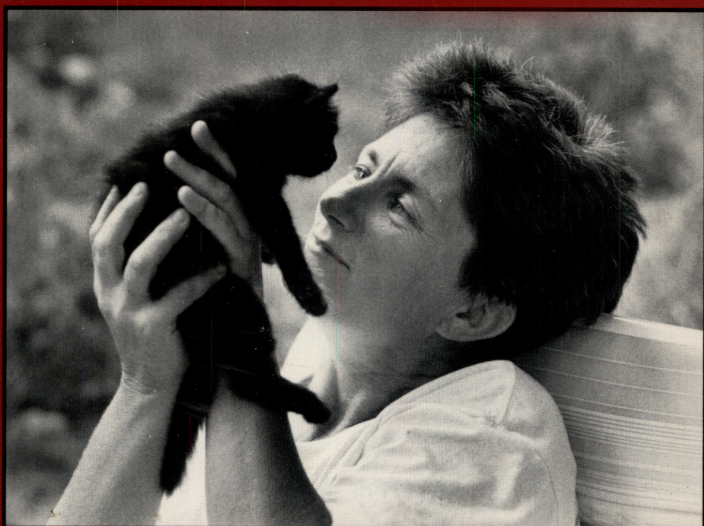


CATS

(and their Dykes)



an anthology

edited by

Irene Reti and Shoney Sien

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Printed in the United States of America by McNaughton and Gunn.

ISBN: 0-939821-47-8

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 90-86148

Cover Photo: "Sister and Judy" by Beth Karbe.

Back Cover Photo by Cathy Cade.

Rhonda Dickson's cartoons, "Lesbian Survival Hint #72" and "Lesbian Survival Hint #30" are from *The Lesbian Survival Manual*, published by The Naiad Press © 1990 with the kind permission of the cartoonist and the publisher. "Mourning a Cat Lady" by Virginia E. Smith previously appeared in *Up Against the Wall, Mother*, 1990. "Cats, Environmental Illness and a Feminist Bookstore" was previously published in *Dykes, Disability and Stuff*, Spring 1990. "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Cat" previously appeared in *Sweet Dark Places*, poems by Lesléa Newman © 1991, Lavender Press. "Cats Call No One Mistress" was previously published in *Bay Windows*, Boston, MA. Andrea Natalie's cartoon was published in *Outweek*. "Hairball Life," © 1989 by Diane F. Germain first appeared in *Lesbian News*. The photo on page 53 is © 1982 by Cathy Cade and was previously published in *A Lesbian Photo Album*. "Cat Fights" first appeared in *Baker's Dozen* (Women's Press, Toronto). A slightly different version of it is available on audiotape, *Vanilla Bedtime Stories* (Toronto, Wild Series Productions, 1991).



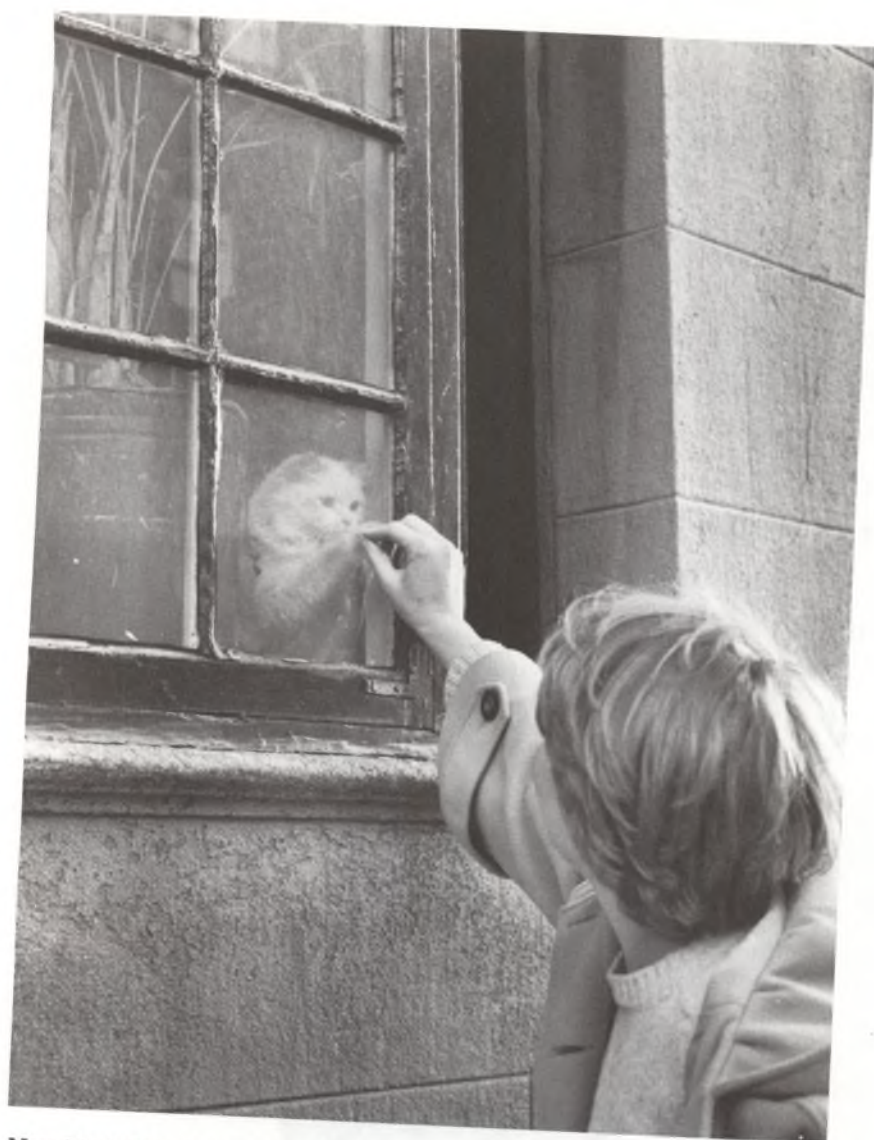
Contents

1	Introduction	Shoney Sien
5	Toward a Feminist History of the Cat	Irene Reti
19	Household Deities	Penelope J. Engelbrecht
19	Drawing	Shoney Sien
20	Obedience to Being	Mab Maher
24	Photo: Tara and Phineas	Tam Garson
25	Ice Panther	Lea Matthews
26	Big Kitty	Julia Tóth
28	Drawing: Mazie and Me	Tamara Bower
29	Little Hay Girl and the Color Cat a Grim-No-Longer Tale	Hilary Mullins
33	El gato sin nueve vidas	Shoney Sien
35	How Purrs Came to Be	Pamela Gray
36	Lessons in Love	Amy Edgington
37	Cats Call No One Mistress	Patricia Roth Schwartz
40	Cartoon: Lesbian Survival Hint #30	Rhonda Dickson
41	Catechesis	Betsy Brown
44	Drawing	zana
45	Ursula, My Love	Barbara Ruth
46	Cats, Environmental Illness and a Feminist Bookstore: Point and Counterpoint	Raven & Full Circle Books

50	Photo of Tee Corinne	Caroline Overman
51	Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Cat	Lesléa Newman
53	Photo	Cathy Cade
54	Remembering AH-OOOO-GA!	Jodi
57	Cartoon: A Typical Communal Lesbian Household	Nikki
58	Paw Prints	Pamela Gray
63	a dark closet is not a pile of leaves	Susan Dambroff
66	Drawing	Shoney Sien
67	Amazonia	Ruth Mountaingrove
70	Photo: Dunkel and Me Outside the Hexagon	Shoshana Rothaizer
71	A More Subtle Bondage	zana
76	Familiar	Nina Silver
77	One Space Against Another Across A Silence	Sandia
83	Photo: Self-Portrait with Louise	Beth Karbe
84	Attainable Things	Maud Samuel
91	Love or Dominance?	Eileen Anderson
100	Photo: Marie and Tiffany	Susan Logan
101	Mourning A Cat Lady	Virginia E. Smith
102	Sally's Stress	Linda L. Pollard
103	Photo	Cathy Cade
104	View From a Flat above a Tavern	Penelope J. Engelbrecht
105	Catnap	Terri de la Peña
109	Because I Turn on the Light Switch She Thinks I Make the Sun Come Out	Abby Bogomolny
109	Cartoon: Hairball Life	Diane F. Germain
110	Shopping List	Alena Wordsmith
111	My Step-Cats and I	Wendy Caster

113	Imagine Now	Laurie A. Posner
114	Grey Day	Mary-Elizabeth Garcia
117	Photo: Ours	Cathy Cade
118	Separatist Paradox	Jan Hardy
119	Sometimes I Wonder if You Want To Hear This: Life at an Animal Shelter	Kat Brown
122	Cat Fights	Frances Rooney
127	Cartoon	Andrea Natalie
128	And Baby Makes Two	Anita L. Pace
133	The Princess of 18th Street	M.B. Doane
139	Photo	Karen J. Hall
140	CATS	Janet Harrison
141	Drawing	Denise Mauldin
142	Photo: Watch Cat, New York City	Shoshana Rothaizer
143	Contributors' Notes	
148	Cartoon: Lesbian Survival Hint #72	Rhonda Dicksion
149	About the Editors	





New York City Cat and Susan

Photo by Beth Karbe, 1983

Introduction

It is not as though I am a cat fanatic or a cat lady, in fact it was at a relatively late age by dyke standards that I began living with a cat and then only after a great deal of apprehension.

Yet three months after Chelsea joined my household I began half seriously to imagine an anthology of this sort. You see, I thought it would be a good idea for *Irene* to do a book about cats and lesbians. She could do it in that mysterious manner that book publishers have of snapping their fingers and making books appear. The idea and title would be free, my contribution.

When I suggested it to her, she took the idea seriously. After all she takes both cats and dykes seriously. On a vigorous walk we sketched out a call for contributions. For the life of me I can't remember when I signed on the dotted line to be a co-editor, nevertheless here I am pounding out this introduction with a deadline hanging over my head.

We envisioned an anthology that took an honest look at the role of cats in lesbian culture (or lesbians in cat culture?) A book of politics, love, grief, rage, history, healing and connection.

Our call for contributions was met with enthusiasm. Week after week Irene showed up at my door with her backpack full of poetry, prose, essays, and photos—including many fuzzy snapshots of well-loved cats. Chelsea, the cat who resides at my house took an active interest in all this cat business (she is very selective about what she involves herself in), snuggling into Irene's lap, or sleeping on Irene's down vest, or simply sitting in the middle of the very manuscript we were trying to discuss.

By far we received more contributions by dykes grieving over cats who had died than on any other theme. I believe this is because we have little permission to grieve the death of an animal or to recognize the depth of feeling that can exist across species. Irene Reti's historical essay includes mention of a temple for cats in modern day Tokyo where, "chants remind visitors that the death of a cat, is as much as the death of a human being, an event which requires gravity and respect." Pamela Gray writes in "Paw Prints" that, "we all know that these are sacred beings, essential parts of who we are," and later, "I watched a part of Mary die with each of them. They were her family."

That for many lesbians cats are family is clear. This may be difficult or confusing for those of us who believe that LESBIANS should be the first priority of Lesbians. I'm not sure how we reconcile this.

Other contributors showed the early bonding and identification that can happen between girls (dykegirls, if you know what I mean) and cats mutually surviving male violence. Particularly moving for me, a farm girl, who now lives with a calico cat, is Hilary Mullins' story "Little Hay Girl" which explores the magical healing and protection that occurs when a calico cat enters the life of an abused country girl. Julia Tóth's "Big Kitty" also addresses a girl's friendship and subsequent innocent betrayal of a cat in a world that values neither cats or little girls.

For many contributors, the independence of cats is one of the main parallels between cats and lesbians—women who simply in being lesbians declare themselves untamed at least in some small way. This feline independence is often mentioned as a model for dyke living. Mab Maher writes in "Obedience to Being," that cats, "continue to teach me how to free myself from obedience that oppresses."

From the beginning we had a commitment to publishing articles by lesbians who are allergic to cats and/or against pet "ownership." I think the pieces we've included will lead lesbians to ask some important and difficult questions about our relationships with cats.

Raven writes in her letter to a feminist bookstore with a cat, "I keep asking myself—what is it we're trying to create? Even if I'm the only allergic womyn, even there is no one else right now in this community who is allergic—what is our vision of a future world. Many lesbians agree that we want a world that offers to everyone the fullest life possible." I have friends who are allergic, most of us do. The fact is that there are many lesbians who are allergic to cats. And there are many lesbians with serious commitments to cats. How do we resolve this?

Other contributors addressed not only the issue of allergies, but the concept of pet "ownership." Eileen Anderson argues that it is a contradiction for those of us who struggle against dominance in our relationships to live with cats. In "Love or Dominance" she writes, "wild animals don't wait at the door for you to come home; they have lives of their own." She also points out the destructiveness that cats wreak on native animals.

Some lesbians who live with cats acknowledged their discomfort with the power difference between cats and humans. Betsy Brown for example, in "Catechesis" says, "I am aware that patriarchal society gives the lesbians in our household life-and-death power over the cats. I don't like that. But I continue to keep cats in my home because the alternative is worse. In today's united states, a free woman is at least theoretically permitted to exist, but a cat who is "unowned" lives under a death sentence.

And finally, not surprisingly, many lesbians wrote about the humor and "love" that cats bring into their lives. Amy Edgington's poem, "Lessons in Love:"

This had nothing to do with domestication—
I did not want a pet; she was not looking
for a hand-out or a master—
but you cannot fall off the earth
and you cannot fall out of love.

—Shoney Sien
December 28, 1990



Bastet, the Egyptian Cat Goddess

Toward a Feminist History of the Cat

Cats Come Into the World

Long before there were women there were cats. Cats evolved from a creature called Miacis who fifty million years ago padded through filtered shadows in giant forests, forests which would not know a human voice for another 46 million years. (Lockridge, 20) Miacis had a long body, short legs, paws with retractable claws and looked somewhat like a modern-day weasel. From Miacis came all the land-living carnivores: dogs and bears, raccoons, hyenas—and cats, who made their evolutionary entrance some forty million years ago. Cats have not changed much since then. Their physiology is remarkable, apparently built to last. Padded feet surprise enemies; strong muscles and flexible bones spring far and fast; hooked claws and sharp teeth make them formidable; their irises widen to admit starlight, and contract to protect them from the piercing noon sun.

Cats watched dogs appear two million years ago, seals climb out of the sea to become bears, otters float on ancient waves, and skunks develop their special perfume. All of these animals are their close evolutionary cousins. Within the cat family itself there are three branches—*Felis*, which includes all the small cats; *Panthera*, which includes the big lions, leopards, tigers and jaguars; and *Acinonyx*, which includes only the cheetah who has no retractable claws. For millions of years all of these cats hunted, leapt from tree branches, touched noses, growled, and slept in the sun. Then about four thousand years ago, something changed. One member of the cat family came to live with humans.

Most historians agree that the first domestic meeting between cats and humans took place in ancient Egypt, although the date given for this meeting varies from 4000 B.C. to 2050 B.C.! Part of the challenge of tracing this first meeting lies in the ambiguity of what actually constitutes domestication, a true problem with cats, for unlike animals such as the dog and the horse, cats have maintained a high degree of independence to this day. If a cat comes to eat on a human doorstep but spends the rest of its time in the fields or the woods, does that count as domestication? In any case, the attraction of Egypt

for cats lay in the wide golden fields alongside the Nile, prime agricultural land—and a haven for rats. The cats began to hunt those rats, the Egyptians were eternally grateful to them for saving their crops, and the rest is history, or so the writers of most books on cats would have us believe. (Mery, 19)

They make it sound so simple. But how did it happen? What made the first cat venture into a human house? What made them think they could trust us? Do they trust us? Was it a woman working in the fields who first made friends with the cat? What did this woman say to that cat? What made the cat come back?

