Cycles

Timeless, floats the whispered sigh of Sappho to her young lover, "Come sit with me." Afterward, she celebrated their love in sweet poetic lines,

Sad, longing, and tremulous.
Now I, Sappho-like,
Caress you with my words.

Kissing you, I am ravenous.
Your breasts are velvet soft like spiring air wafting me towards.
Your white body is fair and rosy in the glance right at morning,
Shaken and mysteriously luminous in the dark roots of nights.

Its sweet volubleness
Makes me yearn to hold your heat forever in my mouth,
And taste forever the rush of soft-spilled fruit,
And breathe forever your female scent,
Committed to you by the tree-spilling passion
Of brain and soul and body,
I mount and hold your pulsing soundlessness between my thighs,
And feel your moist month drawing up toward
Into your heart.

Sweet, lovely shown, by eternal soul,
Lovers long ago
We walked upon the beach at Lesbos,
And left a trace upon the broken wood of the past.

Except the faint memory of automat,
Of soul flowing into soul,
Of love that now spells past the barriers of time and space,
Cycle following cycle,
Beyond and past and beyond again,
As these same waves still break upon the sand.

I was your last lover,
You mine,
Then
And now.

by Judith Trova
The following summer, we had an amazing stroke of luck. Our printer had a shop with equipment which he seldom used. He generously offered to rent us space in his shop at a very reasonable rate. Thus, we were able to start our printing business with virtually no capital and to build it up by month-to-month investment from our personal income. After some brief demonstrations in the use of the equipment, we were turned loose to learn printing, which we proceeded to do, with much trial-and-error and consultation of textbooks. In less than two years, we have acquired our own equipment.

The naming of our business came about in the following way: All three of us had been admirers of Ayn Rand’s ASHTRUGS, so we were doubly enthused when the National Organization for Women announced a women’s strike day called “Ms. Atlas Shrugs.” We were excited because the emphasis would be on productivity and accomplishment and because the theme would underscore specifically women’s contribution to the economy. Thus, we were disappointed when the NOW slogan was changed to “Alice Doesn’t” -- a theme which not only emphasized negativity and helplessness, but focussed entirely on straight-housewife-and-mother problems and was derived from a male-produced book containing anti-gay slurs. The reason given for the switch was that housewives couldn’t identify with the strong image of Ms. Alice. If I remember correctly, we were about to call it “Ms. Alice” anyway.

And so we named our business MS. ATLAS PRESS. And published an editorial in our first issue explaining why “Ms. Atlas Is Not Shrugging!” and printed the entire issue ourselves for the first time, with only three months experience.

Not satisfied with publishing a magazine and running a print shop and holding down outside jobs to support our enterprises, we decided to open a bookstore in the front of our shop. We spent two hundred dollars on new feminist paperback (two small boxes full) and rounded out our inventory with used books on various subjects from our personal libraries. Gradually, we added more merchandise, such as greeting cards and feminist records. This year, we have our first ad in the yellow pages:

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Ms. ATLAS PRESS
53 W San Fernando
601 1087
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This issue of LESBIAN VOICES marks the beginning of our third year of publication. MS. ATLAS PRESS is going-on two years old, and MS. ATLAS BOOKSTORE is over 1 year old. We have met many people who are interested and open to our ideas, and we are continuing working towards that goal. The rewards have been primarily psychological and spiritual -- which is a lot, but we do need to make a living by our work. We hope to make a profit this year -- at last. On the thresh old of success, we wish to thank all of you who have helped to make LESBIAN VOICES possible -- our contributors, readers, advertisers, distributors, retailers, exchangers, boosters, moral supporters -- and those who have patronized and helped to publicize MS. ATLAS PRESS AND BOOKSTORE.

Who is Ms. Atlas? Ms. Atlas is our ideal, a feminist image embodying the principles of existence, realness, self-esteem, self-worth, self-love, true satisfaction, true freedom, true trade, romance, and romantic love. We have dedicated our lives and resources to trying to live by these principles and achieve this ideal. We know that many of you share this vision, and we invite you to join us in the pursuit.

Rosalee Nichols

*Students of Ayn Rand’s works will recognize these as basic principles of Objectivism, applied in a feminist context. applied as spokespersons for Ms. Rand or her philosophy, nor do we attempt to engage in metaphysical issues. We do, however, acknowledge our intellectual and spiritual debt to her.*
toward what was then an unbelievably hostile world.

Perhaps it is this very fact which prompted a friend of mine to term homosexuality the great paradox: while appearing to be overly concerned with the physical, it can achieve at times something very near spirituality -- because it is more "other accepting." Other accepting. Yes, it is that. In the gay world, the usual categories and boundaries just don't apply. Long before social empathy was fashionable -- back in the great paradox: while appearing to be overly concerned with the physical, it can

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The Gay life. I am glad I am a part of it. And I can say that even while realizing that no amount of gay bar bacchanal, no amount of healthy eroticism, will ever blunt in me the awareness of the unrelenting oppression we have all enduring at the hands of this heterosexual culture.

By any conceivable yardstick we don't exist at all. We are ignored by the media, by the politicians, by the educators. Any recognition from the law is sure to be of an oppressive nature: witness the laws against gay sexual behavior and the vicious harassment of gay establishments. This harassment, even in 1976, is not subtle. Mention that you are gay to a policeman writing you a ticket and -- man or woman -- you are quite likely to be dragged from the car.

We are certainly never consulted on matters of policy. What office seeker feels the obligation to take a stand on gay questions: discrimination in housing, jobs, taxes? The list could go on and on. Understandably, you may not even be able to conceive of the incredible difficulty of life as a gay person. Your whole frame of reference has been so totally oriented to a life of heterosexual privilege and ease that, quite simply, you don't have the courage to think in our terms.

And make no mistake about it: courage is exactly what I am speaking of here. Courage. Existential strength. The terms are virtually synonymous with gay life. I have known men and women with a thousand times the grit, the "manhood" possessed by any straight man. I have seen them battle for homes and lives and their very dignity as human beings -- and have seen them succeed. If indeed this country ever really

stronger, finding more reasons for living, as I grew weaker, finding more reasons for

dying. In the coolness of the morning, studying her hands which lay contentedly

against the soft curve of her stomach, I felt an urgency to hold her. The cloud out-

side remained as a distraction though. Instead, I swung my legs off the bed, got up

and limped to the radio. It was on, but too early for the station to be broadcasting.

The room was still pale with the somber conversations of last night. Friends had come over. We had discussed news of the cloud that was silently
darkening the earth. Scientists were committing suicide in their search for answers.

Yesterday, another human-filled capsule was sent into it, never to be seen again.
The days of judgment were upon us, and the scientists were fools, I reflected. An

hour passed. The radio cracked to life.

This is Jack Anderson with another WECD commentary. The cloud still remains of mysterious origin. Another research capsule has disappeared into the cloud. The scientists assure us though, that the artificial sunlamps will be finished before the end of the fifth year."

I caught the sound of movement. Yes. She was stirring. Her head turned in the direction of the window, her body looking despondent with the reflection of purple cast from the cloud. I forced my ailing legs to reach the bed before she completely awoke. Her head, turning towards me, arched in recognition. She

reached out for me, but I could not respond.

"Coffee. Want some?" I held back from her grasping hands.

"Yes, please," her smile uncertain.

"No," she laughed. "It's going to kill you!"

It seemed her hostility had grown within the last few minutes,
unnerving and unexpected, as were the purple and crimson hues that rushed through her eyes when she watched me, the darkness of my cloud. Holding the hot cups of coffee I'd prepared felt reassuring, as the room chilled with the absence of sunlight. I handed her a cup, sat down beside her, making sure not to touch her body. She sensed this, and I smiled directly into it, leaving her surprised and hurt. Nothingness was becoming to our relationship now. It gave serenity to the doom that throbbed through my aching limbs.

“I liked your friends,” she said softly. “They were really interesting.” I could tell she was trying to drag me into a conversation, but my response was silence.

I reached over to pull down the shade. At first, she thought I was going to caress her, so she tried to hold me, letting go suddenly when she realized that wasn't my intention.

“Why do you hate me so deeply?” she cried.

“I don’t hate. I fear.” The answer, I noticed, puzzled her, and she sipped coffee to cover the question which began disturbing her lips.

Her hands suddenly caught my thighs, reaching around them gently.

“Do they still hurt? Your legs.”

“Yes,” I replied curtly. She removed her hands with anxious slowness.

“I must go to my sister's today,” she remarked absently, as if closing stiffly around the axis of the world in a death grip. I realized, as I studied the cloud, that I needed something to believe in. I couldn't stand this cancerous fear-ridden mind, and replied calmly, “I've got to know.” (Helena would make the thirteenth volunteer scientist to go up into that puzzling darkness.)

The phone rang -- it was Tamera. She wanted me to come over to sister Helena's house. Actually a very tidy little retreat -- though the International Interstate roared only a few yards away, her house was mystically protected in the last remaining forest of New York State. She'd readily latched into that buy Everyone envied her -- particularly me. I chugged into the fancy, brick driveway and wheeled to a halt, my car “dieseling” for about a minute after I had turned it off. Both Helena and Tamera greeted me, though Tamera was still coolly distant. I guess I couldn't blame her, although I hated to admit I was at fault. Her sister, on the other hand, made me feel right at home. We entered the house and sat down, Tamera across from me.

“I'm so glad you brought your guitar. It's been quite some time since you've played for me, and I do love your music.” I tried not to smile at the compliment, and not to notice Tamera staring stiffly beyond me.

“Thank you. But I don't understand this sudden interest in my music again, Helena.”

“Oh, didn't I tell you?” I shook my head, and sneaked a look at Tamera, who was still staring beyond me. Helena continued. “Why, tomorrow I'm going into the cloud.” I gasped loudly. Tamera caught my eyes -- she was on the verge of tears. Somehow, she no longer reminded me of the cloud, but of myself.

I turned back to Helena, my voice only half-concealing my swelling emotions. “But why?”

She looked directly into my face and even deeper into my cynical, fear-ridden mind, and replied calmly, “I've got to go. I've got to go and explore. (If I could make the thirteenth volunteer scientist to go up into that puzzling darkness.)

I understood now. It's something I myself had considered doing, but she had had the guts to do it. I envied her strength, and I shuddered over her fear. Anxiously, I looked at Tamera, who was now smiling at me. She was telling me it was okay. I timidly smiled back, then turned to Helena. “I hope you'll find the answer.”

