didn't know what was wrong,
but I could sense the coldness of some of the women, and others seemed to be
actually afraid to talk to me — or worse yet, to be seen talking to me. I
learned much later what had happened. Since I was an individualist, this
Marxist woman had defined me not as a "Sister" but as one of the "enemy." Far
From recognizing my political anarchism, she had misrepresented my posi­
tion as being Fascist — as believing in government support of big business,
exploitation of the workers, and a lot of other rhetoric. A rumor was cir­
culated that I was a government agent. How someone who does not even believe
in government support of big business or government agents or support government favoritism
to big business was beyond me, but no one ever bothered to discuss that fine
point. This woman's Marxism was more central to her than feminism. As a
point brought silence to the room — or when tensions built up too
high. But when she did speak up, cutting
appreciated her because she was always coming from a different direction and
other women's bookstores, and it was exciting to think of all the women every­
sue to reach out to other women through our newsletter.

There were about six or eight women in the group that worked on
the newsletter with me, but Joan just sat back, sort of aloof and smiling. But when she did speak up, cutting
give them another viewpoint.

The first few months of working on the newsletter will always be
a happy memory to me, in spite of what happened later. We found an old
mimeograph machine, got our paper and other supplies together,
and were in business. Our newsletter went out to other women's centers and other women's bookstores,
and it was exciting to think of all the women everywhere
where who were reading our poems and stories and commentaries. Other women
sent their newsletters and magazines to us, and we were so glad to go in
to work together, and to have other women thinking and feeling. We started a weekly writing workshop to improve our
thinking and feeling. We started a weekly writing workshop to improve our
skills and read our efforts aloud to each other. We had brainstorming ses­
though women were by then officially okay in the feminist movement, many
of the women were mostly housewives and college students of very limited
experience in politics. Along with rejection of the political style of the New Left, the
embraced the notion that there was something to be gained by joining together in
new groups and social life. We could achieve that feeling of movement, of
progress, by working together on a constructive project. We would also be
able to reach out to other women through our newsletter.

One of the women thought Joan was too "masculine" in her appearance, but I never
thought so. I thought she was a woman like myself, only stronger. She just
radiated a kind of inner strength, and she had the most penetrating eyes I had ever
seen. She was delightful to be with — sort of aloof and smiling. But when she did speak up, cutting
through our ideas and phrases, it was usually to make a point that brought silence to the room — or when tensions built up too
high. Sometimes, she would say something witty and subtly ridiculous that would make the tension collapse and everyone smile at each
other. None of the women ever got to be close to Joan, but in a way, they
appreciated her because she was always coming from a different direction and
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But Joan could sense their uneasiness and hung back from the group. Some
of the women thought Joan was too "masculine" in her appearance, but I never
thought so. I thought she was a woman like myself, only stronger. She just
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other. None of the women ever got to be close to Joan, but in a way, they
appreciated her because she was always coming from a different direction and
gave them another viewpoint.

When I went back to the women's center again, I found that things
had changed. Many women had repudiated the male-dominated New Left and were
strictly committed to and concerned with feminism. There was no longer
the ubiquitous social pressure to be "hip," to smoke "dope," or have the "correct"
language (I remember having had to learn "hip" talk in order to under­
stand the drift of what was being said in "raps" and I remember what a des­
tructive influence it had on the rest of my vocabulary and therefore on my
thinking and feeling. I was glad to see how it affected other women's centers and their own style in music, language, art, politics, and relations —
talents in art and photography began to contribute, making our graphics more striking and original. Women in other cities who liked our newslettertalents in art and photography began to contribute, making our graphics more striking and original. Women in other cities who liked our newsletter began to contribute, making our graphics

worked on late at night, collating and stapling, when the others had gone home. We did the best work in the world, writing something that I really liked, I would request more coverage. When Joan more than with anybody else, I remember watching her face as she read more of thenewsletter. Her eyes crinkled with laughter at the funny parts. Sometimes, I would be thinking of her as I was writing — I would think, "Joan will like this part," or "I wonder what Joan will think of this idea." I remember a few things that I even wrote just for her, to tell her something — although I never let on that I was doing that.