The Egyptians called their new friend “Myeo.” Myeo prowls through Egyptian art. She sits by a duck hunter in a small rowboat. She holds three birds prisoner while her feline friend fishes with deft paws. Myeo even appears in papyrus cartoons criticizing the government. “Cats were everywhere and were pictured in all possible catlike activities. They were pictured on tombs; images were made of them in all available materials from gold to mud. Carvings show them sitting under chairs, in one or two instances tied by ribbons to chair legs, they show them gnawing at bones, eating fish, with mice under paws . . . some of these representations are so real that they might almost purr; others are stylized; the images vary in size, widely; some evidently were worn as charms.” (Lockridge, 37)

Cat Becomes Goddess

“May Bastet give life and power”

—inscribed on an amulet found at Bubastis, Egypt

Somewhere around 2000 B.C. Myeo became Bastet—the Feline Goddess of maternity, the moon, music, and female fertility. Bastet had a woman’s body and a cat’s head, in one of the most striking and physically expressed linkages between cats and women in human history. It is important to understand the worship of the cat in Egyptian culture in the context of worship of a whole pantheon of animals such as the lion, the serpent, and the dog. Nevertheless the place of cats and the place of Bastet was particularly powerful. The locus of cat worship was the city of Bubastis in lower Egypt on the Nile. In Bubastis was the Temple of Bastet, an ornate red granite structure with intricately carved cats decorating its square walls,

which nestled in a sacred grove of trees on an island in the Nile. At the center of the Temple was a large statue of Bastet, the cat goddess. Sacred cats guarded the Temple, attended by young priestesses who cared for their every need. During the Festival of Bastet each April and May pilgrims came from all over Egypt in boats on a journey to the cat goddess, playing flutes and cymbals, joking and dancing. When they arrived at Bubastis, the statue of Bastet was brought from her Temple and the people feasted and drank to her sacred power. (Dale-Green, 4)

The sacredness of Bastet extended beyond the Temple to every cat in every house, field, or street. Anyone guilty of having even accidentally killed a cat could be put to death. If a family's cat died they all shaved their eyebrows and wailed publicly. Gettings (1989) speculates that these eyebrows represented both the fur of the lost cat and the crescents of the moon, which makes sense, given the Egyptians' associations between cats and the moon. If Egyptians had money they mummified their cat, sometimes placing a turquoise collar around its neck. People buried their cats along the fertile banks of the Nile, placing bronze cat statues and amulets by their sides. In the middle of the nineteenth century an Egyptian cemetery was excavated and 300,000 embalmed, mummified cats were uncovered. With modern-day reverence, these twenty tons of mummified cats were loaded on a freight ship and dumped on English farm fields as fertilizer. (Mery, 29)

So revered was the cat in Egyptian culture that the Egyptians' enemies were able to use cats to defeat them. In 529 B.C., the Persians lay siege to Pelusium, Egypt. They were losing the battle until the Persian leader ordered his soldiers to capture every cat in the region. Three days later the Persian soldiers marched in, each one holding in his arms, like a shield, a terrified, living cat. Thousands of cats raced ahead of them as they were set free. The Egyptians were paralyzed since they could not harm cats, and Pelusium fell without a blow. (Mery, 30)

It is important to recognize that the Egyptian reverence for cats did not necessarily extend to women. A discussion of the status of women throughout thousands of years of Egyptian history is beyond the scope of this essay; suffice it to say that Egypt was no feminist paradise or homeland.

The Cat Creeps Across the World

Egyptians were not willing to sell their sacred cats, but the Greeks stole six pairs of cats, bred them and brought them on trading trips to Europe and the Far East. (Mery, 22) They also sold them to the Romans, who brought the cat with their troops as they conquered Europe. Thus the cat crept across many lands, where its presence was often met with reverence.

Beginning in the sixth century A.D., cats came to live with the Arabs. (Mery, 23) There is a famous Muslim story about Mohammed and his favorite cat Muezza. Muezza fell asleep on Mohammed's sleeve one day. Mohammed had to get up for a meeting but didn't want to disturb Muezza. So he cut off his sleeve instead. Muezza was very touched and when Mohammed returned from his meeting, Muezza bowed to thank him for his courtesy. Mohammed ran his hand three times down Muezza's back and this, according to legend, is what gave all cats the ability to land on their feet. Ever since then most Muslims have revered cats.

Through trading routes cats arrived in India about 200 A.D. Orthodox Hindu belief demands that humans feed at least one cat under their roof. And the law of Manu specifies that, "He who has killed a cat must withdraw to the middle of a forest and there dedicate himself to the life of the animals around him until he is purified."

By 600 A.D. cats had come to live in Japan. (Mery 24) Two cats guarded each Buddhist temple, protecting sacred texts against mice. Cats in Japan were cherished pets of the rich, invited to curl up on the softest satins and most expensive silks, to take walks through ornate gardens on little leashes. But silkmaking, one of Japan's traditional industries, ultimately interfered with this life of feline leisure. The silkworm is essential to the silk industry and mice love silkworms. The mice began to multiply. Still reluctant to make their cat friends work, the Japanese first tried drawing cats on the doors of houses and creating bronze, wood and porcelain cats. The mice just laughed. At last, in 1602, the government mandated that people had to set free all of their adult cats and it was illegal to buy, sell, or even give anyone a cat. Thereafter cats hunted mice in the streets of Japan. But they did not lose their sacred status. In 20th century Tokyo, cats have their own temple, *Gotokuji*. *Gotokuji* is attended by priests who

chant for the peaceful rest of feline souls. These chants remind visitors that the death of a cat, as much as the death of a **human** being, is an event which requires gravity and respect. On the altar, porcelain, bronze and cloth cats keep each other company. They raise their right paws in the greeting of *Maneki-Neko*, "the small female cat who lures and enchants people, brings happiness and ensures good luck." (Mery, 30)

Outside of the temple is a cemetery where Japanese people bury their cats. Each grave has a prayer inscribed for the souls of cats, with invocations to Buddha. The cats are wished the quickest achievement of Nirvana. Their human friends buy a statue of them and place it on the altar in the temple. Buddhists believe the cat is a messenger between humans and Buddha.

Cat as Demon: Persecution by Christianity

It is a cultural constant that the gods of one religion become the devils of the next.

—Andrea Dworkin

When, at the end of the Roman period, the image of the cat gradually faded, it did so in company with those of all the other animals, before the emerging image of Christ.

—Patricia Dale-Green

Like the Egyptians, many of the old pagan cultures of Europe revered the cat. For example, a Teutonic cult which began in the Rhineland but was popular all over Europe worshipped the Norse Moon Goddess Freya, whose chariot was drawn by two black cats. (Dale-Green, 38) From Freya we get "Friday," Freya's day. Cats had long been associated with Artemis, the moon goddess, who sometimes appeared as a cat. Artemis in Roman times was called Diana, goddess of the dark, she who sent Aradia, the first witch, to teach human beings magic and witchcraft. Cats were believed to be witches' familiars. This legacy linking cats with the pagan religions paved the way for Christian persecution of the cat. Realizing that the cat was a powerful symbol of paganism which threatened the institution of Christianity, the Church targeted cats as part of the

witch burnings. Popes Sixtus IV and Innocent VIII instituted laws which allowed the torture of suspected witches and cats. (Gettings, 145) This specific targeting of cats by the Inquisition is often left out of feminist discussions of the witch burnings. All over Europe men and women, especially women, were tortured because they had cared for a sick or wounded cat, or given one shelter. And in South Carolina and New England 2000 accusations of witchcraft involving cats were legally upheld. (Mery, 56)

No longer worshipped as goddesses, cats were now tortured as witches and demons, burned with women at the stake. In Metz, France, a woman was accused of witchcraft and condemned to be burned at the stake. The bishop secretly intervened on her behalf by substituting a cat for the woman under cover of dense smoke. The cat, half-burnt, ran screaming from the fire into the crowd, who believed that the dead witch's soul had escaped in the form of a cat. From that day on, the people in that area believed cats were bewitched. Throughout France it was customary to hold public ceremonies in which cats were burned alive. Up until the 17th century, French kings attended many of these ceremonies for entertainment. (Mery, 36)

A baffling ambivalence about cats persists in Western European culture. Perhaps the old pagan reverence endures despite centuries of Christian propaganda. Numerous folktales illustrate this ambivalence. (Mery, 39) In Finland the peasants believe cats carry the souls of humans to the kingdom of the dead. Sicilians believe that if a black cat arrives on your doorstep you should chase it off immediately because it is bad luck. In France they tell young women not to step on cats' tails, because they will not find a husband before the year is out. (Mery, 4) Is this good or bad luck? But even being considered good luck was not always beneficial for cats. An ancient European custom held that if a living cat was walled up in the foundation of a building, that building would last. These desiccated, mummified cats have been unearthed in the ruins of medieval castles and homes.

Ritualistic enactments of cat hatred have not ceased. In Ieper, Belgium, people began tossing cats from the church tower in 962 to prove to the Christians that Ieperians no longer worshipped cats. This ritual continues to this day. Ieperians hold an annual three hour cat parade in which children dress up to represent various historic

characterizations of the cat, such as Puss and Boots, Bastet, or witch familiar. Then a stuffed cat is thrown off the church tower. While the cat tossed from the church is stuffed, the human fears of the cats are still real. These enactments of cat hatred haunt history, echoing in the everyday torture of cats by neighborhood boys with matches, with rope, with whatever devices they can get their hands on. And I am left trying to explain to my two black cats why they can't go out on Halloween.

Women and Cats: Virgin Kittens or Wicked Seductresses

Why do we think of or even call a particularly cuddly specimen of the female of our species, 'kitten.' Because she is delectable, pettable, sufficiently diminutive to curl up into our laps, or snuggle close to us in bed, and because everything about her aspect, her fragrance, and her touch is pleasing and charming. There is hardly a higher compliment in the area of personal aspect that you could bestow upon her.

—Paul Gallico

Cat's eyes in the face of a woman, particularly when half-closed and slightly slanted upward, seem to promise the most unusual and selective delights as green, as seductive they glitter behind narrowed slits. Oh, give me your cat-eyed woman and I will follow slavishly in her train.

—Paul Gallico

What is it about women and cats? Why are cats characterized as feminine and women characterized as cats? This association of women and cats has two major manifestations—the seductress persona in which cats and women are seen as deceptive “sluts”; and the virgin kitten persona, in which cats and women are seen as cute, harmless, and brainless.

An integral component of the seductress persona is the notion that cats are deceptive, just like women. This is reflected in *Webster's Dictionary* definition of a cat as “a malicious woman.” Women are also called catty. All over the world there are legends of deceptive women who turn into cats in order to seduce men, or deceptive cats who turn into women in order to seduce men. In one of Aesop's

fables a cat who has fallen in love with a man asks the God Venus to help turn her into a woman. Venus grants her wish but the cat betrays herself by jumping out of bed after a mouse running across the floor. In the rural villages of the Ozarks folk wisdom has it that women who are unfaithful to their husbands disguise themselves as cats in order to sneak around. And in the Far East there are stories of cats turning into old women and young girls to deceive people. "The name cat itself is often used to describe a woman. Perhaps this comes from the superstition that cats are two-faced and often false, and a man who has been spurned by a woman feels that she is being false, and catlike," writes Ann Currah in *The Cat Compendium*. (Currah, 77) Why are cats considered two-faced? Is it because they refuse to be eternally grateful for human attention and to pay for it by giving up their free will? Is it because they persist, despite their partial domestication, in being animals rather than live toys?

The second characteristic of the seductress persona is the notion that cats are sluts. Female cat sexual behavior is loud, aggressive and uninhibited. This frank and obvious sexuality feeds the patriarchal characterization of the female cat as a slut. In contrast, the prowling tomcat, the neighborhood fighter, is often the recipient of male admiration for his antics. For example, a 1917 U.S. Army recruiting ad with the caption "Treat 'Em Rough" shows a huge blue-black tomcat with extended claws raking over a field of sprawled tanks. The ad proclaims, "Join the Tanks! Open to Fighting Men." (Muncaster and Sawyer, 23) Yet these patriarchal perceptions of female cats as sluttish or tomcats as virile knights in furry armor say more about humans than cats.

Feline-like characteristics have become yet another beauty standard for women. "Women have been told to strive for the slow graceful walk, the supple thighs, the lengthened shape of the eye." (Mery, 226) "The cat's face is an ensemble of marvelously matched and balanced features and the total result is one to stir the heart. Where the human female is able to approach them she becomes irresistible," writes Paul Gallico. (Gallico, 14) Glaring in these quotes and in the epigraph for this section is the racism in describing the slanted eyes of the cat as exotic and sexy, a bizarre echo of depictions of Asian women.

The flip side of the slut cat is the virgin kitten, the domesticated cute kitty who serves as a household ornament, always available to

be petted. Yet cats do not conform to this stereotype either. Cats have claws (except when de-clawed by humans), supreme intelligence, and a true ability to get along without people. Indeed 1/4 of the 40 million cats in the United States live on their own. (Spies, 1984) Cats are not truly domesticated. But as an old proverb states, "God gave man the cat in order that he might have the pleasure of caressing the tiger." (Currah, 76) Likewise the Bible states that God gave Adam Eve for his pleasure. But if a cat doesn't want you to touch her she will let you know in no uncertain terms. Neither cats or women have ever conformed to these constricting roles and man has never forgiven either of us for this.

Is it something about the innate independence of cats that has inspired this hatred from men? Is it this self-possession, this fierce will, this stubborn refusal to be submissive and always available which has sparked the wrath of the patriarchy? Likewise, women who are independent, self-possessed and powerful also experience the wrath of men, are called witches, hags, dykes—and cats. To call a woman a cat is akin to calling her a dyke, a hag, a witch—it's a way of telling her to shut up, of humiliating her sexually, of making fun of her independence, of keeping her in line. The pornographic use of the word "pussy" denigrates women's sacred sexuality. Indeed the word "pussy" comes from Pasht, one of the names of the Egyptian cat goddess, Bastet. (Serpell, 152) To use this name as an insult is to turn the history of reverence for cats into a mechanism for enforcing patriarchal ideologies of womanhood.

Objectification of the Cat

No other animal could so successfully sell us beauty products, soap, detergents, cream, carpets, fuel, washing machines, cigarettes, and shoe soles.

—Fernand Mery

Today cats and women are depicted either as seductive witches or cute harmless kittens, mindless, pretty objects. Cats, like women, are objectified, used to sell things. "In publicity and advertising the cat is used more than any other animal. What other animal can be associated with so many qualities we look for in the products we

buy? What other animal has charm, beauty and mystery, as well as cleanliness?" (Mery, 224) No other animal, I might add, but women.

"An ad is more likely to be noticed if it contains a likeness of a cat than if it features many other images," write Alice Muncaster and Ellen Sawyer in *The Cat Made Me Buy It*. This collection, and its sequel, *The Black Cat Made Me Buy It*, contain over 200 ads from the late 1800s to the 1950s, all of which use cats to sell products. Products—shoes, seeds, baby powder, apples, magazines, sheet music, cigar boxes, Coca-Cola, cologne, varnish, stove polish, thread, tacks, stockings, rubber bands, rubber heels, footwear, cereal, flashlight batteries and hosiery. Many of these ads exploit the various female characterizations of the cat: witch, slut, kitten to promote their wares.

Witch: an ad for Ipswich Hosiery proclaims, "The modern witch weaves a spell in fine, full-figured hosiery." (Muncaster and Sawyer, 27) In the foreground of the picture sits a fragile looking young blonde woman, legs exposed, ineffectually waving a charm on a string at a black cat. The cat stares off into the background, where looms a huge shadow of an stereotypical witch, sharp chin, old hunched back, pointed cap. The advertisers define witch as, "one who exerts power more than natural; an irresistible influence." The power of the pretty young "witch" in her modern stockings to be irresistible to men is acceptable, in contrast with the power of the menacing, medieval shadow-witch, who represents all the witches who were burned alive, whose power represented a real threat. Whore: three pretty, but used-looking, long-haired cats with wide, terrified eyes wait for their pimp in "Tom's Den," a cigar box ad. (Muncaster and Yanow, 5) Virgin Kitten: a white kitten stares innocently, mindlessly, but seductively from a shiny red cushion—an ad for Northwest apples.

Racism also permeates this kind of advertising. The Reit-Price Manufacturing Company features a bedraggled and defeated black cat on their Domestic Maid mops, mopping tanks, and buckets. (Muncaster and Sawyer, 55) Black Cat Shoe Polish is another advertising scheme with highly racist overtones, considering who historically shined shoes in this country.

Certainly the contemporary use of cats on paraphernalia—mugs, T-shirts, calendars, pens, clocks, lamps, towels—every conceivable sort of doodad, illustrates that this use of cats to sell things is far

from over. Very few of these cat items are a tribute to the dignity and power of cats; most depict silly, cute kitties with lifeless eyes.