She was looking out the window at the cloud. “Play,” she almost commanded, her eyes never leaving the window.

I picked up my guitar and carried it back to the couch. The strings were rusted from neglect. The corrosive roughness saddened me as I ran my fingers up and down the fret board. A song I'd written years ago melted through my mind and fingers I was feeling the melody flowing through my body, emptying my sorrow into itself, pushing the iciness from my veins, lifting me away from Helena, from Tamera...
A LEGEND IN HER OWN TIME

by ROCHELLE HOLT

Jana looked out on the city from her window, a room on the eleventh floor of the Sheraton Hotel. Night illuminated people walking purposefully up and down Michigan Avenue. She saw Chicago reflected in the dark brilliance of Lake Michigan. So many souls in the unknown company of each other. They do not touch one another; they never enter individual private circles, body spaces, isolated worlds. The lonely beauty touched Jana for she believed herself to be a poet. That was why she came from Holly Grove, Mississippi, to the first national women writers conference. She wanted some people to know, to realize that she was alive and working in the same county that Faulkner had imagined, created, harvested. Jana was absorbing all the excitement of a new experience so intensively and completely that she felt she might not even be able to float back to Yoknapatawpha. She was poetry-logged after two days in the big city.

She had met many women from all parts of the country. They shared their lives if only through their readings, but she could not reach out to them. There were so many young women writing poetry. Jana was overwhelmed by not only the number of poets but also their excellence. How could she ever become known to such a diversified and colorful group? An idea bombarded Jana's mind. Preoccupied with a way to become immortal and savor the glory, she concentrated on a way that would allow her to become a legend in her own time. After all, she was not totally a "nobody" in the fine arts world. She operated her own printing press and belonged to a unique coterie surrounding Ana Nioni, the diarist and advocate of the novel of the future. If she led people to believe that she had committed suicide, surely she would be mourned, perhaps martyred, made famous? Jana speculated on the gravity of her proposed scheme.

She would let people believe that she had committed suicide in a cold and unfriendly city. Jana imagined her suicide note. The wind knocked on her windowpane and begged her for an invitation to enter. She began to compose aloud. "Night was no stranger to the woman whose mind was haunted by dark ominous premonitions. She had foreseen this end in her beginning years ago when her mother brought her to life on an island in the middle of a windy lake. Only water enveloped her like a secure and beloved blanket, like the warmth of a protective womb." Jana, the unproclaimed poet, would let the world think she had walked into the deep, soft, beautiful waves of Lake Michigan. In fact, she planned to fly to a distant uncle who lived alone in the vast, uncluttered space of North Dakota to remove herself from the scene of this uncommitted, only imagined crime.

Thor knew his niece as the Janet she had been christened years ago when his mind and paintbrush were more alert, more active. She had not seen him in over ten years; Uncle Thor did not know of Jana, the poet, the printer, the modern woman who longed for some recognition, a small shred of fame. Jana chose the poem she would pin to her suicide note before swiftly and secretly departing Chicago for the cabin in Mountain, North Dakota.

Now I Lay Me Down I know the shadows of my room, the reflections from the moon on the mirror, like ghosts with long prong feline fingernails

that itch to scratch the veins in rippling blue plaster before fracturing into fragments the torn image of myself.

I know the cobwebs in the corners and crannies of this tomb and the complicated stitchery of Fear who hems mental shreds with pale grey threads and applies decals as design, not machine made, but mine-tight iced flesh kept in storage too long.

I know the silences in this womb, the mute echoes that loom through the years. Sheltered from the humming streetlights and the crushing rushing autocades, I have heard: the wind snoring on a snowy ledge, a wedge of time in mother's wind-up creaking clock, and tocks of tears in a pillow at midnight. I know the shadows in my room, the cobwebs of this tomb, the silence of this womb.

I have been one acquainted with despair.

A few days later Janet was reading about the self she had left behind in the CHICAGO TRIBUNE. The article stated that a young poet attending the first national women writers conference held in Chicago on October 13-14 was believed to have drowned herself in Lake Michigan. "The woman left a poetic suicide note in her hotel room. The poetess Jana never returned to her stepmother and half-sisters in Holly Grove, Mississippi." Janet winced at the unfavorable little of poetess. She wondered whether there would soon be an unveiling of her greatness. She hoped Estelle remembered where all her boxes of poetry were when the right people came in search of her work. Surely she would become immortalized, assured of a place on the ladder of literature. Janet felt extremely buoyant despite the silence of her uncle who was now approaching seventy-five years of age. She hoped that he would not die. What would she do then? she thought. Days turned into weeks, passed into months and still there were no profiles of her personality. Was the world so cruel? Did nobody care about a young poet who poured all her soul, heart,
imagination into poems of love, death, war, peace, hope and despair? Jana sat in Uncle Thor's cabin and meditated on the Dakota bleakness, Icelander country. A wild jungle had grown up around Thor's house, a shed in need of serious repair. Tall trees were tangled with high weeds, bushes, cornstalks, broken fence posts. A dull brown stamped the landscape that was not even cheered by a cold pale sky. There was neither fall nor spring in this god-forsaken country, only hot summers and long cold winters. She had not seen another human being since Chicago. How could Thor ever have been inspired to paint from this nature. So depressing, so sterile, so barren, she thought. Jana kept rocking in the creaking wooden chair. She felt comforted by the to and fro rhythm. In her mind she created a poem about the sea but did not think it good enough to preserve on paper. Uncle Thor then came screaming into the solitary abode like a madman, like a demented spirit. Above his head he wielded a pitchfork like some giant Viking of old. Before she could move, he had hurled the pronged weapon at the body rocking so calmly in the squeaky chair.

"I told her not to disturb my paintings. I like cobwebs and spiders and dust. She came back to taunt me, a witch I have met in my dreams. I'll put an end to her. I'll put an end to her."

Jana heard the rambling speech as she lay suffering in the chair. Uncle Thor disappeared from her sight out into the grey day as blood ran down her shirt onto the floor. She felt she was dying and yet she couldn't be sure except she knew the pain was real and her chest was throbbing as never before. Minutes later, she coughed, gasped for air and then fell face forward out of the chair which continued to rock back and forth, back and forth, as though unaware of the strange murder that had just occurred.

The smile across the room, the wisdom I'd never known; it all moved inside of me evoking a strange blend: a witch's charm of passion and terror. The length of time it took to walk over to her and ask the cosmic question "Do you want to dance?" returned old fantasies: as Alice I went through the looking glass. She was Alice. I was Alice. I waited for the guilt, but there was none—only freedom.

METAMORPHOSIS

We conversed most of the evening; I imagining foreign tongues and Atlantis rising up, water rushing off—churning the beast and angel. I was spellbound; numb and yet vibrant in my numbness. If only her eyes weren't so heavy with secrets, I would have never asked. The fear was there but my thoughts were not my own. My body was turning to liquid. Never had I expected to be so frail—so burning. I left all of me with her that night.

-- B. C. Foster

Thoughts of a Disabled Dyke

Today as I was conversing with a friend of mine who also is a disabled dyke, several points of reality were pointed out to me. I've always been aware of these things she mentioned, but I was never able to deal with the situations with the firmness required.

The very most important situation called to my attention has occurred often in my life, and she noticed it New Years Eve at a bar I attend fairly regularly. People would ask me to dance and pick me up to dance since I am short and have portrayed a false image of being so "sweet" and "cute." Portraying such an image has led to other problems difficult for me to handle.

My problems of sexuality stem from my "sweet" and "cute" image. I've continuously fought and tried to prove I am capable of sex; I have sexual feelings and desires just as any other lesbian does. Being disabled plus having such an image intensifies a person's negativity of my having any kind of sexuality at all. (I have found this to occur much more frequently in lesbians than with males, because men seem only to care about their prick power and prick energy without giving much if any thought to the woman!)

I'm tired of women telling me, "Oh you're so cute" etc. without ever thinking of me as an equal, only as some little-person who only needs a pat-on-the-head relationship. Well, damn it, I have feelings, fears and desires just like you or anyone else! I am capable of an intellectual conversation, and I need to be treated as an equal who has the same basic needs of fulfillment in various ways whether it be sexual, intellectual or whatever. Just because I am disabled does not mean I am any less of a person with any less needs or desires as you able-bodied dykes out there! I have anger to express, and I'm going to express it! I demand to be treated and thought of as an equal.

So— from now on -- damn you who do not respect me in the way I deserve to be respected! One last warning—Watch out! Here comes that disabled dyke you treated so casually -- that disabled dyke who has now turned her silence into anger! I am rebelling against your treatment of me in the past, and I won't tolerate it another minute!

-- Mary Gennoy
I.
I have sat in
Dark corners
And
Thought you out;
I have turned
My eyes
From what is
Before me,
Running you through
My heart and mind,
Like a computer,
Digesting the facts
Of
Your life's actions.
And still I don't
Know you,
And (I) fear I
Never will.
But--
That doesn't stop me
From
Loving you.

II.
Your Christmas present
Stands alone,
Under the once happy
Tree:
I fear
It will be there
For
A long, long time--
Even after there is
No tree.
It was wrapped
With
Love/Pride/Devotion,
All the good
thoughts/warm feelings
That came (so) naturally.
Now it fills the air
With
Anger/Pain/Humiliation--
A result of Deception--
And Betrayal.

III.
As far as I am concerned,
You have now joined
The ranks of
(The) machines
With human flesh
Stretched
Over them.
Or--
Have you always
Been there?
ME: Look, if you both don't mind, I'd rather not sit in on anyone else's arguments; I've got too much on my mind as it is.

COM: Does it still hurt, Dorothy?

ME: It's coming down to a sad, dull ache, thank you; but my feelings seem to fluctuate---between anger and bitterness---understanding and---

COM: (As I hesitate) And what, love?

ME: ---And thoughts of you, Compassion.

COM: How disgustingly vain and quixotic you can be at times, Compassion. (Directly to ME) You got much more on the ball than that, Dorothy. Didn't you tell me only tonight how you sometimes can't stop thinking about getting your hands on your friend—ex-friend, that is—and how you often can't sleep at night because of all the conflicting feelings and thoughts you are having about her? Why, it isn't a distinct possibility that if you went ahead and took this little trip—as I was advising you before our nosey, old-fashioned friend here showed up—and physically confronted your friend—ex-friend—you could wipe away all your frustration in one attack?