There are happy memories. Then something began to change.

I don't know who started it or how — whether it was one person or several — whether it was intentional or accidental — whether it was the result of the particular people who were in the group or whether the nature of groups to work that way, I don't even remember what was the first incident leading in that direction.

I think it started with something that seemed insignificant at the time. One woman didn't like the lettering we were using; she thought it looked too cold and professional. I didn't agree, but I felt obligated to let them have their way. Since the newsletter belonged to the whole group, the newsletter wasn't in agreement, but a compromise was worked out. It was decided to keep formal lettering for the headings, but to do the cover, advertising, and illustrative work however the group happened to be impressed.

Next, a question was raised about the ability of "lower-class" women to read the newsletter. It was said by some members of the group that our writing was too academic, our vocabulary was over the heads of many of the women we should be trying to reach. I have to admit that this made me mad. Now personalizing of these women to assume that they were too much more literate than those of my social class! But when I raised the objection, I was told that I was "exceptional." I was "privileged" by having been born intelligent — and since I had a college education (which I had worked damn hard for), I had to be considered middle-class, no matter what my income was or my family background.

The newsletter was also criticized for not carrying enough articles on the activities of the North American Indian Women's Association. It was assumed by these (middle-class) women that "minority interests" meant giving particular attention to the "protective" Indian movement, and I don't think welfare is our primary concern. Welfare is a symptom of the nature of our oppression. We want to be independent, economically self-determined. Give us justice at long last, and we won't need welfare! There was a terrific silence following my outburst, yet I don't think anyone had heard me really. They all stared past me blankly for a moment and then went on to the next item on the agenda.

Thus, bit by bit, the newsletter changed. Very seldom did we print anything about women's achievements or outstanding women of history or women's goals for the future. Someone wrote an article questioning the motives of the women who had started a local women's bookstore and objecting to the fact that they were successful and making a profit. The women's committee trying to start a local feminist credit union also came in for a lot of criticism. Some women never gave up on the idea of welfare, and this had been very helpful to each of us. We had hoped suggestions and constructive criticisms to give each other on tone, style, imagery, order of presentation of ideas, and so forth. During some of our brainstorming sessions, we had practically written whole articles as a group -- different women contributing parts of ideas until the whole subject was worked out. When we were able to work smoothly and cooperatively this way, it was a very intimate feeling that bound us together. Articles that were written this way were signed by the whole group. We also wrote editorials as a group. One former member felt that no one woman should write down our final position and signing it "staff." Perhaps it was because our group functioned so well in our early months that someone came

Indian Historian Press, or the newly-formed American Indian Chamber of Commerce. No one even suggested a story on the activities of the North American Indian Women's Association. It was assumed by these (middle-class) women that "minority interests" meant giving particular attention to the "protective" Indian movement, and I don't think welfare is our primary concern. Welfare is a symptom of the nature of our oppression. We want to be independent, economically self-determined. Give us justice at long last, and we won't need welfare! There was a terrific silence following my outburst, yet I don't think anyone had heard me really. They all stared past me blankly for a moment and then went on to the next item on the agenda.

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up with the suggestion that we should work as a collective. We had never had any formal structure; it didn't seem necessary. In the beginning, I had felt we were working without any actual title and acted as graphic artists, two had taken most of the responsibility for subscription orders. Joan had done the bookkeeping, but she had not donated her work, nor had she given any indication that the collective didn't seem too inaccurate a way to describe ourselves. None of us were trying to compete with each other for status or power, certainly.