The objectification of cats is also evident in the industry of breeding and showing cats. The Beautiful Cat. The Beautiful Woman. But neither of us is beautiful in our natural state it would seem. For just as innumerable patriarchal conventions tell women what they must do to their bodies to be considered beautiful—shave legs, lose weight, curl hair, redden lips, neutralize scent—breeding standards for cats proscribe what the Beautiful Cat must look like. *The International Encyclopedia of Cats* warns breeders of Abyssinians,

The body should be slender and the tail longish and tapering . . . The coat texture should be fine and close. Bars and markings are considered bad faults, but a dark line along the spine is permitted. Any white marks are frowned on and white chins are considered undesirable, but do tend to keep appearing.

The persistence of white chins is strangely akin to the persistence of hairy female legs or fat handsome women, who just won't be bred out of existence!

A friend told me about growing up next to a house of cat breeders, who kept a whole basement full of cats confined in cages their entire lives. Women also live in cages, different kinds of cages, but often with the same intent, our food and footwear regulated by patriarchal conventions to keep us attractive to men. Cat shows, with their display of hundreds of cats in cages for the public's enjoyment (and for profit) bear a striking resemblance to beauty pageants. There are over four hundred cat shows a year in the USA alone. The terminology used by British cat shows is especially revealing. Cats and kittens new to the world of cat shows are called "Debutantes." Cats who have participated in these shows before but haven't ever won a prize are called "Maidens." (Anderson, 72)

Cats and their Dykes

She is no longer worshipped as a goddess, nor is she enough of a threat to be even considered a demon. No, Cat has become "kitty, kitty," a cute furry ornament. And yet, despite patriarchy, the power

of cats persists. It persists particularly in the houses of women, especially lesbians, many of whom love cats; who, rather than being threatened by cats' independence and wisdom, value it as a model for strong women.

Yet when I really think about my relationship with my cats, I am overwhelmed with ethical dilemmas, with disturbing and haunting questions. Wizard and Wicca, the two black cats who have lived with me for the past four years, stare at me from the picnic table outside my kitchen window. They are magnificent beasts, tributes to feline wizardry and sense of self. They are not cute. Yet sometimes I catch myself talking to them in that cute little voice reserved for addressing the powerless. And this makes me wonder about the power relations between us, power relations I am not comfortable with. When my cats act cute to get my attention (they seem to know when they are cute, or what they can do to seem cute to me) how is that different from a woman making her voice soft and sweet to appeal to her man? Do I have power over my cats? Daily I make decisions for them, or at least try to. There will or will not be more food put in their bowls. Of course if there is no food they may choose to eat elsewhere or catch mice and gophers in their yard.

Is it ethical to confine an animal? I live on a busy main street. Many, many cats have been killed by cars in the few years I have lived here. Each day I come home half-expecting to find my friends dead in the street. Each opening of the window to let them out is an exercise in letting go, in respecting their wishes. I struggle with my conscience, knowing that cats are nocturnal. Wicca moans at the window, watching the trees beckon darkly in the windy backyard, yearning to prowl in the smooth grass. Who am I to stand in the way of forty million years of evolution? Yes, I can claim that I need to protect them from the harsh world. But how many women have been kept indoors by fathers or husbands who claimed the same thing?

But I love my two black, furry friends. And they seem to love me. Dare I call it love? Why do they seem to come in simply for affection, sometimes dashing into my lap when I've thought they were in search of food? What is this purring music that fills the room when we play together under worn blankets? What is this curiosity that propels them from room to room, to observe whatever I do? *What is this?* It must be more than gratefulness for shelter and food. My cats lived for four months on the streets before they ever came to live

with me. Could they live off birds and mice quite happily, find cushy beds in crisp leaves and soft grass under tree trunks?

So what made the cat come back? What do women say to cats and what on earth do they think of us? Is it ethical to "have" a cat? For 5000 years women and cats have lived together. For 5000 years cats have chosen to put up with humans. That in itself is a staggering fact, considering what humans have done to cats. And yet for some of that time, some people and cultures have recognized the power and grace and dignity of Cat, this being whose friendship we are lucky enough to have. Is this what has earned us forgiveness? Or is it simply that cats have no where else to go, that once domesticated they cannot go back. Or can they? Can women? Is it up to us to set cats free? Or do *they* set *us* free through their inspiration. Perhaps there is something we can give each other through an alliance of friendship, some ancient friendship dating from that first cat who made a deal with a woman in that Egyptian field so long ago. For there is something between cats and women that is not based on domination or condescending adoration. There is something the cat is trying to tell us, if we would only listen, listen past the din of patriarchal hatred. Cat is telling us about independent grace, beauty born of self-respect and pride. Cat knows how to say when she doesn't want to be touched. Cat knows how to ignore men. Cat is wary, alert, intelligent—qualities essential for survival.

There was a time, long, long ago, when cats were held in high regard. No one has ever really forgotten it, least of all men, who have been trying to erase that fact for thousands of years, to spit on it with pornographic distortions, to burn, to torture it to extinction, to capture it with commercialism. But the power of cats persists. It is no accident that lesbian feminists remember, even unconsciously, who our wise and sacred companions are, that we who are not afraid to be called dykes, witches, crones or hags, are also friends of cats.

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Penelope J. Engelbrecht

Household Deities

Around the corner, crying plaintively
a small large-eared rough-
coated lonely hungry
cat who came home with me
eagerly. Against my better judgement I
named him and fed him.

Fabius Catullus shall he be,
for he at least did not delay
and he cried to me as Catullus
cried to Lesbia, even as I cry—
not *odi*, but *amo*.

Everyone wants to get inside
out of the cold,
but the plea of a tiny cat
carries more weight than a thousand
Sapphic lyrics
upon a tender breast.



Obedience to Being

Many of my friends choose to single out the vow of chastity I once took as a Roman Catholic nun, insisting that surely that was the most destructive vow I could ever have internalized. (The other two vows that I took at the age of 22 were poverty and obedience.) When I insist back to them, "No, no, it was the vow of obedience that was so awful," they usually roll their eyes in a gesture of disbelief and/or compassion for what they consider to be my denial.

Only my three cats get it. And they eschew all theoretical discussion.

Mabby, Buber and Annie came my way twelve years ago, four years after I had left both the convent and church in 1974. At that time I began to unpack the destructiveness I had internalized from all three vows. Poverty and chastity were easy to work on actually. They were dreadful sore thumbs in my life as I came out as feminist and lesbian, and demanded being dealt with through things as pragmatic as checkbooks, apartment rentals, bare-breasted country festivals, and lesbian socials, parties and dances.

Obedience was foundational to any way of life in the church and we were often reminded that the big beef against Lucifer was that he would not obey. Imagine what a wound that is to human will!

Well, in the 70's I looked around at a good number of my former nun, now ex-nun, friends who had shucked off the same two vows, poverty and chastity, pretty easily but—it seemed to me—they were still living obediently, having just transferred into other systems such as the Federal government, IBM, Chevron, the psychiatric industry, and a score of other such institutions equally patriarchal and oppressive. All demanded obedience of a lethal degree.

When I did find a therapist to unpack what obedience had done to me, she gave me weekly assignments until I suddenly realized that what was going on there was obedience to her model and mostly what I was unpacking was my pocketbook.

Enter Mabby, Annie, Buber. Inheritors of the tabby and Russian blue gene pools, I first perceived these frisky felines to be anarchists. They ate because they were hungry, not because they were obedient to my two meal schedule for them. They used their litter box because

they liked the sand, not because I had much authority to demand that defecation be in boxes. Occasionally to let me know that, they bypassed the box. They slept when and where they wanted on the window sills of my apartment off Dupont Circle in Washington, D.C. They did not know what it meant to disobey because they had never learned to obey. It was just natural to their awareness not to be duped by authority nor to give over control of their lives to any power higher than that within their little fur bodies.

I began to watch them very closely, as if to learn a whole way of being in the world which was not mediated by oughts and shoulds, a lifestyle without moral imperatives or psychological injunctions at every turn. At the same time, character of contradiction that I am, I came across country with them to California in 1980, where I began to work on a degree in transpersonal psychology. At one of the first gatherings of my 21 classmates, it was suggested that we all tell others who our spiritual mentors were. All the heavyweights got named, from Baba Free John to Rajneesh to Jesus to Mukthananda. When my turn came to reveal my "path" and my "guide," I said as simply (and undoubtedly veiled in hostility) as I could, "My mentors are my cats." Such a statement wakes up everyone in New Age heaven. I was out before as a lesbian and as a feminist there but making that one statement declared me out as disobedient as well. Things were looking up.

Of course from that moment on I got pictures of the goddess Bast with her cats, articles on mythology involving felines, dream interpretations including cats, and what have you.

Later on, in one class we were all asked to give a five minute demonstration of some spiritual exercise which we thought would be most beneficial to our classmates. After listening to various breath techniques, chant sounds and ways to stimulate energy points, I added mine: how to give a cat a bath. By this time I had realized that here was where my three cats dramatically parted company with human intent: baths. They refused to obey any position I put them in in order to clean their fur of fleas. So my class demonstration on a cat bath concluded that to give a cat a bath was to understand the limits of human problem solving. It was to enter the realm of the unalterable. Only the intuitively hardy got my point.

In San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury neighborhood where I lived in the early 1980's, many devotees of Rajneesh shared houses and

happily roamed the streets with "the Master's" picture hung around their necks on small, circular wooden frames from strings of beads. I think it was my root or survival chakra that bothered me whenever I ran into them, and by that I mean things like money, car repair and vacation opportunities were not flying in at me on the wings of manifested abundance. One night looking at Buber, I knew what I would do to help myself not feel so resentful of these people. The next day I went to North Beach, bought a string of beads and a small wooden locket, scissored down a picture of Buber to fit in the locket and then found all the orange-red clothing I had (not much). The next day I walked among them as if one of them, but defiant and armed in disobedience (and/or disrespect) to their system. I should have guessed: they were charmed to see Buber in my locket, not at all offended. And thus I had to reassess this little New Age habit I had rigged up for myself. It also made me think about learning a kind of disobedience deeper than rebellion or reacting to systems.

As the years have gone on, my three cats have continued to teach me about living without compliance to authority. They continue to teach me how to free myself from obedience that oppresses, which at this point, 1990, seems to be demanded in most systems. I see how much of my cultural identity as a woman (to say nothing of what I picked up in nundom) was intended to fit me inside perimeters which white males constructed. They then demanded that I obey inside that space, always too small for my being. It is very very hard to give up obeying for it carries so many systemic rewards; at least for me as long as I obeyed in the convent I had food, medical care, no fear of not being taken care of when I was old. But clearly I was not obedient to my own being and my own body and heart needs. I was disobedient to myself in an effort to obey a system.

Slowly I began to see that my cats were neither obedient nor disobedient according to the categories I set up for each of these. They lived as obedient to their being as they could and they were not prone in any way to internalize systems or designs outside themselves. They had no need to change, to grow, to fix up their psyches. They were very radical, if by radical one means acting in accord with the root of being.

I watch my cats, trying to imitate their obedience to themselves. I have tried over the years to learn to blend with their energy, as one does in aikido. There are definite lapses in this practice, among them

noticing Annie sitting on my computer printer washing her paws, or Mabby stalking down a bouquet of flowers brought me by a friend, or Buber stealthily edging a piece of salmon from a platter I am readying for dinner. Then equality seems shaky and I am tempted to claim some hierarchical privilege hinging on the fact that I am the financial provider in this house. Such duty and my self-importance regarding it does not impress them.

I have learned a good deal about deinternalizing obedience from my three mentors. I have gone from reactivity to rebellion to stubborn resistance and then inverted the order and gone back over the same three over and over, again and again. I think that will be necessary for me for the rest of my life because of the oppressive systems set in place throughout society. But I also realize, and this realization comes mostly from my cats, that the most radical thing I could do would be to be myself, as best I know myself. It would also make me as magical and loveable as my cats.

Some of the major spiritual traditions assert that teachers come into our lives when we are ready for them. That has been true for me. Before 1974, cats and conformity would not have both fit into my life. After 1974 I needed models of non-conformity who were not self destructive in that same process. So when I describe 1974 I often say, "That is the year I left the convent and fell in love with cats."

Sometimes lately I catch Mabby looking at me, as if in appraisal and I get panicky for he has that look in his eyes that seems to be asking, "What do you think, Buber and Annie, is she ready yet to learn how to unpack poverty and chastity?"



Tara and Phineas

Photo by Tam Garson

Lea Matthews

Ice Panther

Cool Cat,
Fur of arctic snow,
playing cat and mouse
with a stray ice cube.
Batting it across floors
of peach glacé
then examining the paw
with cool deliberation,
shaking it with cold disdain.

But the glacier calls again,
irresistible,
and you
with icy instinct,
pounce
and pounce again.
Another chill,
another dramatic gesture,
the unbelieving ice blue eyes
narrow in contemplation
of a foe
you cannot master.

At last, the prey becomes
merely a puddle.
And you
with frozen pride
preserved,
search for other Everests
to conquer.

Big Kitty

I know what kind of a child I was—comfortable in my wild Adirondack setting. The first time my parents knew that I was different was when we were walking along the banks of the Hudson River, near the dam. I was walking twenty feet or so ahead of them, exploring my Indian summer, early morning world. My father, who comes from Hungary where there aren't many dangerous animals, grabbed my mother's arm and pointed at the rocks around them. Rattlesnakes were sunning themselves on the smooth shale, their scales blending in almost perfectly with the rounded rocks and hard river clay. Dead ahead of me was a large, two humped boulder, that I would later nickname "Hippopotamus and Child" because of the way it looked at high tide. There was a rattlesnake right in my path, and even at almost two, I didn't turn aside for anything. There was no time, my father says, for them to do anything, not even cry out. I walked to the top of the rock, said, "Move, snake," and kicked it. It moved. It slithered off the boulder, into the sedges.

Not that I remember this, but the story fits me pretty well. This I do remember.

I had no other children around me when I was very small, so I had a rich fantasy life. I lived with "Mister Nobody," and any creature from the mythology books my mom loved to read, so no one was surprised when I told them I had a new friend, my "Big Kitty." No one believed me when I told them that Big Kitty was real, which surprised me.

I used to look out my ground floor bedroom at night and wait for the woods to light up with stars and moon overhead, or the glow from the lights of the nearest city through the beech branches. If the sky was cloudy that night, I would listen for peepers, and whippoorwills, and watch and smell and think. The screen was loose on my window, so sometimes I would go out my window, but I would have to come back in through the front door. I didn't want to be caught outside at night and risk having my screen nailed down again, so I saved going out for special nights, nights when I had a visitor.

He would come just within sight, and make a noise like my newborn sister made, in the clearing beyond the new pine. I would bail out my window and sit by him, and we would just watch each other. He smelled like the rank musk and ginger of my angry father's lap, but he had long, soft-looking ears, a stubby tail, and eyes that seemed to have their own light in them. Sometimes he would chase a little creature in the grass, but he never actually caught anything while he was with me. He was like a regular cat, simply more so, bigger, and cattier. We had a wonderful summer together, from snow barely melting, to the green on the pumpkins peeling back to gold. It seemed to be enough, just perfect, at the time.

Then came the day I would betray him, in my innocence. I was telling my father about him, and mentioned the long ears and no tail. He kept on asking questions, and I was a little bit frightened, though I couldn't figure out why.

That night, my father was watching too, through his own window next to mine. My Big Kitty came into sight, singing to me as he always did. I heard the bolt of my father's gun go back.

I jumped through the screen, scratching myself as I did and not caring.

"No, Ludi, get back, it's rabid!" he shouted. My mother was yelling, "Kill it, kill it!" and my father said to her, "No, I can't get a clear shot."