ME: (Confused) You mean hurt her—physically—?

COM: (Annoyed) What the hell for—?! To punish her? And how? By slapping her in the mouth—? Kicking her in the ass—? Or maybe you would prefer the more heavy-handed stuff---Strangulation. Suffocation. Drowning.

VEN: (Dryly lyrical) Do-da—do-da—

ME: You're being ridiculous—this is all absurd---

COM: Exactly. Glad to hear you say it. In the first place, if you are really going to be honest with yourself, you know you couldn't hurt her, really hurt her, in any way, shape, or form---so what the hell will you be wasting your time, energy, and money for traveling down south? You probably couldn't even spit in her face without hating yourself—and you goddamn well know it.

ME: So I do nothing---?

COM: What's to do? Besides, don't you think, in her own way, she might very well be suffering for what she's done to you? People—especially women—suffer their own pain, as well as torment---punishment—what have you---when they are in the habit of constantly inflicting it on others. Very few escape altogether, you can be sure of that, my friend.

VEN: I never heard such garbage in all my lives. Listen, Dorothy, forget what Mary Poppins' great-grandmother here has to say and take some tips from one who knows. That broad is probably laughing her head off at what a fool she's made of you. And inside, where it really counts, she's no doubt filled with all kinds of satisfaction at what she's put you through.

COM: It's a trap that mortals in love easily fall into, I assure you. So don't be too can on yourself. But, tell me, can you really think of taking revenge on someone like that? Someone who was once a friend as well as a lover.

VEN: It's certainly true, I guess, that if she played her cards better—was more shrewd and calculating about it—I could have been deceived, kept on a string, a hell of a lot longer. It could have gone on for years, in fact, in view of her having to travel all over the country.

COM: Now you're getting it. And did you ever consider the fact? love, that she just may not be able to handle anything better than contempt from the people who mean the most to her?

ME: (Thoughtfully) The old 'self-destructive pattern' at work again. And I thought I knew better than her shrink—I was so smart—my love and affection and friendship were going to wipe it all away---

COM: (Shrugs) It's a trap that mortals in love easily fall into, I assure you. So don't be too can on yourself. But, tell me, can you really think of taking revenge on someone like that? Someone who was once a friend as well as a lover. A sister. A sister who wreaks enough vengeance on herself as it is.

VEN: (Desperate, but smug) I'll bet she's found another lover, Dorothy, and that's one of the reasons she dropped out of your life without warning.

COM: Perhaps. But don't you think, Dorothy, that eventually she would no doubt---the very same thing, no matter who, what, when, or where---it will always be the same with her—and no one will ever be sure who she really loved and whom she didn't. Maybe not even her. Although I wouldn't bet money on it as a sure thing.

VEN: Oh, balderdash!
COM: (Laughs shortly) Why, Vengeance, I do believe your age is showing -- I haven't heard you use that expression for at least half a century.

VEN: Let's not speak of age, sister, since I can plainly see your wrinkles, even in this dim lighting.

COM: (Shrugs unconcernedly) It comes with experience, sister. Look closely and you'll see a lot of happy wrinkles there also. It all comes from the satisfaction and gratification I have derived from taking part in the growth of womanhood down through the centuries. Women know that I'm a natural friend to them—and can always be without hampering them in their struggles.

VEN: I almost feel sorry for you, Compassion, the way you bask in the sunlight of the past. Times have changed, sister--haven't you heard? Once sisters got to know me, they realize that I can be a much more reliable and practical friend to them. You see, little Dyke Sunshine, I don't fill their heads with empty promises and thoughts of sickeningly sweet results coming from real-hard-cold facts. And those, me darlin', are just the raw, basic facts of life. You have kept women back for centuries, kept them mentally, emotionally, and psychologically weak and dependent. Even when they actually weren't. But no more, sister, because women have changed since you were in your prime. And still others are changing with the times. Now they prefer me. Me and my kind. And you, dear little sickness of the weak and feeble, are a thing of the past, almost obsolete. ---So you better get good and used to it.

COM: Are you through running off at the mouth, you ancient dealer in misery? What you say is not true, and you damn well know it. And even if there was a hint of truth in it, you could never replace me where women are concerned, Vengeance, and you know it.

VEN: Says you.

COM: Says me.

ME: You know, the way you two are always bickering, you'd think you were lovers or something. (Compassion and Vengeance both snicker) Well, did you ever actually consider getting together to straighten out your differences?

COM: Never.

VEN: No way.

ME: Well, I don't know—but I have the feeling that if you could both only get together--between the two of you, you might very well be able to achieve unlimited goals for women and womanhood.

VEN: Us working together? That's impossible. (Slight pause) Isn't it?

COM: Of course it is.

VEN: Of course it is.

ME: Well, okay—but just remember what mortal women can-have-and will accomplish together—so just try to imagine what women could do with the likes of you two behind them. Well—(Stands) I've got to be going now—thanks for trying to help—but I guess I'll just have to work things out for myself. See you around

---and you might just think about what I've said to the both of you---I'm certainly going to give some thought to all you've both told me. 'Bye.

DOROTHY LEAVES.

VEN: I don't think either of us accomplished anything with that one.

COM: Oh, I don't know; only time will tell, I guess.

VEN: Yeah, I guess. (Significant pause) That was a stupid thing she suggested about us getting together---Wasn't it?

COM: Of course. (Slight pause) Though she's not usually a stupid woman, of course. I really like her. She's quite bright, in fact.

VEN: Well, yeah, I know, but---(Significant pause) Listen---do you have to rush away---? Would you like to dance or something---?

COM: (Slight pause; steady, sober gaze) What for? After all these centuries, why are you asking me to dance all of a sudden?

VEN: (Unsure; shrugs) Because I want to—?

HEAVY PAUSE, AS THEY CHECK EACH OTHER OUT---FOR THE FIRST TIME?

COM: (Making a sudden decision) Well, okay---But I wanna lead.

VEN: (Following after her; annoyed) There you go again, making a big deal out of a simple situation—'cause you gotta be stubborn---

COM: I'm not the one who's being stubborn---

THEY GO OFF, ARGUING ALL THE WAY. CURTAIN (IF THERE IS ONE).

A young man was on their porch, writhing, screaming, and pounding out windows with a fist. PCs. He must have been hallucinating JAWS or ROLLERBALL. And next door to me, a frightened old woman and her best friend Charley. Charley had been sent to watch junkyards and to bite people. He also hated butterflies and birds. So every night until midnight -- a Bark-a-thon. I had to move, and I did!

I’m recovering from a savage beating received last week after an Audubon Club meeting. The hall emptied out so fast that I hadn’t had time to contact a ride. I walked a mile up a dark road to the safety of Grandlake Avenues. When I was mugged, beaten up, and almost raped and killed. I had no money, only a quarter and some BART tickets, which he didn’t want. I talked him out of the rape by telling him specifically: “I said ‘syphilis’ — then demanded perversion, but suddenly got up and ran away. I had finished saying, “Why do you want to hurt women? Women have never harmed you in any way.” My glasses were broken, and my jaw swollen from repeated blows to the chin. But I’m thankful merely to be alive and unharmed.

You see, I have this thing about penetration — I’ve been penetrated by medical examinations, and one thing about vaginal, kidney and rectal tests is the god-awful pain!

As you might guess, I’ve cooled a lot about Negroes. I sympathize with black women, I think their babies are stunning. Customs and mores are something else. As Del Martin stated in her book, in black society the absence of heterosexual activity automatically labels one a homosexual. And black attitudes towards homosexuals are no more tolerant than that of the Rednecks. White Machismo, Black Machismo, branches of the same tree; the big-sized Texan, or the super-endowed black stud. White rednecks encourage this attitude in the blacks, and then snicker behind their backs that “some folks are just like that. A lot of them are bisexual. In my case, it’s because I was raped black women from the time of slavery. I’ve given up hope on Rednecks, but I thought the sufferings of the black man might give him compassion for the plight of women. Some black men have — I recall the sensitive writings of Langdon Hughes, or the political acts of John J. Miller, Willie Brown and Mervyn Dymally. For all of them savaged me, and called me BITCH. Some courageous women have told the press all of this. As Del Martin states, “I don’t care. I got bit by dogs twice already, and I don’t want to get bit again!”

Well, look at it rationally. Things like that happen. So you happened to be one of those who got bit. That’s no reason to generalize your experience and hold it against all dogs. After all, you only got bit by two individual dogs out of all the individual dogs in the world. Now you’re going to take two dog bites and blame it on the whole canine race.

“Yeah, well, my mother also got bit, and so did my sister — and come to think of it, so did my cousin. I guess almost everyone in my family has got bit at one time or another.”

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“So? That’s your particular family.”

“Yeah, I know. But they make me nervous just the same.”

“Yeah, well, let him get his ‘free bite’ somewhere else. I’ve already given him a ‘free bite’ before. Unprovoked dog bites are deplorable, and the victims really ought to do something about it. But what I’m trying to get at is that you are being irrational and therefore unjust to THIS dog,” I argued, pointing again at the dog. “Boy, you really HATE dogs, don’t you! You must be miserable, going around hating dogs like that! You ought to try making friends with them. There’s enough
hate in the world already. Hate doesn't accomplish anything. Hate is a negative force, and all it can do is destroy."

"Wait a minute," my friend said angrily (proving that she was full of negative emotion, as I suspected), "I don't go around 'hating' for no reason. The damn dogs BIT me! And a lot of other dogs have BIT other people! What do you want me to do? Deny my experience? Blank out on reality? Act like it never happened, or could never happen again? No, you're going to do, start handing me that 'love the enemy' line? Boy, you're some friend -- I get bit by a dog, and you're going to tell me to turn the other cheek!"

(Shes was plainly getting hysterical by now, which confirmed my judgment that she was a little on the irrational side, but I decided to go on trying, very calmly, to reason with her. After all, there was no point in both of us getting emotional, and it was the wrong time of the month for her anyway.) I proceeded, "All I'm saying is that hate isn't the way to change anything. Dogs aren't born vicious, you know. I'll bet that the vast majority of biting dogs in the world were either mistreated or trained by a master who rewarded them for growling and biting and acting fierce."

"That's swell. But I didn't mistreat them, so why should I suffer for it?"

"I'm not saying you should. But if you really want to change things, you have to deal with dogs. If you would try loving them and talking to them and petting them, I bet they wouldn't bite anymore -- or at least some of them wouldn't -- you have to give them a chance to change."