I personally didn't like the term "collective" because of its connotations of collectivism, which is a form of Statism. But I told myself that these women didn't mean anything like that. They weren't out to start a government at the women's center or set up some authoritarian system. "Collective" was just popular rhetoric that they had picked up and didn't mean cooperative, equalitarian Sisterhood to them. When all was said and done, I didn't care too much what they wanted to call it. I probably meant cooperative, equalitarian Sisterhood to them. We were all very close to my master's degree and was finishing work on my thesis. The group was small and the consensus was that the group would have to be able to nitpick loopholes and discredit my thesis. At my (female) faculty advisor's suggestion, I submitted a copy of the first draft to a major publisher, and it was rejected.

What happened next, I couldn't quite believe. I was so excited and proud of myself -- and proud that I was a woman who had written this manuscript. To me, to be a woman writing, rather than being a woman doing anything else, was important to her. It was beginning to sound so uniform, like homogenized rhetoric, with nothing original or striking, nothing individual or authentic in it. I felt that I would have to be able to nitpick loopholes and discredit my thesis. At my (female) faculty advisor's suggestion, I submitted a copy of the first draft to a major publisher, and it was rejected.

After the women left that evening, I went to see Joan. I had often gone to work for the collective, and she had been a part of it. We were working on the newsletter. Most of the work of the group was taken over by other women. Joan had dropped out of the women's center entirely.

Calling the group a "collective" seemed to have a strong psychological effect, though. Before, each woman had worked on and taken responsibility for the things she did best. There was a natural division of labor based on interest and ability. Afterwards, everyone had to have a say about everything, and there was no way to tell whose judgment to follow. No one could make a practical decision about anything. Everything had to be discussed with the collective and a consensus had to be reached. Decisions about the simplest things had to be put off until the weekly collective meeting. The group members became petulant and critical -- the bookkeeper had to have her say about the artistic merit of the photographer's work, the distributors didn't trust the secretary's figures, and the art director didn't want her bookkeeping money from the bank deposits, and everyone wanted to have a say in editing all the women's work. I didn't enjoy the little touches, blue-pencilings, and trivial slants. Those women whose work had been tampered with or revised quit sending in material, and more and more women had to be written off, and the group was decided to do away with individual by-lines. Any writing by a member of the collective should bear the name of the collective and represent all women in the group. Ramona, the collective's name, had chosen to do this. They said they were glad, but they didn't really look glad.

The following week, two of the women came to my apartment to talk to me. "The collective has had a meeting, Ramona," they said, "and the consensus was that you should publish your book in the name of the collective, and donate the proceeds to the Women's Fund. If you really believe in Sisterhood and want to help your sister, you should do this." I said, "But I have never been a woman." They said, "But you are a woman." They were published under the name of the collective, I shrugged off my sense of weariness and told myself that it was all for the cause and it would all be worth it when feminism triumphed. I didn't like the name anyway; it was beginning to sound so uniform, like homogenized rhetoric, with nothing original or striking, nothing individual or authentic in it. I felt that I would have to be able to nitpick loopholes and discredit my thesis. At my (female) faculty advisor's suggestion, I submitted a copy of the first draft to a major publisher, and it was rejected.

My consciousness of what was happening was finally raised suddenly and drastically when I finished the first draft of my thesis. It was good. All my hours of research, digging through original sources -- collections of letters, unpublished diaries, obscure and long-departed feminist journals, legal decisions, political campaigns -- finally paid off. I completed the last page and realized that I had written a comprehensive history of feminism in the United States. I had made it a very scholarly work, painstakingly researched and meticulously presented because the idea being presented was meant to be able to nitpick loopholes and discredit my thesis. At my (female) faculty advisor's suggestion, I submitted a copy of the first draft to a major publisher, and it was rejected.

"I don't want to," I said. "I've worked too hard on this. I feel that I deserve the credit and the rewards that it will bring me. But I don't understand all my feelings about the women in my group and their aspire to something. If those women are my friends, then I must be willing to have someone on mine. And talking to Joan made things clear and simple again. She always made me feel that she was on my side, and yet I had never defined what the "sides" were, or why it was necessary to have someone on mine or not."