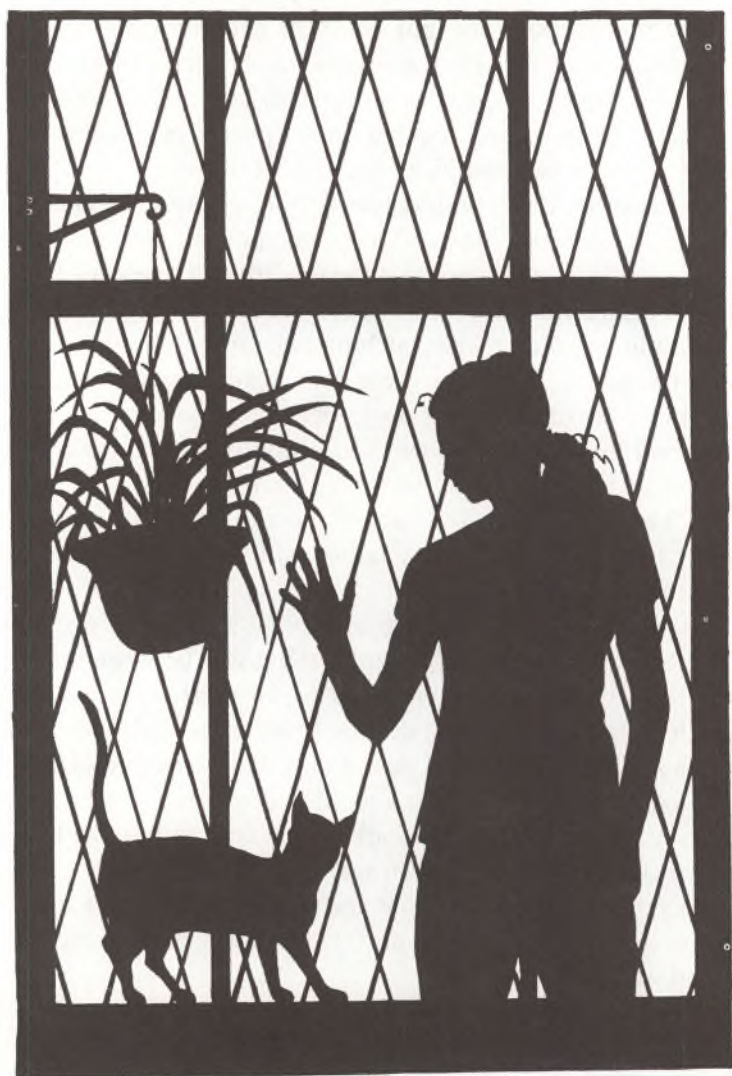
"Run, go away, don't ever come back!" I screamed, crying, terrified. I knew what the gun did; I knew that I was between the cat and that awful, nasty gun. I remember being afraid that I would be shot by accident, that he would be shot for being in love with me. I picked up grass and pine cones, and pelted him. They bounced off his face. He looked confused, hurt, like a scolded dog. After what seemed to be forever, he got a dignified look on his face and walked away. I knew that I would never see him again.

I remember clutching the grass and sobbing, and hitting my father when he came to pick me up and comfort me. He just did not understand us.

Nor did I understand what a full grown, healthy male bobcat could do to my soft, fat, three-year-old self.

I'm twenty-seven now, and still my friendship with Big Kitty has stood as a model for my life. I watched him and was fascinated by the differences we had. I loved Big Kitty for his differences. And that

is how I choose my friends today, human and otherwise. We are different and we work together enjoying our differences. That enjoyment earns respect. I am still in my beloved Adirondacks and I have cared for many wild, half-wild and feral creatures, and had them care for me. I have never been harmed by them, not once.



Mazie and Me

Tamara Bower

Hilary Mullins

Little Hay Girl and the Color Cat A Grim-No-Longer Tale

Once upon a time there was a little girl who lived by herself in the vast airy loft of a barn. She had been there so long that she could barely remember the first day she had been brought there, how a big bearded farmer had taken her by the hand and led her up up up into the mounds of hay. Indeed, she had been there so long that she could not really remember the world she had come from.

All day in the barn sun-lit breezes blew in and out and swallows flitted above the girl's head in the rafters. Sometimes in the morning she would climb up to the big hay doors and sit on the broad sill, looking out as the birds swooped in great plunges and loops, skimming the tossing tops of long grasses.

Then in the afternoons, after their morning of hunting and napping, the barn cats came to be with her. The girl spent long hours playing hide and seek and tag with them. Sometimes they would sit together in a circle and the cats would tell her rambling tales of their adventures, stories of how blue the pond looked in the morning light, what falling rain felt like on their whiskers, the feel of dew under their paws. From their stories, the girl thought the world must be a wonderful place indeed.

Then as the darkness seeped in around them, one by one the cats slipped off into the night that was turning scarlet into purple into darkest blue. The girl would watch as the last thin tail bobbed down the hay and would sit down to her supper of berries and grain and milk. Every day the cats brought her what things they could.

After supper she would swing on the old rope that hung from the ceiling, long arching flights over the hay, up into the eaves and back again, lifting her feet so the deepening shadows could not grab her by the ankles and drag her down. In air she would dream of the world, of the pond and the fields, of mountains and the feel of rain on her face. Finally, too tired for more, she would lie herself reluctantly down in her straw bed.

And then, lying there, a small girl alone in the dark, she would pray that the beast would not come, pray that it would leave her be. And on some nights it did not come. But on others, how many she

could not tell, it did: the strange long-tailed beast on two thick legs that brought its huge weight down, lapping at her with a heavy scaled tongue until her whole body was in terrible fire, burning her alive. This would go on and on until suddenly the beast would be gone. And then the dark would turn and turn 'til morning came finally clambering over night's broken back to return day to the world. And every morning she was still alive.

And so it went and she wore long clothes that covered her and never spoke of it. But time passed, and the girl was growing, her legs and arms were longer; she looked less and less like a girl, her features and form beginning to take their womanly shape. One day a new cat appeared in the barn. No one could say where she had come from. She was the most beautiful cat the girl had ever seen, with crystal green eyes and a fluffy coat of fur of every color, so bright that bits of color would glimmer up as she moved. The girl could not take her eyes from the new cat. They played, pairing up in the afternoon games. Gradually the girl came to love the color cat as she had never loved anything else. Every morning she thanked the stars blinking out above her that she had lived through another night and could see her new friend again.

One rainy afternoon the color cat called the hay girl over to the furthest corner of the loft. One drop of rain after another dripped into the hay next to them. The cat reached out her left paw and with her claws sheathed, slipped the girl's sleeve up her arm. There, revealed, was the burnt skin. The girl flushed a bloody red and dropped down, hiding her face in her hands. And now the drips fell on the top of her head, and still she could not look up, the silence between each tiny splash a space blazing with every night the beast had ever come, firing her. A small splash and then the flames and a splash again, and the drumming of rain on the tin roof rapping louder and louder until the girl looked up and a drop fell to her face like a kiss. When she sat up, moving slowly, it ran down her cheek.

The color cat was still there, watching, her eyes full of light, a single bright round tear caught in her whiskers. She scooped it with a folded paw and held it out, a brilliant clear stone the girl took in her own hand.

"Hang this about your neck," said the cat. "It will help you where you have never had help before and needed it." Then the color cat was gone.

By this time it was already late in the day, and the girl took a piece of twine and tied the stone around her neck, then sat down to her supper. Then she lay down and slept deeply, dreaming. She dreamt she was a fish swimming her joyous way out to the sea and woke to the sound of the beast, tail shuffling in the hay, coming towards her. The girl sat up, clutching the stone at her throat.

"Who are you?" she cried.

The creature paused, grunting.

"Who are you?" the girl cried again.

"It is of no consequence to you, Hay Girl," the beast replied, his huge shape looming over her, down, down, and then he was full over her. But then out of that very darkness falling came glinting splinters of light, dancing flashings and the girl remembered the words of the color cat.

"Help," said the girl to herself, "Help. Help when I need it. Help!" She yanked the stone up from around her neck and held it high, its clarity suddenly blazing like a torch in the vast recesses of the old loft.

In that light she could see the cats crouching, their eyes yellow, tails swishing back and forth.

"Help!" hissed the cats, "help when you need it."

Then the girl looked up in the face of the beast, and the shadows fell from him, peeled away like scales from a snake, falling to the floor like bits of ash.

It was the farmer whose face she saw, the man who had brought her to this place. His features twisted in the unrelenting scrutiny of the light. He turned away when her eyes met his.

"Get off me!" cried the Hay Girl, and when there was no movement in that mountain of flesh, she thrust her arms and legs, her body and everything in her up, up, up.

And off he did go, rolling down the hay mound, a heavy tumbling and crash as he fell down the chute to the floor far below.

The girl jumped to her feet. The cats were all about her now, prancing, exulting. Up through them came the color cat, one paw outstretched.

"Congratulations, my friend, you have prevailed," she said. The girl swooped the cat up into her arms and felt her throaty purr against her chest. And then they all celebrated, dancing and playing far into the night until the girl fell into her bed, asleep instantly.

She slept soundly and woke to the long thin rays of dawn shooting through the cracks in the hay mound doors. Her ears had caught the softest meow and she turned to see the color cat coming towards her. Suddenly she knew the cat had come to tell her it was time to leave this place.

She propped herself up on stiffened arms, saying, "But you must come with me color cat!"

And the cat pulled up where she was, pausing, "I do not know if you are ready to have me with you, my friend," she said.

And she was right, for suddenly, the girl was afraid to bring the cat into her arms, even though they had danced so freely the night before and the girl had held her tightly to her chest. She started crying, burying her head in the straw, and could not stop until she looked up and saw the color cat again. It was then too that she saw the light of the day coming full upon them both. She called the cat to her.

The color cat drew towards the girl slowly, carefully, but when she was almost upon her, she stopped, waiting. The girl said, "Please. Come." And then, paw by paw, the cat brought her body onto the girl's chest. And even though the girl's fear was ferocious within her, something new was taking hold, and it was this the girl felt in her hands as she ran them the length of the cat. The cat bent her head, licking each tear that had spilled onto the girl's face. Then the cat's rough tongue was full on her chest, licking her, spreading a glorious new warmth through her body. The girl began to laugh and then she was licking back and with each lap against the cat's chest the fur fell away until the girl saw before her another young woman, dark dark hair and the same clear eyes that had gazed on her from the face of the cat.

"The farmer's curse has been broken!" said the woman who had once been a cat, "Shall we go now?" The hay girl—now no longer a girl, but a woman herself, nodded. They walked to the rope together, each grasping the large knot firmly, pushing off one foot and then the other. Then they were in the air, the whole world before them.

El gato sin nueve vidas*

At sunrise the sound of rain woke her up. Through the sliding glass door she saw the grass, wet, green. Across the yard, under the clothesline, she noticed some old rags.

Who lost those rags out there? She wondered, perhaps they fell off the line?

The thought was interrupted suddenly by the cat, the queen of the house. The cat leaped to the bed, and stood on the woman's back where she began stretching and digging her claws deeply.

"Stop!" the dyke yelled, "Stop it now!"

But the cat had already jumped down and was standing next to the sliding door, meowing in a loud voice.

"No, it's freezing out there. It's raining."

The cat insisted and finally the dyke opened the door, but the cat didn't go out because the cat didn't like the rain, and especially didn't like to get her feet dirty.

It wasn't until the afternoon, when the dyke was doing her household chores that she noticed that the rags had disappeared.

Very strange, she thought.

At dawn the following day when the woman awoke because of the sound of rain, she saw once again through the window those rags underneath the clothesline. Rags or crumpled bags, white and orange twisted together. She got out of bed and wrapped her robe around her.

"What is this?" Annoyed and curious she slid open the door.

Crossing the yard she thought she saw the cloth move. No, it *did* move.

"Hey . . ." Startled, the sound slipped out.

Two cats scampered not fast like cats, but still quickly like fugitives, across the grass.

*This story was written first in Spanish and then translated months later into English, hence the title. Spanish is not my first language, but one in which I must think and speak daily.

"Poor cats, lost in the rain."

The rain stopped and the day warmed. She didn't want to think about the cats.

One cat was more than enough. Her friends agreed that in fact her cat might be too much.

Still, she found herself thinking of the lost cats and finally put out just one bowl of food for them.

Her cat, the one who lived in the house, the one with brilliant and soft fur, and full stomach, watched angrily from the window.

Soon she found herself thinking of the orange one as Basil, meaning noble, for despite the scarred nose and dried-out fur, the cat held himself with dignity. The rag cats ate in front of the house every day now, but the cats were still wild and remained wild which was okay with the dyke. She imagined the cats were littermates, lovers or companions, because every night they slept wrapped together, one protecting the other on the cement slab under the clothesline.

For five months she fed them, and began to feel a great deal of affection for the one she called Basil. The other one, the white one, was wilder and only came for food.

Slowly, Basil had begun to change, now he slept much of the day on the roof of the neighbor's house in the sun and out of reach. And he didn't want food, or wanted it but after a bite moved painfully away. And his hair, it looked like dried straw.

The dyke didn't want to think about those cats.

She didn't want to think about Basil. Basil with the name that means noble, who was no longer so wild, so independent. Sick, but noble, still noble.

At sunrise the woman woke up because of the sound of rain on the deck, but she didn't get up. She didn't yell at the cat, the queen who was perched on her back. She didn't look out the window.

And she didn't look at the solitary white rag under the clothesline.

Pamela Gray

How Purrs Came to Be

for Bast, on the loss of Chaucer

The moon is a sharp
cat's claw. Tonight
the Queen of Cats
sits on its curved edge
and cries for her lost
babies. Her tears are falling
stars that fall below
into bowls of cream
in kitchens all over the earth.
In the morning, sleepy-eyed
cats saunter to their bowls
and drink. And as each cat
laps the silvery-white
cream, a purr rises
in her throat.



Amy Edgington

Lessons in Love

Once when I was almost dead inside—
squeezed dry of all but the bitter memory
of a woman who had battered me—
a strange cat greeted me on the street
with an offer of love I couldn't refuse.
She followed me home, and when it was clear
she wanted to stay, I began to feed her.
This had nothing to do with domestication—
I did not want a pet; she was not looking
for a hand-out or a master—
but you cannot fall off the earth
and you cannot fall out of love.
When I wept alone in my room,
she would get up from her nap,
run across the house and jump into my lap,
then do her best to comfort me.
To her keen ears I sounded like a kitten
astray in a world full of danger.



Tamara Bower

Cats Call No One Mistress

It's a well-known fact that you can't call yourself a lesbian unless you possess a cat—or, rather, for cats call no one mistress, a cat possesses you.

Living as a lesbian with cats presents numerous liabilities. First, there's the sleeping situation, and something that every woman about to come out should seriously consider. If you are a lesbian with cats you will never sleep alone, and I mean this without regard for your relationship status. Cats demand space on the bed. In fact, my lover is troubled by a recurring dream that a heavy weight is on her legs; she always wakes to find our large black cat, Kali, firmly ensconced across both her legs, cutting off the blood supply. Kali also likes to lie between us, pushing us as far apart as possible. She once lived only with me (and other cats, of course), and finds herself consumed with jealousy.

Lilli, our small white cat with the two different color eyes, is another matter. She likes to sleep across your neck like those fur wraps women in the forties wore, or, more particularly, right on top of your face. She also likes to purr as loudly as a cement mixer, especially when you're trying to stay asleep. It's not possible to shut these two OUT of the bedroom. Their loud cries and scratches at the door are more bothersome than their bed habits.

Cats also love to walk across your chest while you're semi-reclining, reading or watching TV. They aim for the most tender spots upon which to implant their hard little feet, which has caused me to wish to design the catproof lounging bra which would have thick little pads strategically placed.

Another issue is cats and sex. They love it—that is, they love to watch it, with a steady, voyeuristic gaze that would make even JoAnn Loulan blush. I believe this is their retribution for having been spayed; if they can't do it themselves, they'll make you feel creepy for doing it yourself. I don't know how they'd react to a vibrator, since we don't use one, but I do know they detest the vacuum cleaner and run like shots from the sound, so that's a thought . . .

Again, if they're shut out of the room, their protests will destroy any amorous mood you might be in, so there's nothing to do but let

them observe. Sometimes they like to participate, too; nothing will get them going more than a brisk, repetitive hand motion under the covers. They pounce. I suppose this is pleasurable if you're into s/m; I wouldn't know. So we just try to go away to bed-and-breakfasts when we can afford to . . .

Another thing is that cats are, in their natural state, hunters. This instinct cannot, even by the most pacifist, vegetarian, animal-rightist lesbian, be bred out of them. I know it's going to be a very bad day when Lilli brings me a *corpus delecti* in bed before I'm even up. My lover leaves for work very early. My punishment for languishing under the covers while she's already out there on the T is having to deal with the situation alone. There I am in my nightie, screeching and shrieking and demanding a divorce if my lover won't stay home and take care of crises like these (after all, she used to live on a farm and got used to slaughtered things, while I grew up with gentle English fairy tales in which adorable mousies wore tailored waistcoats and ruffled gowns). During this time the mouse, which is frequently not quite yet a corpse, struggles in Lilli's jaws.