"If you want to try to change them, go ahead, be my guest. But I don't see why it's so quick to stand up for the dogs. What about those of us who have been victimized by them? You really some humanitarian -- or caninatarian -- you're full of sympathy and understanding for them, and no compassion for us!"

"But they don't hate you! I'm just against hatred, in all its forms."

"If they don't hate me, then why do they bite? And what difference does it make to me whether they 'hate' me or not -- a bite's a bite, isn't it?"

"Just the same dogs are living things, too, and we all have to get along. We all have to live together on this Spaceship Earth." (I was still hoping to appeal to our common humanity, but she looked pretty grim.)

"All right, all right," my friend said in exasperation, "I concede the point. You're correct. Not all dogs bite -- BUT ALL DOGS GOT TEETH!"

Lately, I have done a lot of thinking about the idea of "isolation." As a woman of healthy independence and self-reliance, I enjoy a certain amount of solitude -- solitude in which to think, to dream, to enjoy sunny mornings with my coffee cup, and to gather a sense of myself. Yet I recognize that enforced isolation can be very painful, may perhaps be the most painful condition which woman can experience. In order to understand the essence of isolation better, I looked up the dictionary definition and familiar words, and found, instead of words, and found:

**ISOLATE:** To set apart, as from a mass, group or situation: cause to be alone; to place away from others, usually as a form of punishment.

**SOLITARY:** Living, being or going alone; made, done, or passed alone; a solitary life; unfrequented by human beings; secluded; lonely: desolate: lonesome, lonely; single; one; sole.

**ISOLATION CONFINEMENT:** A form of imprisonment in which the prisoner is confined completely, apart from others, usually as a form of punishment.

**OSTRACISM:** To shut out or exclude, as from society or from a particular group; exile.

**OUTCAST:** One who is cast out or excluded as from society; a homeless person or vagabond; anything cast out, as refuse.

**QUARANTINE:** The enforced isolation for a fixed period of time of persons, ships, or goods; a place designated for the enforcement of such interdiction: the enforced isolation of any person infected with contagious disease.

Is it rational, I wondered, to feel that mere isolation is such a negative and fearful condition? Or is dread of isolation symptomatic of some internal weakness, some flaw of character?

I reviewed in my mind the social uses of isolation. I thought about school-years, when the "group" reigns supreme and the independent child is ostracized; ostracism is used to enforce conformity and promote snobbery. I thought about orphans of boys who won't let girls or "sissies" play with them; ostracism is used to enforce masculinity and enslave women, about the welfare and "quarantine"; ostracism is used to make the outcast feel diseased or worthless. Next, I thought about the use of isolation as punishment; solitary confinement is used to cause suffering by depriving the prisoner of closeness, companionship, and the healthy stimulation of mind and body. I thought of women confined to mental hospitals and old women in convalescent homes and wondered whether their "treatment" didn't feel more like punishment to them. I thought of all the stories I had ever heard of lonely geniuses dying in poverty attended by only a few loyal intimates, only to be hailed and eulogized posthumously for their "great contributions to society"; ostracism is used by society in such terrifying ways, then the need for stimulation, companionship, and social justice must be a natural and healthy human need and not a weakness or neurosis. So, I shall continue to enjoy my morning solitude, with my coffee cup in one hand and my fountain pen in the other, but I'll enjoy it with an increased awareness that I would not enjoy it if my solitude were enforced rather than chosen!
From the age of 10 on I always had close women friends, and these women were the most important people in my life. I was always going over to my best friend's house to spend the night, or vice versa, and we'd generally stay up most of the night discussing and sharing our deepest thoughts, fears, and dreams. Oftentimes I was close to several friends at the same time, without this causing many hassles. Actually, some of the women I've been sexually involved with (my old lovers) haven't affected my life nearly as much as my friends have.

In fact, I doubt that I could have a good long-term lover relationship if I didn't also have good friends. Without those friends my independence and derivacy on my lover would probably grow until it strained our relationship, for no one woman can fulfill all of my various needs. I've found it damaging to me, my lover, and our relationship if either of us loses her independence and has her whole self tied to the other. If friends can help prevent this from ever happening, by friends I don't mean acquaintances - you see at social events once or twice a month. I'm talking about women you can talk and relax with without hassles, women you trust, women who don't have unrealistic expectations of you, women with whom you enjoy just being yourself. If friends are so wonderful and necessary, then why is it so difficult for lesbians to make friends with each other? Why is it that many of us have an easier time finding lovers than good friends?

Before I attempt to define what, in my opinion, are some of the barriers lesbians erect between themselves and other lesbians, let me explain that I'm concerned here only with the interactions among lesbians (another article could be written about trying to be friends with non-lesbians). Also, when I refer to lovers I mean women who are sexually involved, and for this article I'm assuming that a couple relationship is one which is monogamous.

I believe that the major obstacle to lesbian friendships is the simple fact that every lesbian is a potential lover. "Lesbians have been socialized by a society in which friendships between potential lovers (i.e. in the heterosexual world, between men and women) hardly ever occur. Our society does not prepare us to deal with the sexual aspects of friendship, has, in fact, taught us to value only the lover relationship (for society assumes that that relationship will be with a man), and friendships with women are only secondary. I feel that lesbians still believe what society has taught us; that it is imperative to find a lover. Thus finding and keeping a lover becomes the highest priority in our lives. Often the result is that lesbians view each other solely in terms of their potential as lovers. Our emphasis on sexual involvements, along with our often relating to each other solely as sexual beings, makes it difficult for us to form close friendships. Often the result is that "let's be friends." Before they got sexually involved the two might have become great friends, but now the intensity of feelings that comes from a disintegrating lover relationship makes this a difficult time to form a friendship, especially when there wasn't one there to begin with.

Unfortunately, I've found that, even with men out of the picture, the reality of lesbian friendships is far from ideal. In fact, I now think that it was much easier making friends when I was straight, for men only occasionally got in the way. Whenever a lover relationship makes this a difficult time to form a friendship, especially when there wasn't one there to begin with.

I've done a lot of thinking about this situation because friends have always been an integral part of my life. In some instances my friends have been more important to me than my lovers, and the friendships I've had have often been more lasting and stable.
Another possible course of events would be for the two to actually talk with each other about their relationship before they become sexually involved. They may decide that they don't want any heavy involvement, but since they're two adults, and they would both enjoy making love, then, why not? While in theory the concept of two friends becoming lovers is possibly the most enjoyable because it feels good to be with the person you like, from my experience it hardly ever works out that way. For, as one friend put it, "Ideally making love is healthy, fun, satisfying, and a release, but in my guts I just can't do it - I can't just make love and feel that it's unimportant." Somehow, no matter how honest, up-front, and sexually liberated lesbians are supposed to be, I believe that becoming sexually involved changes our relationships, and the results can be disastrous.

Generally what's happened to me when I've gone to bed with women friends is that one of us starts wanting more out of the relationship. Either myself or the other woman is no longer content with continuing the relationship simply on the basis of two friends who happen to be making love; one of us falls in love. Unless we both feel the same way, then one of us, or probably both of us, is going to be hurt. Logic disappears, feelings become complex, emotions intensify, and neither one of us is having much fun anymore. Usually the friendship the two women once shared is destroyed.

After all, friends are the people who are supposed to help you with your problems, not make love. But if the women have been able to talk with each other for several years now. I've since decided that my friendships are too important to risk like that.

If, instead, the two women don't go to bed there's other problems they might have to confront. The one who decides that they shouldn't make love could be accused of putting her friend on the defensive (a definite no-no among the other type of spontaneous). Or the other woman could perceive the decision as a personal rejection. Neither reaction helps the friendship much. If the two women make it past these initial difficulties, then they may be faced with the question of where do they draw the line between affection and sex, and how do they deal with their sexual feelings for each other.

In addition to these barriers, the friendship must try to survive in an atmosphere where, as I've said before, it's unusual to find lesbians who place so much emphasis on sexual involvements - lovers is one thing. One or both may say they want to keep the friendship, but at the same time put their main energies into the more important search for a lover. One time a good friend of mine whom I hadn't seen for a while came up to me at a party and asked, "Are you still monogamous, or now can we really get involved?" It seemed to me that, as long as this woman and I didn't make the involvement, the friendship we did share was relegated to the rather unimpressive category of "just friends."

I've heard lesbians complain that when they have friendships/relationships with non-lesbian women they sometimes feel as if they have to take second place to some man. Well, I'm tired of taking second place to sex. I don't want to be friends with a woman only spending time with me while she's "spending time with her boyfriend." If other lovers are unavailable. Why must we downgrade the friendships we have? Why must we, as lesbians, place so much emphasis on sexual involvements?

Sometimes I wondered if friendships weren't easier to come by when lesbians were into roles. Even though it was always possible that a woman would change her mind or vice versa, I imagine that for the woman, the role of the femme, is less threatening than any involvement of non-sexual relationships. That is, the butches could be friends with each other without the constant concern about getting involved with each other, with the same being true of the femmes. Furthermore, a butch did not have to be too jealous if her lover was spending time with another femme. Of course, there are a multitude of additional problems that are a result of role-playing, but perhaps one of the reasons role-playing exists among lesbians is the need these women feel to have other lesbians they can relate to on a friendship level and feel safe with. Also the existence of acknowledged roles may allow for an added bit of order to the lesbian community.

If the lesbian community lacks anything, it's order. The simple fact that all other communities and roles have an established pattern of behavior results in the results of others who have been close for any length of time, many of them might very likely have been lovers with each other. There've been several times when I've been involved with or close to women who were once lovers with someone whom I'd also been involved with. For whatever the underlying currents of past love, pain, and jealousy can be incredible.

In addition to the general complexity of lesbian communities, and the ever-present question of sexual involvement, there exists a whole other set of barriers to friendship when one or both of the individuals already has a lover. For example, one of the first lesbian communities I got to know consisted of about ten women, most of whom were in couples with each other. I was single at the time, and I felt as if I almost had to go through a probationary period before most of the women would open their doors to me. In a sense I had to show that I could be trusted, and that I wasn't interested in breaking up any of the couples. My experience made me realize the overwhelming restraints placed on lesbian friendships.