This didn't all happen at once. It was a gradual change that took place over a period of months -- well, really over the almost two years that I was busy with my own pursuits without, however, having dropped out of the group. I continued to give them articles and news write-ups, and when they were published under the name of the collective, I shrugged off my sense of weariness and told myself that it was all for the cause and it would all be worth it when feminism triumphed. I didn't like the name anyway; it was beginning to sound so uniform, like homogenized rhetoric, with nothing original or striking, nothing individual or authentic in it. I felt that I would have to be able to nitpick loopholes and discredit my thesis. At my (female) faculty advisor's suggestion, I submitted a copy of the first draft to a major publisher, and it was rejected.

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"Ramona, your writing means a great deal to you, doesn't it? It's what you really want to do, isn't it?"

"Yes, I've always wanted to write. I read a quote from Don Marquis once: 'Creative expression is the need of my soul.' That's the way I feel about it, and it is a need. It isn't only something I love to do; it's what I have to do to stay alive."

"Do you think most of the women in your collective feel that way about writing?"

"I've never really thought about it -- but I guess not -- I think writing is just a means to an end to them. I don't think they really care what they want to publish -- I suppose it could come out of a computer, as long as it had the right political slant. I don't think they are very interested in individual women's talent -- the newsletter to them is more of a propaganda leaflet."

"What about Nathan," Joan asked, "do you think he loved writing the way you do?"

"I used to think he did, in the beginning. But then he seemed more concerned with circulation and getting a profit out of it and making a good profit and being recognized by established editors. I heard he's gone to work on the staff of Right-Wing Review as an assistant economics editor. He was always wanting to do the 'practical' thing with our magazine, I suppose his love for writing got lost in that."

"Then you've never met anyone who loved writing as you do?"

"No," I answered softly, "I guess not."

"Ramona, you've told me that when you finally left Nathan, you felt as though you were pulling yourself out of quicksand. Would you ever willingly go back to that? Joan was speaking very slowly and carefully now, and I thought she was trying to ease child back from the edge of a cliff, or talk an attempted suicide down from a window sill."

"No, of course not. I was miserable in my marriage. I felt non-existent toward the end. Why should I ever want to go back to that?"

"But don't you see it's the same thing?"

"Wait a minute -- no, I don't think so. I see what you're saying, but it's not quite the same. Nathan had the law, the courts, and two thousand years of Christianity on his side. As a man, he couldn't understand how I felt. But the women in my group are women like me. Why would they want to oppress me? They just want me to make this voluntary sacrifice to help the cause."

"What difference does it make, Ramona, if someone urges you off a cliff, or asks you to jump yourself, 'voluntarily'? Either way you're lost, I was reading a book today, and it had this line from Ingersoll in it: 'Nearly all people stand in great horror of annihilation, and yet to think that Marriage and Sisterhood could turn out to be so much alike?"

"No," I answered softly, "I guess not -- I think the hurt away and tell you: Ramona, dearest, you have a right to your own existence. Don't sacrifice yourself again. Don't sacrifice what you love, and don't let yourself be ruled by anyone, not even your 'sisters.' Fight for your cause, yes -- but be sure it's your cause you're fighting for."

"When Joan said that to me, in such an impassioned tone of voice, with so much concern in her dear eyes, I know at once what I should have known for months: I was in love with her, too."

And I told her so.

And I slept with her that night. And every night since. And will as long as she wants me. And she says she will always want me.

"My book will be published in a few months, and it will have my name on the jacket: EXTRAORDINARY WOMEN, by Ramona Roark."

"Woman, like man, has been enslaved by Gods and Kings. She has been persecuted and oppressed because of her social class, her race, her heretic beliefs, her flamboyant actions, her political sedition, her refusal to conform and to submit to rule. In addition, she has been oppressed on account of her sex. She has been oppressed by her own biology, and she has been oppressed by the bigoteis of others who wished to define her only in terms of that biology, which in turn was defined as evil. Now, in the twentieth century, all that is changing. Woman is no longer to be a slave to her biological functions, nor need she be a domestic slave to man, But she will never become a full person until she recognizes her own good and discovers her own individuality. She cannot do it collectively."