Usually I just leave the house until the struggle is over. Then I sneak back in, find a large dish towel, avert my eyes, scoop up the remains, and conduct a burial at sea. After that, I imbibe a huge belt of herb tea and try to relax, but cats demand praise for their kills, which they consider to be love gifts, so my next task is to lavish a lot of petting on Lilli. If I don't, she might not keep on committing the gruesome ritual, thus allowing our home to become overrun by increasingly large, bold, and well-fed rodents. I can just imagine hostessing some lesbian gathering at which several of these beasties make a mad dash across the living room floor right under the feet of the guests!

The most difficult thing about cats is their dietary ambivalence. They act as if they're starving, rubbing violently up and down your leg, mewling pitifully and purring like a bandsaw, *feed me, feed me*—and then as soon as you wield the can opener, they turn their royal noses several inches up and stalk off. The worst comment any cat can make over the turkey in cream giblet gravy or ocean tuna fish with salmon sauce you've just served up (mind you, at a whopping 69 cents per can), is to perform covering motions with her hind legs in the direction of the plate. This is the same motion employed in the litter box. In essence, she is telling you that the food is shit. I don't

know where they get this arrogance—must be from watching Morris on TV.

Cats also put on an Academy Award-winning starvation act, even when they've just been fed, which can fool one household member into thinking the other has forgotten to feed them. Double portions for the clever creatures often result. Such starvation behavior can also be embarrassing in front of guests, who assume you commit cat abuse. Cats only like to eat human food when it's on *your* plate. (I once had a lover whose enormous, fluffy cat would immediately place himself in the vacated chair of a guest at a dinner party and scarf away her lamb chop or steak.) Yet if bits of leftover chicken or tuna or beef are placed in cats' own dishes, up go those royal noses again

Cats are easy to care for when you go away on vacation. All you do is leave dried food, (which they will not eat), leave water in their dishes, (instead they drink out of the toilet bowl, leaving dainty little footprints on the seat for you to find when you return), and locate a cozy corner of the best carpet to use as a litter box, because they haven't had theirs cleaned for the entire weekend you're away. In the meantime, of course, just to show you how glad they are that you went somewhere else so that you could—for a change—get a good night's sleep and some unobserved sex, they waltz all over the highest shelves and mantels and knock off every valuable item you've ever possessed.

Lilli used to make it up to the top of a 6-foot-high bookcase just to flip down a geode that lived there on a plastic stand—dangerous, if you happened to be walking by without a hard hat. Once, too, she also peed on a Lord and Taylor comforter, just after I came back from a trip, to show me how furious she was over my abandonment. I had a suicidally depressed friend on the phone at the moment the cat lowered her rear over the quilt. The friend laughed so much over my plight that her problems went away. I wish I could say the same for the quilt.

Cats also love to lie on whatever you put out on a surface, like a sweater or jacket on a bed or a couch. They fit their bodies exactly to the contours of the item, even if it's very small and they are very large. Their favorite items are the coats of allergic guests which, during a party, you've put on the bed. Lilli also used to like to stuff her entire frame into a tiny plastic file basket on a desk. She would fit

all four feet in, then lower her body delicately down until most of it slopped over the sides. I tried filling the basket with check stubs and bills. She would just tip it over, dump them out, and climb right back in.

Like it or not, some of us lesbians are just stuck for life. There *are* the advantages. When you're single you get to hear steady breathing by your ear all night and feel a warm body keeping you from the covers. When you have a lover, you feel like you're having an orgy, because there are always three to four to five in the bed, depending on how far your obsession has gone. I expect in past lives we were all witches and they were our familiars. All in all, I guess it's not so bad.



LESBIAN SURVIVAL HINT #30:
LOVE HER - LOVE HER CATS.

Catechesis

In *The Wanderground*, cats remember everything that has happened since the beginning of time, and use their psychic powers to help the hill womyn learn their herstory.

Lately, I've begun to wonder if something like this might actually happen in the real world. After all, cats have long been associated with womyn who were not owned by men. Feminist scholars have written of the connection between cats and such goddesses as Bast in Egypt, Artemis in Greece, and Freya in Scandinavia. And the medieval church in Europe was aware enough of the symbiotic relationship between strong womyn and cats to persecute them together for witchcraft.

In my own life, when I think of all the things I've learned about life, and death, and lesbian culture, I've learned at least as much from cats as I have from other dykes. For instance, the cats I live with now, Pounce and Sorren, are teaching me to write poetry. And when I came out, it was a cat who taught me how to get along in the lesbian community.

Liz Olds was a fine guitarist, songwriter, and poet, and probably the most flamboyant and notorious lesbian in Moscow, Idaho. She and I were very different, but we'd both come from back East, we'd both been Girl Scouts, and we agreed that Girl Scout camp was the Amazon Nation.

It was late spring or early summer in 1978 when I moved into Liz's old-fashioned, funky apartment, up above a drug store at Sixth and Main. I was almost 22, and I'd come out two or three months earlier. I would have been too proud to admit that my Amazon Nation had been too thoroughly colonized by the fathers to prepare me for being a dyke. But if I had been humble enough to look for someone to teach me about lesbian culture, I couldn't have picked a better roommate than Liz. She went to the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival, and brought back records by Sweet Honey in the Rock, the Izquierda Ensemble, and Therese Edell. Liz started a group to produce womyn's music concerts in Moscow. When Olga Broumas taught a poetry class at the University of Idaho, Liz was one of her

star students. And Liz left copies of *Lesbian Connection* and Andrea Dworkin's *Woman Hating* lying around the apartment for me to read.

Then there was Palouse, the little black cat who lived with Liz. Northwest Idaho and southeast Washington were called The Palouse, after the Palouse Indians and the Palouse River. The cat's full name was Palouse Lautrec. Lots of Liz's friends thought Palouse was vicious, but Liz had a story to explain her bad temper. As a kitten, Palouse had been rambunctious at night. When I lived in that apartment, late at night she'd still gallop down the hall and go skidding across the front room. Anyway, at least once, Palouse had jumped on Liz's sleeping brother, who'd been rooming with Liz at the time. The brother responded to Palouse's pouncing by flinging the little black cat against his bedroom wall.

The more I got to know Palouse, the more I became convinced that she was not vicious, nor even unfriendly, though she did exercise the sovereign right of any creature to decide when and to whom she would express affection. Since she frequently seemed to show affection to me, I decided that she was a being of dignity and exquisite good taste.

About six o'clock in the morning, she'd wake me up by gently kneading my breasts, her claws extended ever so slightly. This meant she wanted breakfast. Sometimes, though, I'd follow her into the pantry, and find that her bowl still contained a generous portion of Blue Mountain Kitty-O's. I eventually figured out that she wanted me to stir up these leftovers with my fingers. Somehow, I came to understand that she also wanted something else. Palouse managed to persuade me that it was really important for me to pet her while she had her breakfast, despite what I'd learned as a child about never touching an animal while it was eating. This is undoubtedly good advice when it comes to dogs, and it also applies to many cats, but Palouse would not eat until I started to pet her.

By evening, she'd be more reserved. If she wanted companionship, she would come to sit on someone's lap, or rub her head against somebody's hand. If she didn't ask for affection, she wanted to be left alone.

This is where many of Liz's friends got into trouble. They would try to pet Palouse when she didn't want to be petted. Palouse would try to be tactful. She'd simply ignore the lesbian who'd so rudely invaded her space. And if the invasive lesbian failed to understand,

Palouse, her claws carefully retracted, would gently bat at her hand, as if to say, "I really don't want you to do that. Please leave me alone." Only then, if the lesbian continued being offensive, would Palouse put out her claws and slash the hell out of the womon's arm.

The lesbians to whom this happened were invariably surprised and insulted. I think I sometimes tried to warn them, but I don't remember it ever doing any good. I like to think the lesbians I know now in Eugene, Oregon, have more sense. Or maybe my cats just hide from the ones who don't.

During my first four years of college, I lived on-campus in a cooperative dorm. For two of those years, I had a strange, intense, sexually-charged friendship with another womon who lived in the dorm. One day she'd be enticing, the next day, cold. There was no pattern to and no apparent reason for these mixed messages. Eventually, this womon and I made love a couple of times. That jolted me into coming out, which was good, but otherwise, the whole thing was a complete mess.

Hard as I might try to figure them out, I found that other lesbians—friends and potential lovers—were nearly as confusing as my first lover had been. Palouse, on the other hand, was open and direct. All I had to do was pay attention.

She was a good friend at a time when I really needed one.

Palouse was also a good role model. She taught me two important lessons about clear communication. First, ask for what you want as clearly as you know how. Don't ever assume that someone just naturally knows what you need, or that it's okay to take it from her without asking. Second, if someone does something to you that you don't like, tell her to stop. If she doesn't get the idea, keep refusing more insistently until she does. If her feelings are hurt, that's her problem.

These guidelines have served me well in dealing with both cats and lesbians. Whenever I've forgotten them, I've been sorry.

I've lost track of both Liz Olds and Palouse Lautrec. Each went a different direction when we all moved out of that apartment. Liz went off to a big city in the Midwest, and Palouse moved in with a fine gentle womon who had been Liz's lover. But since the days I

lived in Moscow, Idaho, I've known many fine lesbians and many fine cats.

I am most fortunate now to have two especially amazing cats sharing a house with my girlfriend and me. Sorren is partly Persian, and she is very furry, grey, fat, and gorgeous. She is an adventurous soul who loves little better than to go cavorting in a winter rainstorm, then come in and climb soaking wet into bed between Gail and me. Pounce has medium-length black fur and burning yellow eyes. She is too smart for her own good, and also an incredible athlete. I think of her as my Mews, because she likes to sit next to or on top of whatever I happen to be writing.

Although Sorren and Pounce seem to enjoy sharing shelter, food, and companionship with Gail and me, I am aware that patriarchal society gives the lesbians in our household life-and-death power over the cats. I don't like that. But I continue to keep cats in my home because the alternative is worse.

In today's united states, a free woman is at least theoretically permitted to exist, but a cat who is "unowned" lives under a death sentence. She can be captured and executed without warning. This almost happened to Pounce before she came to live with us.

Cats have done so much to help me that I want to do what I can to help them. If this means pretending to own a couple of wild animals, I'm willing to make that compromise.



Barbara Ruth

Ursula, My Love

The only warm body
I can find to press against my own
Is the body of my cat.

The only friend
I can find to share my bed with me
Is my cat.

The only soul
Who offers consolation
Is my cat.

The only one
Who's here when I need her
Is my cat.

The only one
Who shares my need for freedom
Is my cat.

Cats, Environmental Illness, and a Feminist Bookstore Point and Counterpoint

The following two letters were published in the Spring 1990 issue of Dykes, Disability & Stuff, P.O. Box 6194, Boston, MA 02114.

Dear Wimmin,

I wish I did not have to write this. I would rather be working on a poem or short story. I do not want to trash any lesbians, but feel pushed to speak up.

I have lost access to Full Circle Books, the lesbian-owned womyn's bookstore in Albuquerque, New Mexico. In late summer they moved a cat into the store to accompany the already present dog. I could tolerate the dog hair, although others can't. I am extremely cat allergic.

I live in Santa Fe, 60 miles from Albuquerque. I've lived in this area almost 11 years and am known by the bookstore wimmin as well as by many others. I don't know what to say about lesbians and cats, but I can't go into most dyke homes. I rely on public places and events as a way to get out of my house and to get necessary emotional and intellectual stimulation. Bookstores, concerts, and other dyke places aren't perfect. I'm sensitive to chemical cleaners and perfumes. However I usually found the bookstore to be a safe space.

I've been a somewhat addictive reader since I was six. I figure there are worse addictions. I love books and periodicals. I need them because my disabilities isolate me. Reading lesbian literature passes the time. It also provides a way to stay connected with other dykes.

Twice a month I drive from Santa Fe to Albuquerque for my disabled lesbian support group. For two years I planned my time in Albuquerque so I would have an hour or two at Full Circle. This gave me a chance for a major outing. A couple of hours with the books and then another two hours with loving and supportive disabled dykes. I loved keeping up with new books, finding pretty or funny greeting cards, exploring the new music. I don't have a lot of extra dollars, but when possible books are a favorite way to spend money.

One day, after browsing about 45 minutes, I went to use the bathroom. This had always been a safe bathroom for me, unlike those in

smoky restaurants, or chemical-filled gas station bathrooms. I walked into the small room and a kitten ran out. I was stunned. I had already spent a long time in the store. I used the bathroom quickly and left the building. I did not say anything at the time because I was so upset, and worried about my health.

I did take immediate action. I asked the wimmin in my support group to talk to the bookstore wimmin. They agreed to do this. I bought a pile of postcards, gave one to every friend over the next weeks and stood there while each womyn wrote a note asking that the cat be removed from the store. I wrote them myself. I enclosed my name, address and phone number but received no reply.

I received messages from the owners of Full Circle through one of my friends. I heard they said the presence of the cat affects only one womyn. Not true of course, but this is the sort of thinking I can't even understand. I heard that one of the wimmin said the cat fell into the store thru the skylite, and was therefore a gift from the goddess. I am a spiritual womyn, but I can't follow this logic. If a strange man stumbled into my house I would not consider him a gift of any sort and would certainly want him to leave. I have no objection to these wimmin keeping pets in their home.

At this point I'm not even sure what to ask for. If the cat left the store now I would not be able to be there, perhaps for years. Every item in the store as well as the carpets and the air itself are holding dander. By the time this piece is published, even more time will have passed with the cat in the store.

There is still an issue. I keep asking myself—what is it we're trying to create? Even if I'm the only allergic womyn, even if there were no one right now in this community who is allergic—what is our vision of a future world? Many lesbians agree that we want a world that offers to everyone the fullest life possible. I feel discouraged that a major cultural center in our community has been so unresponsive to my needs, and to the needs of all of us who want safe, accessible space.

Full Circle Books is a wonderful bookstore. Their selection of books is large and comprehensive. They carry many beautiful crafts from local craftswimmin. They have a great selection of greeting cards. They also hold events such as talks and poetry readings. The store is wheelchair accessible and the owners have been helpful to my disabled lesbian group projects. These wimmin show in many

ways that they want to be responsive to the lesbian and feminist community.

I am left only with questions. Why is there so much resistance to providing environmental access? And when can I write about the lesbian world opening up to me instead of about more barriers?

—Raven

Dear Dykes, Disability & Stuff,

Thank you for the opportunity to answer the letter you received about Full Circle Books.

First, let me apologize to the author of the letter for our lack of response to her original postcard to us. We responded to her in actions but not in written form due to personal tragedies and an extremely hectic schedule. We do regret that time got away from us. Unfortunately, she had no way to know this, so I can see why she is angry.

Because of our awareness of cat allergies we had never intended to have a cat, though a number of other feminist bookstores do. This summer a small sick kitten fell through a vent pipe into our store. It took us ten days to catch this terrified being.

Unlike stairs, bookcases, incense and chemical cleaners which can be handled without concern for their well being, we believe animals to have certain rights we must consider. Certainly, the women whom the store serves also have rights to be considered. This placed the staff (half of whom also have significant cat allergies) in something of a quandary. The kitten did not take well to efforts to provide him with another home. Clearly Shadow's ten days of hiding had left him feeling safe at Full Circle.

After much discussion the staff decided to let him keep his home. This does, however, place additional responsibility on Full Circle to work out ways to keep the space as accessible as possible to differently-abled women. Following discussions with several folks having environmental diseases, we have taken the following measures:

1. The store is vacuumed every day.

2. Shadow is fed, littered and bedded in a non-public area of the store.
3. He is given dietary supplements to help reduce allergens.
4. The kitten is rubbed regularly with Aller-pet (a product designed to reduce dander).
5. A cat carrier is kept at the store so that he may be confined upon request.
6. Two days a week he is taken out of the store (a process of which he is not fond) in order to provide greater access.
7. A sign has been put in the door so women with difficulties are not surprised as the author of the letter was.
8. A rolling bookcase is being constructed to provide outdoor perusal for women who can no longer enter the store.

Both store staff and customers have given positive feedback about these measures. Part of our reasoning in this decision is shared by the author of the letter. Once the kitten had been here the ten days it took to catch him, the space was already too contaminated to be safe for her and others whose allergies are extreme. Many women with more minor allergies have a positive reaction to a kitten with whom they can have an ongoing relationship.

Accessibility is important to us. Perhaps the outcome of this painful process can be an open dialogue on accessibility issues. How do we create a comfortable, safe environment for all on this planet?