Say I'm friends with a woman named Barb, and she's in a couple with Joan. First of all, I'll have to accept the fact that Barb's number one priority will most likely be in maintaining her relationship with Joan. Simple time commitments may take up all the time I don't spend with Barb. Of course, if Joan doesn't like and trust me, it will probably be hard for Barb and I to get very close. Or, if she's jealous and possessive whether or not she likes me may be difficult, I may feel I'll only be difficult for Joan. If Joan doesn't value friendship then she'll have trouble accepting any of Barb's friends. Furthermore, Joan may not understand how Barb can talk for hours with someone else when she doesn't seem to talk much at all at home. The fact that different aspects of different friendships are of different importance may be too threatening to Joan. (It seems sad to me that women feel jealous because of their fear of losing their lovers, and that often this very jealousy causes the women to break up.)

In my getting to know Barb it is important for me to respect Barb's relationship with Joan. The fact that Barb and I want to become friends and not approach the friendship with the underlying hope that we'll get involved or that I criticize Joan, or try to ignore her very existence as Barb's lover, the friendship will falter.

Since Joan is obviously a major factor in Barb's life, it would be almost impossible for me to approach our friendship in the same manner as if Joan wasn't, and this can mean seeing too. In addition, not only do I have to like both Barb and Joan, but also how they relate to each other as a couple. There've been times when I like two women individually, but can't stand the way they act when they're together.

While certain roadblocks have to be overcome when forming friendships with women in couples, being in a couple and attempting to make friends with others also has its own special difficulties. From my experience with non-lesbian and lesbian couples, I've discovered many problems in getting to know a woman, and I feel that those can contribute to the isolation of women in couples.

One annoying aspect of being in a couple is that frequently other lesbians view you only as a part of that couple. At times I feel as if my lover and I are thought of as extensions of each other, not as individuals with our own thoughts, feelings, and lives. Once past this obstacle you meet the more pervasive problem...
Occasionally my lover and I have been sought out by women for this very reason. They have known us, but they feel a need to talk to someone who's not directly affected by what they have to say. In other words, they find themselves in a situation where just about everyone they're close to they're also sexually involved with, or at least considering it. They may get to the point where they feel that they need someone totally outside of the situation to discuss it with; they need someone who's "safe," someone who's not trying to get involved with them.

However, a more common occurrence is being ignored. That is, many times at social events I begin to feel close to invisible. Often I've met women at parties, and after what seems like a conversation they realize I'm in a couple, they seem to quickly lose interest and begin looking around the room for someone else to talk with. After all, why waste your time with someone who's already "taken."

Past these initial reactions, other ones seem to develop. Lots of people seem to get concerned if a woman in a couple starts spending a lot of time with someone other than her lover. Since it seems that everyone assumes that when you're together for any length of time the community begins to assume that they are or will soon be lovers, it confuses people when one of the women is already in a couple.

Even if my lover's not upset about my seeing someone else, my lover's friends may be. They may wonder whether I'm directly or indirectly, that is, indirectly by trusting me so much and not being jealous. She may either feel as if she has to try to reassure her friends that I'm not getting involved with the other woman, or she may start being affected by their feelings and also wonder if she's been a fool.

The other woman's friends may start questioning her too. They may tell her that I'm using her or leading her on, or that I'm obviously unhappy with my lover since I'm seeing other women. They may question our motives for wanting to see each other since it can "never lead anywhere."

Why a woman in a couple might want to get close to other women seems to be perfectly natural, especially if she's already been in a relationship. Women in couples are not supposed to get lonely, or need and want other friendships. Overall it appears that any time two women are close without being lovers it's strange and confusing to others, unfortunately because it doesn't seem to happen very often in the lesbian community.

One way for women in couples to avoid many of these situations and still have friends is to devote their time to other couples. Many tensions seem less prevalent when two couples are friends with each other. No one needs to feel jealous since women in couples are "safe," and couples get together they don't have to worry about someone feeling left out. Also, couples can share with each other their common hassles of living with a lover and perhaps realize that their problems aren't unique.

But when two couples are together that means there's four separate individuals all trying to relate to each other. Naturally all four have to like each other to be friends. In a larger group it can be hard to get as close to each other. One possibility is that the individuals may become lost in their "couple-ness." Finally, there's always the possibility that one of the couples may break up, and thus drastically change the friendships.

I don't want to be totally negative about the chance for the development and survival of lesbian friendships. If two lesbians can make it past all the obstacles and rest is to devote their time to other couples. And any others there may be, the friendships that grow between them can be a wonder. With good friends a woman who's single doesn't have to search for a lover to fulfill her needs for closeness, affection, and companionship. I still have strong feelings for the two women who were the first lesbians I became close friends with, having gotten past the initial fantasies of personal sexual involvement. I'm afraid that unless several women and my life seemed to consist of constant trauma, excitement, and emotional turmoil. The friendships I made with those two women made me aware that what I was looking for was not to fall in love with different lovers, but simply good friends. Having friends to talk and laugh with, to help with, (hold my hand, say sleep, that's exactly what I mean) finally, made me realize what I'd been missing as a single lesbian.

Ideally I dream of a group of lesbians in which jealousy, possessiveness and the constant and at times desperate search for a lover don't exist. I hope that someday lesbians will place more emphasis on friends, and we will allow ourselves and each other more freedom for closeness and affection without confusing it with sex. That single lesbians will feel less of a need or pressure to find a lover, and women living in couples won't be so cut off from other lesbians. Dancing with my friends, holding them, talking and laughing and arguing with them, playing with them, and sleeping with them - all these make up one of the most wonderful parts of my life. Even though I'm not sharing orgasms with these women, I somehow don't feel that our relationships are deprived.

When I read about women trying to form lesbian communities and organizations I wonder if we're jumping ahead of ourselves. Communities composed of lovers, ex-lovers, and acquaintances are missing a very critical and necessary element - friends. Lesbians have a wide spectrum of beliefs, lifestyles, and backgrounds, and we're often separated by race, class, age, etc. I feel that if we're ever going to attain any semblance of unity we must be able to get together at least as friends.

The lesbian groups that now exist often try to provide a variety of ways for lesbians to get to know each other, since for many lesbians the only alternative has been a bar. I'm afraid that until we change our basic attitudes about lovers and friends, until we remove some of the emphasis on sex and sexual involvement and thus reduce the amount of jealousy and possessiveness, and until we validate the importance of non-sexual friendships, we'll still be developing the same relationships as always - we'll be following the same patterns whether we do it in rap groups, meetings, or coffeehouses. Loneliness and isolation are common problems in this society. I hope that somehow we as lesbians can find a way to combat them - and I don't think becoming lovers with lots of women is the answer. It seems to me that an army of lovers certainly can fail.

P.S. I'd like to thank the friends who helped me with this article. Also, I'd really like to hear any additions to or criticisms of this article you may have.

Footnotes: (1) SAPPHO WAS A RIGHT-ON WOMAN by Sidney Abbott and Barbara Love, Stein and Day, 1972. (2) "Women In Love, the Lesbian Way of Life" (unpublished) Lesher.
An Open Letter to My Lover

by Mary E. Lewis

Darling:

It has been five years now, that we have shared our time and space together; and I feel safe in saying, we have made it, and we continue to make it each and every day. It hasn’t been easy, two women struggling to find a place where they can be free to live their life in peace, a place where they can be.

We have had to learn to live with many unwanted things, the domination by our respective families for the life we share, the love we enjoy. For me, that part of our life hasn’t been so bad - I accepted it when I made the decision to live my life as an open lesbian. However, what I have found to be very hard to accept is the criticism of our lesbian sisters for the kind of relationship we made for ourselves.

I have been told by some sisters that I am oppressive of you because the relationship we share is a contractual one. The agreement that provides us each with the guidelines as to what is accepted of each of us, what each of us is willing to give to the other freely -- no questions, no doubts, it is all spelled out for us in our contract. Our needs and wants are all there because we know ourselves, with room for growth and change, as the need arises, that is there also.

I have been condemned by sisters because our relationship is monogamous, told that because of this, I am not a liberated woman, that I am holding you back. Because we have chosen not to relate to any other women sexually, we are out of step with the times. Surely women have other means of relating to each other than sexually.

What has become of listening and hearing what the other person has to say, of caring what that person is saying? Where has the empathy gone? Sitting through the facts as I know them, it appears to me these sisters of mine are continually searching for something of which I am not sure -- when it is we, you and I, who have found, not all of the answers by any means, but enough of the answers to give our life a great deal of meaning, direction, and satisfaction. There have been hard days, days when I questioned the love I have for you and you for me. There have been bad days and all known kinds of days. But there have been more good days than bad, more easy days than hard, and more days when love was shared than questioned.

I feel hurt, darling, because of all the people in this world I expected understanding from, it was my lesbian sisters. This in no way is to say that I feel all lesbians should live in a contractual monogamous relationship, but simply to say, I know what works for me, and I haven’t as yet seen any other kind working as well for its participants. I love you very much, my Sasha, and am so sorry, darling, but as far as I am concerned, you will have to remain an oppressed, unliberated, happy partner in our relationship.

Always,

Mary.
RADCLYFFE HALL AT THE WELL OF LONELINESS: A SAPPHIC CHRONICLE by Lovat Dickson, Charles Scribner's Sons, $7.95

Radclyffe Hall's life should provide a wealth of material for any biographer. Abandoned before birth by her father whom she was to see only twice in her lifetime; inheritor of a substantial fortune which granted her independence when she was 18; many years of one of the most well-known and interesting beauties of the time, other the infamous obscenity trial over THE WELL OF LONELINESS; the friend of such fascinating with, and involved in, years of psychical experience; the first author to publish an explicit and sympathetic novel on lesbianism; the focus of two notorious lawsuits, one against Fox-Pitt for defamation of her name and character, the other the infamous obscenity trial over THE WELL OF LONELINESS; the friend of such brilliant and eccentric women as Romaine Brooks and Natalie Barney; the lover for many years of one of the most well-known and interesting beauties of the time, Mabel Batten; and the devoted lover for 28 years to the striking Lady Una Troubridge—these of her are myriad -- who read THE WELL OF LONELINESS as part of our individual process of self-discovery could not help but wonder about the author and the life she lived. Unfortunately, the only slaking of our curiosity was to be found in Lady Troubridge's reticent and highly unsatisfactory THE LIFE AND DEATH OF RADCLYFFE HALL (Hammond & Hammond, 1961) and the more recent, but cursory, discussion in Jane Rule's LESBIAN IMAGES (Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1975). The real biography remained to be written. And despite the publication of Lovat Dickson's book, it still remains to be written. There are so many ways in which this book must be faulted, not the least of which is its dullness. How any biographer could treat such a life as Hall's with lackluster tedium is a puzzle. Even the tension of the obscenity trial is reduced to dry, factual recounting. And how two such complex women as Una and Radclyffe could emerge as paperdoll cut-outs of butch/femme, sadist/masochist is unpardonable.