"Why did I give up my name? For Sisterhood."

"My Sisters required that I write an ever diminishing pronoun:"

But now I know that this pronoun is my most valuable capital.

"Ramona, your writing means a great deal to you, doesn't it? It's what you really want to do, isn't it?"

"Yes, I've always wanted to write. I read a quote from Don Marquis once: 'Creative expression is the need of my soul.' That's the way I feel about it, and it is a need. It isn't only something I love to do; it's what I have to do to stay alive."

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WELL WISHES

Congratulations on your new publication. We just received your birth announcement today. It sounds great. . . Good luck in everything... Staff of Desperate Living

Congratulations on the new baby sister! We'd like to exchange children. . . and here's our latest. Best of luck. Saunie Salser, Women & Film

Glad to hear of your new publication. We're looking forward to seeing your first issue. . . You have our best wishes for success... Women's Press. Eugene, Oregon

We were happy to receive your birth announcement and would like to be on an exchange basis. . . Wishing you luck! Kathy, Woman Becoming

Here is your first exchange copy of the Second Wave. We're all looking forward to seeing Lesbian Voices. Good luck with the new "baby." Cyndi Baron, Second Wave

Thanks for your letter about the Petition. Lesbian Voices certainly has our permission to reprint the Petition for Sanity. Please send us a copy of Lesbian Voices when it appears. Eline Krause, Ms. Magazine

Thank you very much for your letter. . . I would love to see Lesbian Voices. The only rule about publications is that they must come from the publisher, and there's not supposed to be any censorship. . . I do appreciate your thoughtfulness and I look forward to seeing your magazine one of these days, in any event. Jane Alpert, Munsey, Pa.

We are very impressed with your new magazine and wish you the best in your new venture. Del & Phyl, Lesbian/woman

We're really excited to be getting Lesbian Voices. Hope all is well. Women, A Journal of Liberation

How is your new publication coming along? I'm very slow in replying to your announcement of our "baby sister!" But of course we'd like to exchange. . . I look forward to receiving Lesbian Voices. Donna Allen, Media Report to Women

Hi. Yes, we'd like to exchange publications with you. . . Looking forward to seeing Lesbian Voices. Chocolate, Big Mama Bar

Congratulations, sisters, you have a fine magazine here -- my first copy was well worth waiting for. I sincerely hope that I may become a small part of it with the enclosed poem. . . I have to say how much I really dig the way you don't make the word 'meaning of' 'feminist' sound like something less than clean. . . What a pleasure to feel pride instead of put downs. -- Right on, sisters, and much luck to you! Dorothy Paola, Bronx, NY

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BEGINNING OF THE BACKLASH

After repeated attempts, Assemblyman Willie L. Brown Jr. (San Francisco Dem.) has succeeded in getting his sexual liberation bill through the California State Legislature and signed by Governor Edmund G. Brown Jr. The effect of the bill AB 489 is to repeal penal code sections prohibiting oral sex and sodomy when performed by consenting adults in private. The regulations barring oral sex and sodomy in prison are stiffened by the new law, which goes into effect January 1. Until that date, oral sex continues to be punishable by up to fifteen years in State prison, regardless of the ages or genders of the participants and including acts performed in private bedrooms.

While all law-abiding Lesbians are waiting in eager anticipation of January 1 to make love as they please without fear of imprisonment, their hopes may be short-lived if a gathering backlash succeeds in plans to put the issue on the June 1976 primary election ballot. A group calling itself The Coalition of Christian Citizens, headed by Republican Senator Bill Richardson of Arcadia, predicts that they can easily get the 312,000 signatures needed for a referendum by August 11th. If their petition succeeds, the effective date of the law will be delayed pending results of the election.

All citizens who believe that sex is a private matter not subject to regulation by government are urged to make their voices heard by writing to representatives, writing to newspapers, publicising the issue among family and friends, and registering to vote.

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