In Sisterhood,

Anne, Mary and the staff of Full Circle Books



Photo of Tee Corinne

Photo by Caroline Overman

Lesléa Newman

Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Cat

(after Wallace Stevens' "Thirteen Ways of
Looking at a Blackbird")

I.

Among seven silent rooms
in the middle of the night
the only moving thing
is the tip of the cat's tale
twitching through her dreams

II.

Shredded shower curtain
overturned plants
chewed up earrings—
Hurricane Cat has arrived

III.

The cat sat in the window
watching the snow fall
She was a large part
of the scenery

IV.

A woman and a woman
are one
A woman and a woman and a cat
are one

V.

All the lesbians
are off to the music festival
Who will watch
the cat?

VI.

At the sight of the cat
on the kitchen table
my mother said
she'd wait in the car

VII.

Batting a ball
across the kitchen
Batting a mouse
across the lawn

VIII.

Oh barking dogs
begging for bones
can't you be calm
as the cat
crouched in the corner?

IX.

When she picked me up
for our date
the cat hid under the sofa
I did not go out
with her again

X.

The cat left my pillow
in the morning
like my hair
crawling away from my head

XI.

How I envy the cat
going from lap to lap to lap
being petted and admired
by every woman in the room

XII.

The lesbians lie
naked in the sun
limbs draped over each other
like a litter of kittens
their first day in the world

XIII.

A black cat
crosses my path
Today is my
lucky day



Photo by Cathy Cade, 1982

Remembering AH-OOOO-GA!

Oogie Boo was her name and she came with my lover. I didn't name her, but the reports I got were that when she was a kitten she looked *exactly* like the sound "OOGIE BOO." When I met her, she was angry, and resembled something more like "Esmerelda-Wear-Fine-Clothes-Spit-In-Your-Face-And-Show-You-My-Claws With-Utter-Dignity." She ruled the bathroom towel closet for a few days, and when she emerged I realized suddenly and with shock: *Oog Isn't Jewish!*

I told my lover right away—"Thea! Oog isn't Jewish!" She looked at me for a moment, and then at Oog, and said, "You know, I think you're right. I never noticed before." We stared together at this long-haired three-year-old calico, she stared back, and after awhile she told us, "I'm Irish Catholic."

Life went on. I was very sick, and Oog used to sit on the foot of my bed, defending me against demons when I had fevers and would hallucinate. Once when I was completely lost, she tore around my bedroom, bouncing off walls and windows, until any evil spirits who might be there to attack me were definitely dead, gone, or scared shitless to the point where they wouldn't *dare* do any harm. She made me feel very secure.

Oog taught me how to dance. At a time in my life when I was hardly able to sit up, let alone walk very much, I'd wobble from the bed to the bathroom, and Oog would weave around my feet until I learned to wobble with delight and a relative grace. That was a precious gift. I'd never really known how to dance before; Oog freed me up and encouraged me with her lessons and her desire to be my partner.

I had colored glasses I'd collected from thrift shops. Oog would only drink distilled water, and she'd only drink it from a green glass. Thea brought home a chair she salvaged from an alley, and it became Oog's chair. People thought we were completely irrational when we moved that chair from Chicago, Illinois, to rural upstate New York, but that was Oog's chair, and there was no way we were going to leave it behind. It had custom-made claw marks and everything.

Oog liked opera. We discovered this totally by accident when I was tuning around on the radio dial, and accidentally got a few seconds of opera. Oog came shooting into the room, wrapped herself around the radio, and started to purr. Thea and I hate opera, but after that we had to endure it once in a while. It seemed that high notes were the main attraction. Sometimes I'd give her whistling concerts; she'd lie on her back and bliss out to the sounds. Her favorite tune was "Womon-to-Womon" by Alix Dobkin.

Oog was an early morning person. 5 a.m. she'd start to scratch her litter box, and she wouldn't stop til 9. Living in an apartment with no outdoor privileges, this may have been a form of protest, as both Thea and I liked to sleep in. We'd also have races, from one end of the apartment to the other, and she liked to climb up onto high shelves, and dive to the floor in one large thunk. She could climb up and jump down *all night*. It was hard to refrain from becoming slightly irritated. But she seemed so *happy* that I always hated asking her to stop.

She liked to eat spicy foods. Her favorite items were chickpeas and potatoes, and she liked the onions out of salsa. Oog did not do dairy. Sometimes we'd get surplus yogurt, milk, and cheese free from our food co-op, and we'd bring it home for her. She absolutely would not eat it. She did like soya kaas, however, and once she brought us the bottle of calcium tablets. We thought she wanted to play with it, since it made a rattle sound when she shook it. But she kept looking at us until we opened the bottle and gave her one of the tablets. We expected her to bat it around the floor, but instead she ate it, and then walked away contentedly.

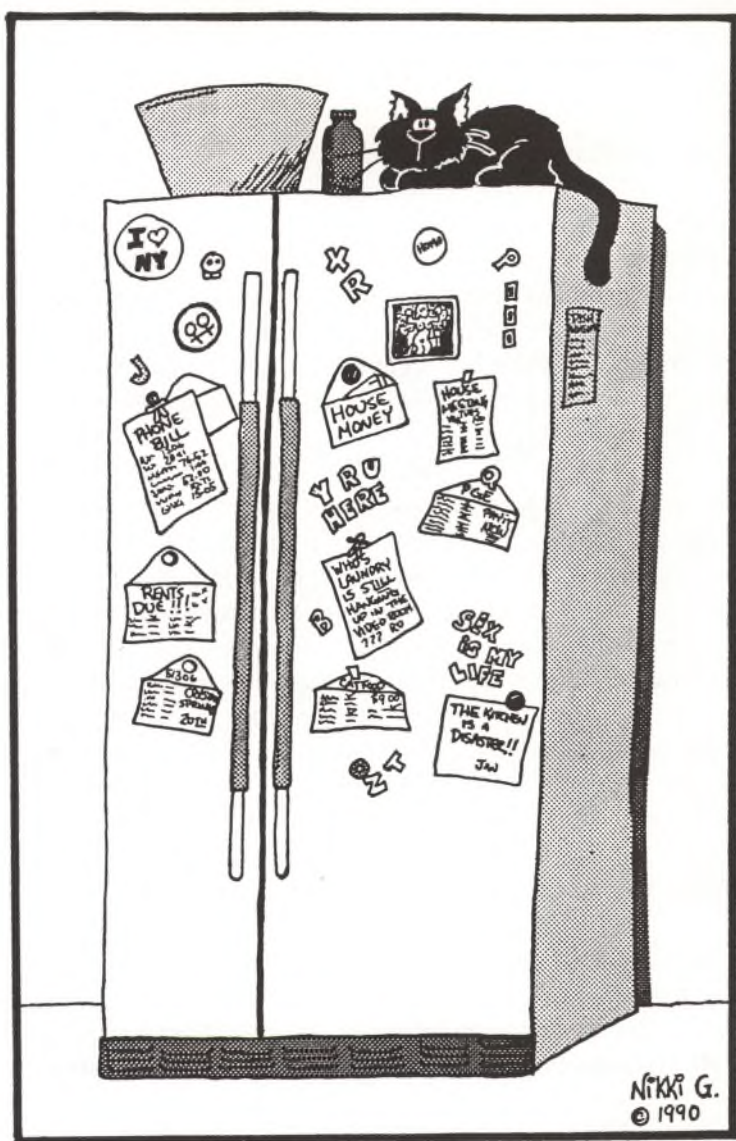
Oog had very definite opinions about people, and they didn't always match our own. She *hated* Ivan, the building's maintenance person (this we agreed on, but found inconvenient). She loved a guest we were trying to get rid of, and she *attacked* a lesbian we really liked. It was quite traumatic. Eventually they made peace, however; the other dyke was also Irish Catholic.

When Oog got pregnant, she looked a lot like a fluffy basketball, and was a totally fulfilled being. I had so much guilt about allowing more kittens into a world where strays starve and freeze in large numbers and so many wimmin are allergic, and I was struggling hard with the idea of "domesticated" animals and forced sterilization. But when Oog went into labor and had her first three

babies on my lap, then waited several hours until Thea got home, in order to birth the remaining two, I knew that she was choosing to share with us, and that she did not regret being alive, or living with us, given the range of currently available options. She would *not* rather be dead, and she did not want to live apart from us. I don't like that "we" have often bent the spirits of animals to serve us. But I think it may be possible to make mutually acceptable arrangements now that we are here.

Oog was hit by a truck and killed one summer morning. I cried and cried and cried and I still miss her painfully, almost a year later. We buried her in the woods in the center of a circle of daffodils Thea'd planted when she was a child. For the first few months I kept finding myself singing the lyrics to the song, "and the cat came back, the very next day," and I'd burst into tears. Over and over again I'd have dreams at night, where Oog would come to me and tell me that she loved me but she had to go. I'd always try to pick her up and hold her, but she'd always slip away. She'd tell me, "I'm still here." That's what dying's about, I guess, the love's still there, the spirit still lives, but you can't *touch* anymore.

I still miss Oog. Sometimes I wonder if I imagined all the things she told me. Are "pets" bodhisattva? Many times I felt like she was my teacher, protector, and adult, other times my sister and companion. I could feel her love and affection for me, and occasionally her genuine appreciation for what I did for her. I have no idea where she went when she died. I somewhat expect that it's not someplace *I'll* ever go. I don't expect to ever see her again. That's the only difference I feel between the death of Oog and the death of wimmin friends. I expect I'll meet the wimmin again, in spirit.



Paw Prints

I. More Cats Than You Can Imagine

We called it the Dyke Building. And what a building it was, a big brown monstrosity on the corner of Bow Street, taking up two blocks of a bleak section of Somerville. Inside were wonderful old, cheap-as-can-be apartments, and lesbians, and cats. And roaches. When the dyke landlady left all the tenants a note telling us she was finally having the building exterminated, she suggested we keep our cats in her office for the day.

After the hideous task of removing everything I owned from cupboards and closets, I walked into the landlady's office early in the morning, Zorba, Artemis, and Panda growling inside the green carriers in my hands. I was greeted with hundreds of meows, cat carriers all over the room, on the floor and desks and file cabinets and tables, cat carriers on top of cat carriers. Cats were howling and crying and growling and clawing at their cages, a lesbian cat kennel, a lesbian catterie. And as I stood in the eye of this feline hurricane, it was more obvious to me than ever before: lesbians love cats, we do love our cats.

II. A Bad Year for Cats

It's been a bad year for cats. Mary's Fuzzy and LA Ruth, Nina's Kiwi, Karen's Pooh-Bah, Jillian's Cassie and Emily, Nathalie's Leo, my Panda, and now, Jeri's Omar fighting to stay alive. And we all feel it, we all understand the depth of pain and grief. We visit the dying kitties, bringing them strokes and catnip mice, bringing their moms flowers and backrubs. We all know that these are not just "pets"; these are sacred beings, essential parts of who we are.

Each of these cats left an imprint on me, a paw print etched into my heart. And every time a cat dies, my heart is heavy with the paw prints of all the kitties who died before it.

III. Omar

I go to Jeri's house and lie on the floor with Omar, stroking his thick Maine Coon fur, my fingers tangling in the white curls on his belly. His spine is sharp and bony, as if his body were shrinking while the longhair coat around it remains the same size. It doesn't seem possible, this big strong ten-year-old boy with the loudest, most demanding meow this side of San Francisco. Is there really cancer hidden beneath his stripes? I have known him for eight of those years. I am losing a friend.

IV. Fuzzy and LA Ruth

As my car approaches Gilroy, the smell of garlic pungent in the air, Mary starts to cry. She is suddenly thinking about her lost cats, and as I drive I wipe the tears from her cheeks. Fuzzy and LA Ruth, her girls, her long-haired tortoise-shells. Fuzzy, the miracle cat who lived a year and a half longer than the doctors predicted, who slept on Mary's head at night. LA Ruth, with the luxurious fur of a Beverly Hills cat, and heavy-lidded eyes that always made her look stoned.

Two sisters dying nine months apart from each other. I watched them both grow smaller and smaller in the final days when Mary held them and sang to them and took them out into the sunlight and injected them with subcutaneous fluids and tried so hard to bring them back. When I think about Fuzzy and LA in their splendid fluffy prime, then remember those final images of them, my heart breaks. And I watched a part of Mary die with each of them. They were her family.

V. Clockface

I called Leo "Clockface" because of her very round tortoise-shell face with stripes positioned like the hands of a clock. For some reason, this blasé, jaded, seventeen-year-old cat loved the sound of my voice saying "Clockface! Clockface!" She'd stop whatever she was doing and follow that sound, slowly padding her way through her lush, grassy backyard. When she died, Nathalie buried her in that yard

with the get well card I'd sent to the cat hospital, a picture of a cat with the face of a clock.

VI. Panda

Panda ran away, and then Bast thought she saw her. The two of us walked up and down Bancroft Avenue at 7:00 on a cold, foggy morning, shaking jars of dry food, calling Panda! Pandie! Panda! We laughed at ourselves, assuming the people at the bus stop would think we were members of some strange cult, the feline branch of the Hari Krishnas. The fog was so thick we could hardly see each other, but we could follow the sound of the crunchies rattling against glass. I kept waiting to see a blur of black and white emerge from the fog, aching to hear Panda's kitten-like meow, but she never came. Did someone take her in, and if they did, what name did they give her?

VII. Artemis Does Her Sock

What would I do without Artemis' socks? I count on finding them, just as I count on the sound of cats running to the kitchen when I use the can opener.

It started with a sweat sock. One day in Buffalo, Artemis began carrying the sock, making strange whining mews as she wandered from room to room with the soft gray thing hanging from her mouth. Then she kept the toe end of the sock in her mouth while kneading the other end with the white mittens of her front paws, moaning and mewling and purring at the same time. And finally, in an ecstatic stupor, she fell to her side and continued sucking and kneading, until Zorba and Panda, mortified by her behavior, jumped on top of her.

And so it began. I'd wake in the morning to find a red knee sock on my bed, a purple anklet on the living room floor, a black and gray argyle in the kitchen. Or I'd hear the tell-tale moan, and eagerly await Artemis' appearance, always anxious to see which sock she had now, often discovering the long-lost halves of my mismatched pairs.

It's been going on for years now, and everyone who knows me knows when Artemis is "doing her sock." Artemis had her fifteen minutes of fame when *Cat Fancy* featured her in an article on Strange Cat Behavior, under the sub-heading, "Baby Ways and Mother Moods." When Artemis is insecure I know it's going to be a two or three sock night, and sure enough the evidence will be on my bed in the morning. When I make love, she does her sock outside the door. I hear her sometimes, opening a flowered storage box under my bed, reaching under the cardboard cover and pulling out my winter socks. And one night, as I sat in my living room and heard the familiar whimpers, I watched her round, plump, gray and white body descend down the stairs, a pair of magenta sweat pants hanging from her mouth. It must have been a particularly difficult night for her.

VIII. The One and Only Zorba

Every time a kitty dies, Zorba gets extra kisses. I can't imagine life without him, picture myself crumpling and dying too on the day he leaves my life. Zorba, my longest relationship, my buddy, my best friend, my sweetheart for fifteen years. Zorba, who came to me out of a suitcase on the SUNY Buffalo Student Union floor, the kitten who tried the hardest to lick the cream cheese off my finger. Zorba, who lived with me in Buffalo and Missouri and back to Buffalo and California and Boston and back to California, who traveled cross-country three times, who tried to escape out the car window in front of a diner in Amarillo, Texas at four in the morning, who clutched me as I stood on a cliff holding him, overlooking the Pacific Ocean for the first time. Zorba who ran away the day I was moving to Missouri and my lover had to load the U-Haul by herself while I sobbed and walked the streets calling his name until finally, eight hours later, I heard his cry, and saw him across a busy intersection. I screamed WAIT! and he did, stopping short of running into traffic on his way to me.

Zorba who tried to jump out a bathroom window too high for him and hung there by his front paws until I found him, Zorba who got caught upside down between the screen and the metal grating on a screen door, flattened between the two like a giant furry moth. Zorba

who will pull a tortilla chip right out of my hand, Zorba who waits outside for me on the brick pathway when I come home, first yelling at me and then rolling over on his back. Zorba who has seen me through lovers and breakups and lovers, Zorba who will not eat in the morning until I've held him on my shoulder and told him how much I love him.