Dickson sets the tone in the first line of the "Foreword" when he refers to Hall's "deviant nature." Attempting to excuse his employment of "what [some readers] may suspect to be a pejorative tone taken towards the sexual acts of the past," he expalins that he has followed the attitudes of the 1920's and 1930's in depicting the attitudes of the 1920's and 1930's. Dickson declares that all attempts to reconstruct the life of Radclyffe Hall with a fuller, more detailed time scheme of most of this biography. Consequently, throughout the book he freely uses such offensive phrases as "warped nature," "depraved abnormal," "psychopathic mind," "predatory lesbian," and "they were all at least a little mentally deranged." Assuming that lesbianism "is a symptom of the disturbed psyche," he attributes to it such diverse manifestations as destructive eroticism, exhibitionism, hysterical giddiness, and chronic hypochondria. This from an author who purports to be sympathetic to Radclyffe Hall! Despite his protestations of compassion, it is unceasingly clear that he considers lesbianism a mental aberration which the fastidious mind cannot tolerate. One can almost imagine him typing the manuscript with white gloves on his carefully manicured hands and a clothespin on his nose.

Dickson's total misunderstanding of lesbianism (this book piously perpetuates the most vicious of Sapphic stereotypes) is illustrated repeatedly, as when he emphasizes that there is an unhealthy streak of sadism in such sexuality, "the sadistic expression of the abnormality of its character" being "almost a necessary preliminary to the thunderclap of its fulfillment." This sadism extended, he believes, to the only child, Andrew, whom Radclyffe alienated from the mother by the imposition of sadistic and capricious punishments. Sadism, sexual frenzy and child abuse are inextricably linked with this lesbian union in his mind. Such lurid thinking gives rise, as is exemplified by the passage cited above, to an equally lurid prose style. The reader often has the strange feeling she has stumbled onto the pages of Lavender True Confessions rather than a scholarly biography of Radclyffe Hall.

In the logic of Dickson's mind, not only is lesbian love mentally unhealthy, but it must be physically unhealthy. It is clearly, in his mind, impossible for two women to have intercourse; to the contrary, the only sexual act possible is "lesbianism induced some gynaecological woes of an unhappy kind for which the medical treatment can be protracted and painful." There is nothing in lesbian lovemaking that would provoke such serious physical repercussions. What strange dark perversion does Dickson envision? Is it such a gynaecological difficulties were caused by, as she told her friends, her husband's infecting her with syphilis. Expectedly, Dickson dismisses this story as merely the lying and guilty self-defense of an unfaithful wife. Yet he himself unwittingly proves it by including it in his biography.-full of his own skewed judgments. Continuing in his condemnatory fashion, Dickson several times stresses the superiority of heterosexual to homosexual love. Such sermonizing has no place in any objective biography of a lesbian life, but it does, of course, reassure the reader that
serious charge that can be leveled against Sapphic love is that it is barren. While it may remain between two women for a lifetime, as in Una and Radclyffe's case, should the author is not to be conjoined with the "abnormal." In his judgment, the most

creativeness that Dickson is predicated upon the premise that passion wanes very early in heterosexual unions, thus creating the need for children to bind and sanctify the relationship. The fact that the act of love must be produced and not consummated springing and yet that passion and intimacy may remain between two women for a lifetime, as in Una and Radclyffe's case, should be a self-contained rebuttal of Dickson's argument.

In other instances of hopelessly heterosexual bias, Dickson insists on gratuitously defending the males in the book. Several times he refers to the "manly vigor" of a male. 

"It is as if, uncomfortable with the main narrative, he barely waits for an excuse to discuss something tangential. One only wishes that these pages had instead been devoted to chronicling in more intimate fashion the centrality of the love story.

But the fascination of the book lies in the sparse stories of these women's lives, in the description of their culture, in the mystery surrounding them, and in the fact that they ever existed at all. Of particular interest is the miraculous survival of one lyric that is a passionate love-song written by Bieiris de Romans to another woman. All in all, Dickson enlists us in his searching adventure, and where the results of her long, difficult research. I recommend this book to anyone interested in almost any aspect of women's history and accomplishments.

FOUR STORIES by Ingmar Bergman (The Touch, Cries and Whispers, The Hour of the Wolf, and The Passion of Anna), Doubleday Anchor Press Original, 1976, 168 pp., $7.95 hard. This book offers the stories that Bergman writes and distributes to those involved in the making of his films, stories out of which the films then grow and develop. Bergman is not a screenwriter in the usual meaning of the word; he doesn't pretend that a film can be comprehended by the printed page, and in this case we aren't even given action and dialogue that completely correspond to the finished films.

Bergman's art form is the film, and it is in the process of creating art that the artist revises and corrects. Since Bergman, particularly, is known for a sort of continual improvisation in the actual shooting situation, we cannot expect these stories written before the filming to be accurate transcriptions of the finished works. They should not be used as sources of quotes or reliable reference. And Bergman on Bergman, despite the bombardingly intensive interviews, has more to tell us about Bergman's art than the stories serve as the pubication of artists' notebooks and first drafts -- a form of biographical documentation. In my opinion Bergman has made the most interesting films about women to date, for the simple reason that they are not "about women" but are, instead, about people who, almost arbitrarily, happen to be women. This is a point male analysts have been incapable of grasping, which has led to many statements about the "meaning" of the female characters. That they are female and yet profoundly and individually characterized, without particular reference to children or sexuality, must "mean" something! It does, indeed, but not in a way they will ever understand.

Bergman marks a turning point in film, in art, in history. Women of the future will look to him for inspiration on his methods, and the publication of Four Stories should be of help to them.
There are two good techniques for consciously altering existing formal language. One, which I'll call replacement, involves conscious, persistent use of a word that embodies the positive attitudes we want emphasized, together with deliberate avoidance of the word we wish to oust from the vocabulary. A good example is the replacement of the words "lady" and "girl" by the word "woman." The second technique is to embrace the positive attitudes we want emphasized, together with deliberate avoidance of the word that is supposed to be a source of shame identified as the source of pride. The word "woman" is a good example of this inversion, too: the subtle defiance of saying "woman" instead of "lady" or "girl" comes from the faint aura of inferiority -- female of innocence, illicit, sexuality -- that has been attached to the word "woman." In too many cases, the difference between a woman and a girl is defined as the difference in their (hetero)sexual experience. Woman of the streets, loose woman; who ever heard of a loose lady? The faint whiny of terms like "lady of easy virtue" comes from the juxtaposition of sexuality with the word "ladies," which means, connotatively, asexual, submissive ("polite"), harmless, and not at all incidentally, upper class. [That "lady" is secretly known by both men and women to be a belittling term is shown by the instinctive use made of it by men to convey contempt, as "the ladies want liberty" (you don't need to hear the tone of voice, do you?) and women's instant recognition of the hostile intent in the phrase.

Think about what it means that the basic English word that defines you is not quite polite! When we assert that we are women, not ladies, not girls, we are asserting that we are adult female persons, with adult female sexuality as well as other adult characteristics, and we are saying, "That's good!" In redefining ourselves by redefining our words, we are taking back power over our self-images. Because of this "taking back," I call this technique repossession.

Both techniques are good. I find an immediate and rightness in the repossession of a word that's sometimes lacking in mere replacement. When a word is repossessed, it usually means someone has gone to the heart of the matter, often by intuition (i.e. lightening calculation).

The most beautiful example of the last decade was the repossession of the word "black". Most of us remember when we were taught to use the word "black" in reference to a person, because it implied that one was dark-skinned -- which meant inferior. The Black Power movement could not exist until...
the doublethink of this "courtesy" was untangled and the word "black" dynamically repossessed. The word was crucial because color, as an excuse for oppression, had been made central to black identity.

In the same way, gender has been made central to women's identity, and this decade's crucial word is "lesbian." Is it coincidence that in both cases the word subverted into gaucherie is the very name of the group? Certainly not. It's important to realize that the word is the concept, and it was the female identity men feared that was suppressed along with the word "woman." This is why repossession of a key word is at once the most elegant and the most powerful means of altering consciousness with language. As the word turns inside out in the mind of the user, it starts to null awareness with it. Find the right word and you have found the revolution.

LV readers shouldn't have to rack their brains to identify one group that recently repossessed its very lovely name, which had almost been subverted into a "dirty" word. Many gay women go through a period of not liking the word "lesbian," because their only associations to it have been negative.

The technique of repossession can be used to disarm words that definitely are, in modern language, derogatory. The word as insult is recognized as a weapon that is to be removed from the control of the wielder. A good example of this disarming technique is the movement of the word "dyke" from a negative word of the kind of the good-bad orientation of such words as likely to give rise to such arguments as "but we shouldn't use insults to describe ourselves." But it is important to realize that many such words have no other meaning, in modern usage, than that one derogatory definition, and nothing else, and yet is allowed to be defined as bad, insulting, then we end up admitting that there is in fact something insulting about being called a lesbian! This is not to say that the word cannot still be used as an insult — any word can, particularly words referring to women, you'll notice — but rather to show it to be defined as an insult. "Dyke" can be contrasted with the word "queer," which definitely does have other, more basic, English meanings, generally negative, and for that reason can never be fully disarmed but only, let us say, defused.

We've moved into the area of slang now, and you'll notice how the energy potential of the word "tit" is burned up! Not all slang is as highly-charged as the words used as insults, of course; and yet -- do you notice that certain 'zing' to the word "dyke" that's lacking in "lesbian"?

For simplicity's sake I'm going to say that there are two ways new slang is created. One is just that -- creation. Certain words are just made up, or transported, in isolation, from foreign languages. Dyke, for instance, everyone knows what it means. It appears to have no relation to any word in the English language, the dikes in Holland notwithstanding.

Most slang, though consists of words already existing in everyday language, but transformed. The new meaning may be tangential to the old ("piss", dialectically opposed to it ("bad," meaning "good") or seem to have only the most tenuous connection.

In both forms slang is creative and immediate; it is the poetry of everyday speech. This is why we need our own slang. No one wants to speak formally all the time; one reason is to give all the wild words, often the words fill a real need, the need for a word less formal than "woman." But there is no good slang substitute that expresses a positive attitude toward women, that emphasizes strength or power of any sort. So, feeling that need for a short word with an informal flavor, they continue to use the slang oriented around cuteness, helplessness, or worse.

Many of us also continue to use such terms as "son of a bitch" and "bastard." It is amazing to realize that nearly all such terms applied to males actually refer to the marital status or behavior of the male's mother, rather than to any specific character quality of the man himself. (I have found this to be true of other languages as well.) The use of these terms should be avoided if we are to re-form our language around belief in a woman's right to define her sexuality and control her body without reference to her relationship to a man. But all slang words, no matter how charged with abuse (particularly when driving), just as one needs terms of praise. My suggestion is that we begin now to be aware of the language possibilities of the women's movement as they can be applied to slang.

I'm reluctant to advocate the deliberate invention of slang, since spontaneity is the key I would hope that what I have written, and the greater readiness to adopt and communicate those words that come into use in small groups or between lovers; I would like to see women writing to feminist publications to share the good words they have discovered; I would like to see those publications going out of their way to use and popularize those words.

Some thoughts on the context of this new slang: abuse could be oriented more around things we really despise -- such as the racist mentality, war, sexism in all its manifestations. We can use things we like about ourselves to refer to women and women's activities. General terms can be altered so as to refer to women: some friends of mine have suggested that "the guys" be rephrased into "the mentors," and, better still, that women learn to define terms such as "tit," which means only nipple or breast, or "cunt," which means only female genitalia. (This is not to say that the word "cunt" can be, or should be, rescued from the male pornographic vernacular; "breast" is so much more euphonious than "tit." And as for "cunt," can you really imagine someday feeling complimented if I run into you on the street and say, "Well, hi, Mog, you beautiful cunt! How ya been?"

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The first time I saw her was in the first grade. A slight, black-haired child with translucent skin, she stood with her thin hand in the teacher's, an outsider being introduced to thirty children who had spent kindergarten together. She was always polite, always formal, I could see that she was already attending country school, and her parents had persuaded the principal that she could keep up with the work. I soon learned that it was the rest of us who would be keeping up.

I remember my humiliation after our first art class during which Miss Tesmer had instructed us to draw a home. I labored over my square wood frame house, awkwardly coloring in window boxes and standing a child's tree at either end of the building. When I finished, I looked over at Diane's paper. There, in realistic detail, was a scene from an Indian village: a large ornate tepee, squaws cleaning hides, jerky strung up on a wooden pole. "What are you, the painter of the class?" I asked. "It isn't fair," I complained. "I'm just trying to draw a home," she said.

I never felt attracted to her. I was sometimes scornful of her, particularly when she seemed to have any artistic talent died during that glance, and for the next twenty years that damn tepee rose up to haunt me whenever I picked up a crayon or pencil. It was only recently that I began to draw again, mentally shouting at the invisible Diane beside me, "I don't care about your tepee or your jerky. Let me draw in peace!"

The last time I saw Diane was seven years ago at our five-year high school reunion. She was slim, poised and, in that pinched-nosed aristocratic way of hers, beautiful. She was married and was working in a program for drug rehabilitation in Philadelphia. Her title was impressive, and her job exposed her to a harsh reality of which I was ignorant. What equally impressive facts could I tell her about my graduate seminars on Chaucer and The Faerie Queene? I loved my seminars, but somehow I never felt attracted to her. I was sometimes scornful of her, particularly when she never seemed to entirely belong to our midwestern small town world. I felt that some­thing was missing in her life, that she was, in the grownups' eyes, permanent damage to her heart), an aura of specialness clung to her. She had had a brush with death. She was set apart. Even when, years later, she rode down Main Street in a convertible as homecoming queen, part of her seemed amused as she dutifully waved to the crowds on either side.

Four years after high school, Diane and I arranged to meet at her college one evening. I told her that I was speaking the truth when I said I was feeling strangely at sea after my own brush with death: the emotional me, "I don't care about your tepee or your jerky. Let me draw in peace!"

The first dream depicted the beginning of a crush. Gradually, over the next four years, the dreams were of a more intense attraction: the electric jolt to my stomach when she appeared, the need to be near her in a group, the pleasure of hearing her voice, the tingle across her cheek bones, her thin lips a strange bluish hue. She was, in the grownups' words, "seriously ill." To me, she was "fighting for her life!"

When she finally returned to school, recovered (except, we were told, for some permanent scarring of the heart), an aura of specialness clung to her. She had had a brush with death. She was set apart. Even when, years later, she rode down Main Street in a convertible as homecoming queen, part of her seemed amused as she dutifully waved to the crowds on either side.

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A COUNTER-LETTER TO A DYKE

B. Stephens

"Still, there is a movement in our society toward individuals looking more closely at what they're doing here and why.

That's all fine, but companies still expect rising managers to be in tune with corporate goals. They've got to believe in the business system and what the corporation stands for. Their objectives and the corporation's objectives must be close together, and the corporation's objective is to make money."

-- Sundancer
Hughes Airwest in FLIGHT Magazine

Dear Ms. Dyke,

Now that homophiles are entering the business and financial fields in large numbers, we of Laissez Faire Incorporated are conducting a poll on the suitability of this new influx for our enterprise. Please answer simply and concisely the choices, (a) and (b).

SELF REPORT

1. In your spare time, would you
   (a) Study the WALL STREET JOURNAL, or
   (b) Read classics, such as THE WELL OF LONELINESS

2. Would you agree that
   (a) Heterosexual acts are enjoyable
   (b) Heterosexual acts are repulsive.

OPINION QUESTION -- DEGREE OF CONSERVATISM

3. Sex should be limited to marriage and procreation
   (a) Yes
   (b) No

4. Communities should be set up for surveillance to discourage fornication, adultery, and non-procreative sex.
   (a) Yes
   (b) No

5. The company has the right to fire and blacklist any person who is not marriageable material, or otherwise different.
   (a) Yes
   (b) No

6. The worker's home life is the concern of the company.
   (a) Yes
   (b) No

7. The worker should be encouraged to spend Sundays and holidays working overtime for the company.
   (a) Yes
   (b) No

8. Who helped mankind the most?
   (a) Rockefeller
   (b) Mozart

LIFESTYLE QUESTIONS

9. The most reliable, dependable and stable type of employee is:
   (a) The unimaginative, pedestrian conformist
   (b) The artistic creative type, mercurial in action and temperament.

10. When the company organizes a bowling team, would you:
    (a) Prefer to go bowling on your boss's orders
    (b) Prefer instead to read a book, paint a masterpiece, or strum a guitar.

11. When your workload lessens, and you have time to think, do you:
    (a) Think about your work and ways to earn a promotion
    (b) Think about the woman you love and wish to come home to.

12. When you are at home, do you:
    (a) Do extra paperwork for the company
    (b) Help your sweetheart with the housework.

13. When you have a weekend off, would you:
    (a) Return to the plant to volunteer more work for the company
    (b) Take your loved one on a trip to the beach or the mountains.

Should your answers have been affirmative on the (a) choices, we welcome you to our firm as exceptional executive material.

If, on the other hand, the answers have been (b), we advise you to go elsewhere for a livelihood. You might be hippy-happy beatniks, or fruity-arty Bohemians -- but capitalist material, never!

Yours sincerely,

A. B. Babbitt
Laissez Faire Enterprises

(My debt to THE ORGANIZATION MAN by William H. Whyte, Simon Schuster, 1956, which formed the base for my material. See chapters 14, 15, and 16, pp 171-217.

-- Barbara Stephens)

FOOTNOTE TO QUESTIONNAIRE

Tyranny runs in many forms and institutions. Governments have no monopoly on totalitarianism; large corporations and many cults and religions are equally oppressive.

The basic question is, should ERA and a homosexual equal rights platform apply to:

   (a) Governmental positions only
   (b) Civil service positions only - including the teaching profession, police and fire departments, and the U.S. Army
   (c) Employment by private business firms only
   (d) Employment by cooperatives only
   (e) The law should apply for ALL of these, with no exception.

I feel that any exception is merely a mandate to public or private bigotry, and an alignment with the enemy.

Years ago, the conservative, Peter Drucker, wrote an article in HARPER'S magazine on the trials of American business executives. He cited an instance wherein a Chairman of the Board suggested that junior executives introduce him to their fiancées, so that he could approve or disapprove of them, and even forced disengagement in the case the prospective company wives didn't fit in. One young man muttered, "This is impractical." But no one had the guts to say, "This is..."
outrageous!"

Back in the 1950's, an officer in my company suggested psychological testing and lie detector screening for all of the senior and junior executives. The corporate body rose in an instant revolt: "No way!"

I recall the humiliation of a City of Oakland civil service examination, wherein I was asked questions unrelated to the job or my performance. I was rejected because they felt that intellectual, artistic or creative types would not fit in with the pedestrian personalities they wanted.

As I see it, these types of oral or written quizzes should not be allowed, for the private enterprise, or the army, or for private enterprises. I'll be happy when Field Marshall Ed Davis has to accept a police force that's 99-9/10% gay!

[Editor's Note: Yes, and when Ed Davis comes applying to us for employment, we are not then also going to be forced to disregard his gender, his heterosexual chauvinism, his homophobia, and his oblivious personality and hire him to help write, edit, and print LESBIAN VOICES at MS. ATLAS PRESS?!?! Remember, "Sauce for the Gander May Cook Your Goose!" — Rosalie Nichols]

Tweedle-Der

"Mr. Carter has gone on record as favoring an amendment to the 1964 Civil Rights Bill which 'prohibits discrimination on account of homosexuality' as proposed in legislation introduced by the radical, leftist Congresswoman from New York, Bella Abzug. . . . Homosexuality and other forms of deviation are acts of sin and should be considered completely unacceptable to a Christian. There are many Scripture texts condemning it. For instance, Leviticus 18:22 tells us 'Thou shalt not lie with mankind as with womankind: it is abomination.' Instead of trying to make homosexuality acceptable to society, we should be telling them, as in Corinthians 6:9, that they are "abominable and an abomination with mankind" which is the kingdom of God. The homosexual, as other sinners, needs to repent, turn away from their sin and believe on the Lord as the One who died in their place for their sin. . . ."