IX. Lesbian Cat Heaven

But maybe there's a Lesbian Cat Heaven. And all the kitties that lesbians lost live there, collectively, in a giant old run-down Victorian with political posters on the walls, and at night they have huge potlucks (no wheat, dairy or sugar, please), and after dinner they break into small groups and process the latest issues in their Lesbian Cat Heaven community. And of course there are arguments—the separatists say the male cats are not *really* lesbian cats, even if they were raised by, with, for, and as lesbians, etc. Afterwards they light a fire and gather in a circle the size of the moon, and they take turns telling stories about life with their lesbian mommies who they loved so much, who they miss so much. And maybe they watch over us, sometimes channeling advice: "Don't do it! Don't get involved with her!" When morning comes, after they've all licked and cleaned and groomed each other, they sleep together in one gigantic furry clump and they purr, they purr a purr that vibrates in the hearts of all the dykes who've lost their cats, their precious precious cats.

Susan Dambroff

a dark closet is not a pile of leaves

you run up the hill
through piles of leaves
at night patient with me
picking the burrs out
one by one
you smell brewers yeast,
leap out of the woods
where fallen logs are scratching posts
long grass your hiding place
you sleep
in a half circle
in the last sliver of sun

Driving back to the city
you claw out of the cardboard box
pee through it
your insides
rebellling

shut in
you cry at the front door
I listen to the fast descent of cars into you
and say no
oh dark cat
oh spirit
who wants to put your nose
against a tree

weeks sinking into the ledges
to get outside the window
by staring
your eye
changes its shape of green
I buy a cat leash
hoping the city park

will bring
your lively back

in moments
your weeping eye
becomes cancer
the specialists tell me
there is "some time"
I am a mother
frantically searching
for god

each cough
a sign
each motion towards food
hopeful

holding you
currents of chemotherapy
jitter under my hand
all your energy towards healing
or dying
I lift you to my lap
for medicine you don't want
eye droppers of chinese herbs
you spit back at me

I place your pictures all over the house
refrigerator, bookshelf, television
your sleek black fur
kitten life
pulling at strings
but your body
now hardly holds you

the psychic
tells me
there's a painful burning
in your throat

getting hotter
you're perched on the windowsill
staring yourself
into the trees

if I could take you back
to the country
to die
I would
a dark closet
is not
a pile of leaves

picture
the cardboard box
moving you
across city blocks
in the car
your small strained cry

moving your weary body
to the slick silver table
a green towel
placed underneath you
the sound of the razor
on your front paw
drowning out
your small cry

holding you
whispering your name
Piper Piper
as the needle
takes away
your
cry

your stiff paws
together as in prayer

eyes left open
cover you with grass and leaves
under the huge green pine

plant a cutting
from the jade
you rubbed your chin against
carve
Sweet Spirit
in a cherished stone

cry
then sing
then cry
then sing
wonder
if you
hear
me



Amazonia

I first met Amazonia when she was a kitten. My partner and I had been traveling since our eviction from our commune, and the women at Cabbage Lane, who were off picking apples in Washington state, said we were welcome to stay there while they were gone.

They had been gone for a week when Amazonia saw us. We had been warned that she was a high energy type. When my partner said she'd put her under a box and that would calm her down the comment was—she'll elevate the box. She took one look at us and shot up a tree, then she shot back to the earth, after which she scrambled up an outdoor roofed eating space and ran across the roof. In all the nine years I knew her I was constantly amazed at her broken field running, her vaulting from tree to tree, her roof climbing.

She was not only high energy, she was wild; she didn't trust humans. After all, they were always traveling and leaving her.

It was while at Cabbage Lane, women's land, that we learned of a cabin on adjacent land that we might fix up and live in. We moved in but left for Southern California shortly afterwards, not getting back till the next Easter.

Meanwhile, Amazonia had become the mother of four kittens, adolescents, and all bigger than her. In October of that year, having given us a certain amount of time to get the cabin shipshape, she arrived with a dead mouse which she laid at our doorstep. "All right," said my partner, it was her birthday, so the mouse might be construed as a gift, "you can stay if you'll be a working cat." Amazonia stayed.

She liked being in the 10' x 10' cabin by the fire and staked out her spot, the bottom of our rather skimpy double bed which served as a couch in the daytime. She accepted milk to go with her mouse, but she was very skittish about being touched and would bolt for the door if you came near her. She spent a lot of time outdoors, including nights, when she hunted. She also, we were told, occasionally returned to check into Cabbage Lane, where she roundly cuffed her kittens, tore up the garbage, and threw it around before leaving.

She caught everything—mice, voles, salamanders, half-grown rabbits and wood rats. She also caught birds. I remember the time

she was sitting in the door of the cabin and a hummingbird backed up. Amazonia just opened her mouth. My partner rescued the bird but it was too late.

Amazonia didn't like men. When a man came up to the cabin she would cannonball out the door, carom around the cabin to the rear to wait his departure. When it was all clear she would come back and settle down in her space.

We traveled a good bit making the magazine *WomanSpirit*, and during these times she would scrounge, eating mice as well as other cats' food. When she lived with us she had scraps but never canned cat food or that awful dry stuff. She was a very healthy cat.

Independent she was, and I set out to be her companion. Occasionally, if she was in the mood, she would let me stroke her. But there was a fierceness in her and a knowledge of her own boundaries that I admired. I had yet to learn mine. After a certain amount of caressing she would stand up, stretch, and jump down from the end of the bed and go out. She had had enough.

Since we were vegetarians she developed some uncatlike tastes. She loved ripe avocados. Sandwiches with avocado were not safe around her. She loved cantaloupes, decaying eggplant, cooked broccoli, pancakes, rice, and of course, cheese and peanut butter, and had first dibs on the compost pile.

After five years in the cabin we outgrew it. Land came on the market that we could afford, so we bought it and moved. Amazonia moved too.

This was her territory and no other cat was tolerated. She was quite sure she could handle the 6.8 acres we owned without any assistance. And she was tough; no other cat survived for long.

We stored some of our supplies like soy sauce and peanut butter, which were in large containers, in an open shed. There were a lot of visitors that summer, and one of them replenished the small peanut butter container. Evidently she didn't fasten the top of the large container securely. Amazonia was missing for a week. Seems she and the skunks, mice, and raccoons had had a feast. By the time we found the thirty pounds of peanut butter it was pretty well gone.

Over the years Amazonia and I became quite intimate. She lost a lot of her distrust of people. She would sit on other laps besides mine, especially if that lap was close to a table with food on it. She had a very quick paw and could snag a snack in the blink of an eye

or a wandered attention. Still she was a shy lover. On some nights she would climb up the ladder into my loft, and starting at my feet, she would work her way up to my stomach, onto my chest, and then snuggle just under my chin. Then she would reach up and put her mouth on my mouth and then dart away, all the while purring, or she would rub her head against my cheek. She loved to sleep curled against my leg, or my side, and, dare I mention this, she snored. At first I couldn't imagine what that sound was, coming from the bottom of the bed, it was so out of proportion to the size it issued from, because Amazonia, for all her brashness, was a small cat. She carried herself as though she was twice as big. I remember once two men delivered a cord of wood to us and while they were taking a break they saw Amazonia up by the pond. The one guy said to the other, "Wow! Look at the size of that tomcat!" I said, "That's no tomcat, that's Amazonia."

And she was true to her agreement. She was a working cat. When we bought the land it had two cabins, a woodshed, and an open shed. We added to that a barn, two other cabins, and a bathhouse. Amazonia never faltered or came meowing that there were too many places to take care of. She just took the additional work in her stride.

She knew her limits too. When the skunks cavorted on the front porch she would sit on the window ledge and watch them but she never got into the fray. She also respected porcupines and raccoons. They had their space and she had hers. She did not consider it part of her duty to chase deer either.

Amazonia never had any more kittens. She really was not the motherly type. She was a butch cat. She was mostly black, and she kept herself immaculate—necessary for a cat with white paws living in the country, and her fur shone like sable. The white under her chin extended up into her face around her nose and mouth. She always looked as though she was dressed for a formal event. She swaggered.

She had a way of looking at you that said she didn't quite trust you. She was keeping an eye on you, so you'd better behave yourself. She was especially possessive of her milk. I have a photograph of her where she is sitting in front of a gallon jug daring anyone to try to take it away. She looks fierce. But her eyes could be gentle too.

Amazonia became more tame over the nine years, and a bit more dependent, which is sad. Being a companion is all right when there is a companion, but when your companion leaves and doesn't come

back it can break your heart. Perhaps it would have been better if I had never become her companion, had allowed her her fierce independence. But how was I to know that I would never return?

When my partner and I broke up and both of us took off to winter elsewhere, neither of us could take Amazonia. My partner was house sitting and I was traveling looking for a new life. We did make arrangements for someone to check in every week, but Amazonia knew and before my partner had returned to the land she had gone. My partner made inquiries around the neighborhood but no one had seen her. I think she died because she was tamed. She had become dependent, not so much on humans feeding her, as on humans loving her. She was a very special companion and I still miss her very much.



Dunkel and Me Outside the Hexagon, Denmark Shoshana Rothaizer, 1980

A More Subtle Bondage

i'm upset. i've just finished reading yet another animal rights article by a lesbian-feminist. all the same stuff—about factory farming, laboratory experiments, fur coats. it's not that i disagree. far from it. but what about *domesticated animals*?

this is the part we seldom hear about. is it true that so few lesbians have thought about it? i think about it a lot. i think of it when a dog sits on my porch for hours, whining and restless, while her owner visits with me. i think of it when one of the dog owners leaves our land for awhile and her animal mopes, or howls, or tears things up, or turns vicious, or desperately runs after the car. in other words, when the dog is so dependent as to be miserable, when the dog must be with her woman constantly in order to be at peace.

this doesn't look like "love" to me. it reminds me all too much of the beaten child, the cajoling wife. a being held not by chains, but by a more subtle bondage.

i began feeling uncomfortable about pets over a decade ago, when i still had cats. i had moved with my cat ananka from a small town in arkansas, where she had lots of green places to roam and familiar cat neighbors, to san francisco, where our small apartment was surrounded by concrete and traffic. she no longer would go outdoors unless forced. on my return from work each night i found her waiting anxiously. the shredded furniture evidenced her anger.

i couldn't help but think of wives, dragged across the country to wherever their husbands' jobs are, cooped up in the house all day, venting their frustration indirectly. wasn't i putting another being in such a role?

i got a kitten so ananka would have a playmate. instead, she was jealous of the new cat and became even more sullen. i could feel her misery and hopelessness daily, and it distressed me.

a year later, mostly because of health problems, i very reluctantly found other homes for both my cats. i had lived with ananka for five years and meggy for one. i loved them, they were like children to me. it was a deeply painful time. my apartment felt so terribly lonely, my bed cold and empty, once they were gone.

yet i realized i was also relieved. their dependency had been eating at me. what sort of relationship did we have, that they had to beg me for food, and then received sterile, manufactured, always-the-same, pellets from a box? i gave them table scraps too, but i was working two jobs and was not willing to spend my few free hours preparing quality food for them.

neither was i willing to spend a lot of time playing with them every day. i realized i had wanted them to amuse themselves most of the time, but be available to me when i wanted to be lovey. again, just what men expect from wimin. ugh! and to continue the analogy, i wanted them to amuse themselves *harmlessly*—not by knocking dishes onto the floor. they were not to get too much into their catness, just as wives are not to get too much into their womonness—not become feminists or lesbians or anything that threatens their man and his world.

in ten years on lesbian land, i can't say i've seen mistreatment of animals in the usual sense of that term. the pets of my land-sisters have a better quality of life than did my cats. some of these wimin want to call their animals "companions," "familiar," and that's a reflection of their desire for a more equal relationship. the animals here have acres of land to roam on. some wimin question methods of discipline and training. some prepare feed from organic grains and other wholesome foods.

but i *have* heard a woman insist that a child needed a kitten to sleep with because the girl had few playmates. i've seen that girl "tightrope walk" a two-by-four clutching the kitten, until she let go and the kitten fell and fled, eyes bulging, adults laughing at these "antics." in other words, the child has real feelings, the kitten doesn't. the kitten, whose natural instinct is to be active and hunt at night, is converted into a teddy bear, an object to be used for a child's comfort. during the day the kitten is a plaything. her terror is not terrible, but amusing.

such things are not cruel or unusual by patriarchy's standards. i want lesbians to reexamine those standards.

if you change a cat's life pattern by making her into a night sleeper, you deprive her of the nocturnal rodents she could kill. of course, she no longer needs to hunt if you provide a commercial pseudo-food for her. some wimin try to teach their cats not to kill

birds or bring home mice. this is taking a natural creature and turning her, detail by detail, into something else. (again, like wives.)

a woman who visited here didn't like the plan to have two young cats spayed. "it's not natural," she said. "they should get to be mothers at least once." was she willing to adopt, say, eight kittens? of course not, she's traveling. and she doesn't think it's wrong to keep cats, only to have them spayed.

i do wish the girl who owns one of these cats could watch the process of an animal's pregnancy and birthing. that was fascinating to me at her age. yet i can't ignore the probability that some of those kittens would eventually end up homeless—or produce more kittens, add more to the enormous population of domestic animals in this country. sooner or later, huge numbers of those animals are abandoned.

no, there is nothing natural about having an animal anesthetized and cut, removing organs that didn't need to be removed. there is also nothing natural about humans training animals to obey commands, confining them in carriers and cars and houses, feeding them processed dead food, making them wear leashes and collars (often containing chemical poisons), fostering emotional dependency, dragging them around on vacations, abandoning them with friends or in kennels so the owners can vacation without them, making them hold their bladder and bowel functions until it's convenient for the human to let them outside, forcing them to use litter boxes which quickly become filthy, discouraging them from clawing or chewing on things, keeping them isolated from others of their own species and other species (except for humans). there's nothing natural about a bird being kept from the sky, nor about imprisoning fish, rodents, and birds for their lifetimes within tiny enclosures with nowhere to hide and often no companion of their species—totally dependent on human hands for food and water and to keep them from stifling in their own excrement. we are horrified when we hear of humans forced to endure such things.

in order to believe that animals are content under conditions we ourselves would find torturous, we have to make ourselves believe they are very different from us. they must not mind being separated from their families. they don't really have a language or communicate anything important with each other. they are content eating whatever meets their (scientifically determined) nutritional needs. if

they show affection to humans, it means they're happy. their boredom is sad, but tolerable. they don't miss the freedom to determine their own lives.

so what's the answer? stop keeping pets entirely? yes, that's *my* answer. i know lots of well-intentioned dykes with animals, but i really don't think there's a right way to do it. there were kind slaveholders, too. at some point the whole system has got to be chucked.

if all the animals were released tomorrow—well, they just wouldn't go. they'd bark and bleat and meow and whinny for meals and company, just like always. they'd follow the same people around.

men couldn't do it with wives, either. the wives would not just revert to what we like to think is their natural state and become strong, womon-loving amazons. a lot of them would be furious—they "love" their men, they depend on them, they know no other way of life.

you can't change a system while continuing to live by the rules of that system, so we have to start somewhere. it's time to start thinking and talking about this issue, asking questions of ourselves and each other. i think it would be great if wimin made a commitment to neuter cats they already have, and not take on any more cats when the ones they have die—not even strays.

many strays would die soon if not taken in. or they would be impounded. but this is happening everywhere, all the time, *now*. in pima county, arizona, where i live, more than 2,000 homeless animals are killed each month by the humane society and animal control. according to an article in *The Clarion*, tuscon, arizona, june 1989, "pet owners blamed in wholesale deaths," pima county animal control kills approximately eleven and one third cats per day. three hundred and forty cats were killed last month. (july, 1990) the humane society of tuscon kills between 8,000 and 9,000 cats per year. that breaks down to around 23 and 2/3 cats per day. so we could say that in pima county, approximately 34 cats are killed in one day. no doubt many more die of starvation, and the unluckiest of all end up in laboratories, subject to gruesome experiments. it's important to remember that these conditions exist *because of domestication*, because of overbreeding, because of training animals to be helpless on their own. saving one creature from impoundment and death is a kind act, but it perpetuates the system that impounds millions of animals and puts them to death.

wimin who now have cats—please open your hearts and minds to these ideas which may be hard to hear. you set an example—others, knowing that you have cats, will assume you approve of keeping animals. if you can, allow these new questions into your life, share them with your friends, share them with your children.

i still love cats. i still miss my cats sometimes, after all these years. and . . . i dream of a day when cats exist again in the wild, in all their freedom and dignity. i won't be alive that long. if i were i know i would look at such cats longingly, wishing to touch them, to cuddle with them. i feel that often with the wild rabbits that live on the land around my house. i don't know if that can ever happen, but if it does, it must come through new kinds of communication, through true equality and mutual respect.