Mr. Carter favors the Equal Rights Amendment, a program sponsored and underwritten by lesbians and others who have formed an organization calling itself N.O.G.A. . . . whose founder is the revolutionary, radical [1] leader Betty Friedan, supporting (1) The 'rights' of lesbians and homosexuals; (2) Elimination of home economics and shop from any draft; (3) Sex education in the schools; (4) Government-financed child care centers; (5) Government-funded abortion, sterilization, contraception on demand and abortion counselling in schools."

Tweedle-Dum

"President Carter said yesterday that he is revising his economic stimulus proposal so that it doesn't benefit persons 'living in sin.' Carter chuckled as he spoke: 'The questioner pointed out that recently I have given advice against living in sin and the point was made that the present tax law encourages lusts...it started to say extracurricular activities but I guess I better not — and that's a fact. . . . So we've changed the proposal now, and we're giving a $5000 standard deduction...to single people, $3000 to married people so that we won't aggravate that encouragement not to be married.' Carter also said he would like to remove the Social Security regulations and others that encourage the breaking up of families." S.F.CHRON 2/77

CAPITALISM

CAPITALISM VS. SOCIALISM

by Johnie Staggs

Capitalism and socialism are terms describing two different, and opposing, systems of economics. Capitalism is defined as: An economic system characterized by freedom of the market with private and corporate ownership of the means of production and distribution that are operated for profit. (1) Socialism is defined as: Public collective ownership or control of the basic means of production, distribution, and exchange, with use made of planning for use rather than for profit and of assuring to each member of society an equitable share of goods, services, and welfare benefits. (2)

These terms, while they can be clearly defined as above, have powerful positive and negative connotations, depending on who is using them. The term "capitalism" is used by socialists to connote greed, callousness, "conspicuous consumption," and exploitation of the masses; "socialism" is used by them to connote the solution to human problems, love, brotherhood, and the solidarity of the masses against their exploiter. The term "socialism" connotes to capitalists rule by the incompetent, parasitism of the lazy on the productive, and usurpation of means to fill the needs of those who have not produced or earned them; capitalism means to them individual freedom, the right to pursue a career without political obstacles, and the right to keep the fruits of their labor.

Modern-day socialists use the term "capitalism" to cover a multitude of evils. If a man beats his wife, he is motivated not by sexism, but by his "capitalistic" view of her as "property." If an employer refuses to hire a negro, he is motivated not by racism, but by his "capitalistic" desire to exclude racial minorities from the labor force. If a theater shows films of sex, love and violence, it is not because this is what the public is most willing to spend money on, but because the "capitalistic" owner "forces" such tripe onto the public in order to make a profit.

Socialists are also using the term "capitalism" to refer to anything that stands in the way of their having whatever they want, whenever they want it, and at any cost. The choice is his own. The only cost they feel is justified is the energy they exert in actively wanting or needing. For example, while reading a feminist publication recently, I came across the following: "We, a group of women, feel welfare is a right, not a privilege. Mothers raising their children by themselves should have the right (right? to choose whether to work or raise their children (at whose expense?). (3)

I believe in capitalism, not only because I do not want to be used as a slave to fulfill other women's desires and demands, but because I believe that capitalism offers me the greatest freedom of choice and opportunity. I would like to give what I think are fair examples of how an average woman might live under capitalism and under socialism, respectively.

Under capitalism, a young woman could choose what form of education she wished to pursue and what vocation. She would be neither helped nor hindered by the state, but would be free to seek her own destiny, rise to her own level of achievement, and enjoy the rewards for her own effort. If she chose to work for an employer, she would be free to change employers and/or occupations if she wished. If she did not wish to
work for someone else, she would have the option to go into business for herself — and her "profit" (the amount left after paying her costs) would be hers to enjoy, not the State's.

Under socialism, this same young woman would have virtually no choice. Her education would be decided upon and provided by the State, depending on what it saw as the best way to use her abilities. If she had a grievance with her employer, she couldn't resolve it by changing jobs — because in a totally socialist system, the State is the only employer — there is nowhere else to go. And she would not have the option of going into business for herself -- this is highly verboten in a socialist system. Given that the basic principle of socialism is not the individual good, but the "greatest good for the greatest number," why should one young woman deviate from the State's wishes? And given that socialism is characterized by State-controlled/public ownership and State/public control of the means of production and distribution of wealth, how could the State allow one young woman to deviate from its wishes or question its authority?

If the essence of capitalism could be symbolized by a famous figure, one might quote Thomas Jefferson, who was an exponent of individual rights and freedom (including economic freedom) and who said: "That government is best which governs least." (To which some anarchist wag added, "That government is best which governs not at all.") And socialism could be represented by Adolf Hitler -- bearing in mind that the full name of Hitler's Nazi Party was the National Socialist German Workers Party.

The economy of our present society lies somewhere between these two extremes. There is still a greater degree of freedom and guarantee of individual rights here than anywhere else in the world, but more and more special interest groups (including protest groups and gay and "feminist" factions) are turning to big government to achieve their ends. As summarized in an encyclopedia article:

The struggle between the groups in the United States who favor free private enterprise and those who advocate greater governmental controls and interference with free private enterprise is perhaps best marked on the one hand by those who have ability, initiative, creative desire, and determination as individuals in industry and on the other hand by those who seek for themselves political and economic power under the guise of providing security for the masses through a socialized state and planned economy. (4)

And further:

Aidful, protective and regulative intervention in industrial affairs is being more and more completely recognized as a legitimate governmental function. The greatest good for the greatest number, rather than natural right and the greatest possible liberty of the individual, has become the active principle of modern legislation. (5)

That was written in 1957. Since then, the trend has not changed, and our government, particularly the Presidency, has gained an exercised greater and greater power over our lives. As a first step toward reversing this increasing statism, we must understand clearly what capitalism and socialism are, what the choice between them means — and then be willing to make a firm commitment to individual freedom, to capitalism, and to quit allowing ourselves to be made slaves to someone else's welfare.


PHILLIS VERNOLD

I'VE NEVER HAD A LOVER LIKE YOU

I feel like I'm in a windstorm raining.

Breathing lovesongs, taking pictures of myself to hang among the trees.

You have loved me for myself, not a picture of me someone else has taken, while I fade out reach out, hang myself.

I want to give you rainstorms, quiet gentle windstorms, trees, whisper to you songs of windstorms.

Take me like a photograph.

Hold me like a tree.

I will love you stronger than a windstorm.

POETRY SECTION

-- Chocolate Waters
Leigh song
fragile band of exploding liquid
I am myself
I remember all of my complexity
there is no one like me in the world.
self inside self inside smaller self
like a child's layered puzzle box
lights and shadow
a river continues to play constant
centering
the center
forming slow and varied explosions
around Herself
inside
in an instant
I am both petal and star
shining shy and folded
a panther worships here.

-- Susan Leigh Star
(c 1976 Susan Leigh Star)

BROKEN
The trees stood quietly and shock with the rain.
Alone happy occupied with my work and silent,
this mountain world.
Just the dogs the security of chopped wood
a birdhouse with its wooden holes
a wheelbarrow waiting to be used again.
12pm a phone call from
someone with nothing to say.
A man's heavy breathing louder than
the Aspens twinkling only from the wind.
A butcher knife
taken to my side
laced between my work and all these quiet miles
from people living.
A red wooden chair.
Silver rain sliding down the pinecones.
A phone call breathing and
someone always asks me why it is
that/I hate men.

-- Loretta Lotman

FOR SANDI
Alone on the beach we sat. The waves
were dangerous that day.
Excitement shivered within us.
You challenged me
But my fear of the sea was great.
Your excitement frothed and foamed
And splashed into me.
The wind-whipped waves curled
Into white tongues.
You ran into the sea
And I followed. The cold force
took my breath away. I staggered.
Fighting the sea.
I caught you and we went under.
Arms and legs tangled with seaweed,
We clung together as we went down.
I fought the tangle
And tried to surface. I pulled free
But had lost you.
I dove once more
And caught you beneath the waves.
We lost our substance, we floated,
were carried with sea-force, and no longer cared.
Your taste was the taste of the sea.
I ate of the sea-foam
And savored the salt taste.
I swallowed as much as I could.
When I could hold no more
I struggled, lungs bursting,
For the surface.
A wall of water tumbled me back into the depths.
Crusted shells stabbed and grabbed at me, the intruder,
As I was dragged along the bottom.
I struggled for air.
Throbbing, I was thrown up
Onto the dry beach.
Broken glass and fragmented shells
slashing my body.
Slimey seaweed wrapped around me
Like slippery sea snakes.
When I looked for you, you were gone.
Of rotting boat, bleached bones
Of long-dead seagulls,
Bone-dry pieces of driftwood
Littered the beach.
The sea was an angry purple.
The waves crashed
Hard upon the shore
Fouling all remnants of life
Into the grit of the beach.

-- Martha Shideler

WHEN
when word of your attempt at death
reached me
I knew only of the change within me
the shifting of flesh
to fill the chasm
the movement of emotion
to cement the cracks
the gesture towards tears
to shave off the unevenness of the knowledge
that word of my attempts at loving
had never reached you

-- Jan Sutherland

Lips touch -
the thoughtless say
this is love
Minds touch -
the knowing say
this is love
Souls touch -
and only silence speaks.

-- J.K.
NIGHT OF MIGRATION

You make me feel like a grove of small sparrows
snared & trembling.
Their wings beat against branches
feathers mingle with leaves
bird cries quiver down
like blossoms from mimosa trees
You make me feel like thousands of
birds flutter inside me
anxious for flight.
I feel them rustling there.
With high winds around my head
It swears promises doing the night
you let those birds loose.
Their high-pitched sounds between
our bodies
singing
they go south
as you release me.

-- Lisa Fenton

I used to wonder
whether wishes on a star
could ever come true.
I used to wonder
whether winning the big half
of the wishing bone
meant my dream would
take shape in
the dawn of reality.
Now I'm glad I believed in
the first sighted star,
in fortune cookies
and mirages from afar.
you are the charming prince
who awakens
this sleeping poet
to a nutcracker world
of sugar plum faeries
and dancing desire.

-- Rochelle Holt

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stood in a circle around the wed-
ing couple and were part of the
ceremony.

Music was sung by Kathu
Cutshall. With guitar
she played and sang
John Denver's 'I'm a Secret
Lady' and 'Auntie's Song'
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