Nina Silver

Familiar

Stealth,
 your middle name . . .
how can you so blithely creep
eluding squeaks of floor,
atop a mantle
 filled with figures,
 delicate daring
to land inside a crack
 of doorway
studying worlds no one has seen?
You slip into stillness,
 motorboat purring,
guardian of realms
only you understand.

Or do you?
Can you fathom the ghosts
 that spread themselves
 through your twitching tail?
Or do you simply let them go,
 like the invisible air
 that keeps you fascinated?
I can only look, ponder
your slit-of-moon gaze
 memories gleaming
 from your secret padded self
when you explore
 with curious wonder
what to my own unseeing eyes
is only a pile of dust
 in the corner.

Sandia

One Space Against Another Across A Silence

The particles of sun vied with each other, dancing on the narrow beam of light that filtered through the window onto the desk. Brusquely the woman moved her body into the beam. The particles dispersed. The dance ended.

She spoke into the office intercom: Carla, would you mind stepping into the conference room?

I'll be right there. Under her breath Carla wondered if there was going to be trouble.

Adelia sat and waited on her side of the desk. She lined up the pens and that done, drubbed her knuckles impatiently until the knock came.

Come in, Carla.

The woman entered, shutting the door behind her. Her head nodded a silent acknowledgement.

Sit down.

Carla moved in measured steps across the room towards the single waiting chair, situated across the desk from Adelia, on the other side of the beam of light.

Damn, she was already nervous with her. Why'd she take forever to do everything? Sitting is not a complicated process.

Before speaking Adelia picked up two pencils from the pile and held them, point up. You've been here two years now?

Yes.

You're not married?

Carla just nodded her head from side to side, aware of the question's usual implication—was she weird?

The sun shone down on the desk. The particles of light danced in the beam. The truth peered around the corner and moved out of the scene before words formed.

Adelia should only know how queer I am.

Maybe it's hard for you to be a team worker.

Oh no, it's just I like working alone and the new software program requires a lot of concentration.

She even talked slowly. It wasn't the pauses in between—there really were none. It was just that every word was carefully articulated as if she had to think while processing each word, programming as she went.

You speak quite slowly. I suppose people have told you that before.

All the time.

It's not a shyness problem?

It's not a problem. I like talking. I like words. I like feeling them in my mouth, words like . . .

. . . thigh. Maybe that's what Tracy had meant. Last night was awkward, but that was to be expected after 4 months apart. It was going to be a rough transition.

Neither of them had wanted dinner. They had sat around with her friends Jan and Nicole in the Cargo Club which Tracy loved and she'd always hated. Tracy felt it was liberating to be in a gay club with a tolerant atmosphere.

Trouble is I could never see in dim light, why do other people find it so romantic? At first she had tried to make out the faces of the women who came there on the chance that one might be recognizable from her corporate world. On the chance that someone might really look her in the eye and want to talk about something other than how cute some dyke's buns were when she leaned over the pool table.

The darkness of the interior was made even more unsettling by the lights flashing on the stamp size dance floor. After several minutes of watching the dancers under the strobes, she could not see anyone. Tracy had spots where her eyes should have been as she introduced Carla to someone she could not have recognized if her life depended on it. She retreated into an asocial silence.

. . . All I see is the reflection in her glasses. I hate those glasses with mirror lenses. I wonder if she knows how annoying that is. I don't want to look at her and see myself.

Uh, Carla. Could you take your glasses off? It's hard to look over at you with the way they catch the sun's reflection. Would you mind?

Carla peered from around the sun beam. Oh no, not at all. These stainless frames are annoying to other people, but they kind of make me feel like a cat. Before she could catch herself, she gestured with her hand and inclined her head towards the book shelf next to the desk.

As if on cue, a Burmese cat nestled on the book shelf above their heads uncurled from a nap and stretched, her back arched, nearly touching the shelf above her.

That's your cat?

Yes.

She stays here in the office?

Yes.

There was going to be a problem.

The cat's blue eye fastened on Adelia for one intense stare and then she turned her back and began washing her immaculate white paws. Adelia peered through the sun beam. The white outline of the cat was obscured in the light particles so that for Adelia the light and the cat, the distorted vision, altered the scene. The meeting was taking on a dimension quite apart from her original intentions.

Carla put on her glasses so she could see the cat through the sun beam. She pondered the silence and the manner in which Adelia twisted her head to stare at the cat.

What's her name?

Pearl.

She goes home with you at night of course.

Only on weekends.

You keep her here during the week?

I have another cat at home. They each like having time with me alone.

How was I supposed to answer that? Wouldn't she just flip if I told her the real reason is that Tracy and I cannot make love without her climbing all over us. She gets on the bed in between us. Even if we

leave her outside she knows when we're making love and cries incessantly. Serenity is impossible. Sure it's the smell. But instinctively this cat knows things about me. As if some demon spirit inhabits her at night. Still, that cat is nicer to have around than other humans sometimes.

The sun shone down on the desk. Its light defined the space of the room.

Maybe the cat wasn't the only reason their love-making had cooled. Tracy had become a comfortable habit. Their lovemaking was a ritual they were playing out. Everyone had their rituals.

Would you mind taking off your glasses again? Sorry to be so adamant but it's hard when I can't look you in the eyes. All I see is me. I don't want to have a conversation with me looking back at me.

Carla pulled off the glasses. I didn't realize I had put them back on.

You're a bit absent minded. You seem to drift off in the middle of conversation.

I'm known to do that. Don't take it personal. Nothing personal. My mind just takes a thought and goes off on a tangent.

Even in the middle of sex. That really pissed Tracy off the other night. Couldn't blame her. How could she be lying there with Tracy's wonderful folds of flesh and drift off in her

mind. The frequency of the flashes was beginning to bother her, too. Maybe they were a way for the mind to release. Once she had thought it was a sign of creativity that the mind could hold several thoughts at once. But she was even doing it in the car—driving long stretches of road and coming back to the present, sometimes just before a collision. She would find she had traveled several miles that way.

Carla looked up and realized she had just done it again. The two of them looked at each other silently. Adelia, not knowing how to bring them back from the awkwardness, found a question forming.

You've got another cat at home?

Carla nodded. Do you like cats?

I've got a cat, too. Just your everyday cat with no unusual traits. Like me. Adelia tapped the pen against the desk, her eyes roving to the computer which had a rest program on that sent sky rockets across a black screen.

This is strange. Either Carla keeps stopping the conversation mid-thought or I do. Maybe it just seems like a long time passes between responses. I find I

avoid looking directly at her because she's behind that annoying beam of light. Then I catch myself and find I'm the one who's gone off, but when I return to the thread of the conversation, Carla hasn't said one new thing. We're both mentally flashing right out of the office. One space against another across a silence. Maybe if she'd move closer.

Carla was becoming increasingly agitated. The glare of the light coming through the window made her squint. It made Adelia seem far away. Inaccessible. Or was it hierarchy that did that? She slid her chair closer to the desk, moving out of the most direct path of rays.

Adelia pulled her own chair closer, straightened out some papers and then self-consciously sat back in her chair, feeling the warmth of the light beam on her back.

The light feels good. From this angle Carla almost disappears in the beam. If I squint, I can just barely see her outline . . .

. . . wait a minute. She didn't have on those glasses when she first came in. I distinctly remember because I noticed some sleep in her eyes. Like Stacey. Every morning I wake to find her sleeping with her back to me. Wisps of red hair on my face. I nudge her, she grunts. I nudge her again. Slowly she turns over to me. Her right cheek is red from staying too long on one side. She opens her eyes and looks at me and there's always some sleep in the corner of her eyes. I kiss her eyes where the little crust of sleep is.

. . . You were thinking about work right then, Adelia. Here you are, in my bed and you're thinking about work.

I was wishing I didn't have to go. That I could keep licking your lips.

Stacey's tongue met hers. Inside Adelia's chest, near the heart cavity, came that sweet rising feeling. It moved down to her fur. Awareness narrowed down to their points of connection—until she felt fur grazing her backside.

The cat was sitting on the bed, leaning into her, watching. Adelia closed her eyes and tried to ignore it. It was just a cat. Stacey continued kissing her. The cat climbed on top of them. Stacey squealed at the feel of cat's fur, getting off on Snowball's presence. She rolled on top of Adelia and slid down to the furry place.

Was there some reason in particular you called me in to talk?

Carla sat silently, wondering if Adelia had heard her question. The beam of light irritated her. She was sure it was conveying their thoughts into the vapor instead of across the table to each other.

Adelia wished she were kinder to cats. To animals in general. They were, after all, nicer than most people. Why did she mind having the cat in her space? Or Carla? She was another woman, after all. What

difference did it make if Carla had a cat in the office?
She did her work.

What difference does it make if I have a cat here. Or
if I'm queer. I do my work.

The particles of sunlight vied with each other, dancing in the
narrow beam of light on the desk.

The cat closed her eyes.



Self-Portrait with Louise

Photo by Beth Karbe, 1990

Maud Samuel

Attainable Things

for Kater Pollock

Call me Buddha-Boy. Or call me Chunk of Cheese, or Handsome Laddie. Or call me Sunny Jim, or Puppy-in-a-Cat-Suit. She calls me all of these, and more. She's learned: just call me.

She was slow to appreciate me. Why are we so often drawn to the unavailable? How we squander our affections on those who will not—but here I bound ahead of myself.

Some moons ago—never mind how many, precisely—I found myself filled with the wanderlust for which we Himalayans are known. It was probably triggered by the growing tension between Him and Her and their refusal to let my winning ways be a wellspring of joy and healing for them. Their voices, once a soothing coo, rose and fell in a series of whines, roars, bleats, and growls. As they soared out of my decibel range I found myself deprived, first of the tribute due me, then of my proper 18 hours. I quietly took to the road.

The days and nights were about even when I left Him and Her. Evenings were still warm, and I reveled in them, delighting in the moonlit scamper across an endless patchwork of misty lawns. By day the coolness of the carports sheltered my naps from the Indian summer sun. Food I found in dishes by the door, in back patios of the working class: a hiss and a swat, and it was mine. When bowls were scarce, open fields yielded mice and lizards' tails, and as I stalked and trotted and gazed, the hunter's primal pant, the dry clicks and rattles of my species pushing past my tongue, I felt more myself than I had in all my years at that unhappy house.

In time the nights had grown, the days shrunken to passing moments of light in the darkening sky. Winds blew from the north, pushing rain across streets, into gutters and down drains, through the latticework of the carports, pooling inhospitably under the arborvitae. I was without quarter. I inspected the trash-cans downtown, then sought higher ground, hiding under the umbrella of the ceanothus on the hill until the sun broke through, then made for the stand of houses away from the sheets of rain that swept in from the sea.

A new neighborhood lay before me! Perhaps somewhere in it lay the soft voice, the sure hand which would meet the press of my head in what we simplify as *home*. First I would have to penetrate its barricade of cats, all tougher and meaner than those who'd shared their victuals with me before.

Here I began my scratch-book in earnest, my body a record of encounters with the locals. I collected several swipes on the nose, my pretty chocolate nose (as She now calls it), as I pressed ahead in the street. My body would have taken even more, had the screen of my fluff not concealed its actual contours, which were receding daily. As I approached the crossroads I was in full retreat from a pretty-faced thug named Romeo, when he caught me a good one on my hindquarter (my sweet bunnyfoot, She calls it), that went so deep I felt I'd sustained my mortal wound right there. I screamed once, rounded a corner, and gave a last spring which landed me in the middle of geraniums against a house. Romeo answered me with that rude, strangled cry peculiar to males untouched by the knife (a cry which I have not uttered in moons, have no desire to emit again), but he did not follow me to my resting place.

The rain resumed, this time a fine mist that rested on my outer fur, leaving me to restore my inner self, quite literally to lick my wounds. My foot was throbbing as I massaged it. When I ventured to put my weight on it, the heat and pain told me that I would be there a while.

Dejected, I flopped back into the decay of the dead geranium leaves and watched the parade of sow bugs and earwigs going nowhere. As I rolled back to follow their line, perhaps to raise my paw and thump one or two, I found my center of gravity changing. I had slipped into an incline, the gateway to an opening, the crawl space—to wit, shelter!

Beneath the house it was dark and dry—a welcome respite from the gray glare of the unending wet. I found a spot above the dirt, next to some warm and moaning pipes, and fell into a dreamless sleep.

I awoke first to pain, then to hunger. I washed the afflicted foot once more, then limped forth in search of food. It had stopped raining. The sun was shining, and steam rose from the pavement and the roof tops. I rounded the corner of the house and spied a door ajar. There stood She, spooning food into bowls, advancing toward a cat

in the doorway who seemed drawn to the bowl, yet repelled by her every movement, the counter-motion between them as if they displayed to each other the same magnetic poles, north to north, south to south. She moved forward; the cat swayed back; she strode toward the door, the cat drew back. When I approached from the other side, the cat saw me, hissed, and shot back in, straddling the doorjamb, ready to flee both the woman and me, her direction unclear.

What her problem was (and remains to this day), I'll never understand: cat chow and salmon supreme, side by side: this was my kind of woman. "Bubby Alice," this human cooed to my flighty counterpart, "Bubby Alice, won't you eat?" She stood for a moment, waiting, then retreated respectfully into some other room.

Bother! If Bubby Alice wouldn't eat, I would. I tried to push past her to the bowl, but she spat and swiped me and returned to the kitchen. Left alone, she gobbled furtively, then shot out the door, leaving half the meal behind. At that point I slipped in to clean up. Even half-consumed and spittle-sprayed, it was the best I'd had in months.

I stayed nearby after that, ready to slip in the half-open door for stolen moments of kitty cuisine. As it turned out, Alice's customary loss became my gain. Her paranoia paid me handsomely; I was guaranteed two half-meals a day. We developed a rhythm around it—Alice scurried in, choked down her food, leaped out, hissing at me as she went. I slipped in, cleaned the bowl, and made my exit before She could discover me and chase me away. When She did encounter me, she ejected me mechanically, without passion, though slamming the door behind me. I had her; try as She might, Bubby Alice, for all her fear of the indoors, was afraid to eat outside, where hoodlums like myself might ace her out of her entire repast. As long as she ate and ran I was guaranteed sustenance. And it became clear to me that Bubby Alice would always eat and run.

After a few moons, the woman seemed to accept my existence. She even confided in me her frustrations regarding Alice. "Kid," she would say (my first name from her, a sort of generic: "Kid, you'd think I beat her when no one is looking. What can I do to make her love me?" she asked me. I couldn't tell her. I could only listen, and wash vigorously, in the hope that she might someday catch the

dance of the sunlight on my creamy coat and shift the scope of her devotion to me.

In the naming of strangers lie the beginnings of relationship, of citizenship, however second-class. She softened and set out a plate just for me, The Kid, but it contained only cat chow! To get to kitty stew, or bits o' beef, or country dinner, I still had to scurry in after Alice. Gertie, her equally inhospitable littermate, ate in the house without incident. In the yard I must admit that I intimidated Gertie; during the day She protected her within the confines of the house. Whatever the politics of the waking hours, Alice slunk in to join them at bedtime, then shot out in the morning before she'd had time to eat, forcing the cracking of the door, leaving our food chain unbroken.

Nights I slept under the house. In the spring I moved to a lawn chair beneath the covered patio, which gave me an observation point for the comings and goings of the household. She was gone a great deal, that I could see: her every departure a frantic sprint. She seemed to know no rest, no time. From there I could also see the steady arrivals and departures of the Sweet One, the Quiet One, she who sat outside and petted me so gently about the ears and chin that I thought I had left this world, and whom She, in her calmer moments, petted in the shadows of the carport, the corners of the kitchen, and I suspect in other rooms as well. When their visits became fewer, then stopped altogether, She began to pay more attention to me, dropping to her knees on the backyard lawn to pet me until I fairly drooled with pleasure, while She pressed her moist face into my neck, lamenting to me the fleeting nature of passion, of constancy. When I tried to follow her inside for further counsel, She stopped me, shutting the back door quietly but firmly in my face.

In this way we continued for some moons, until one summer night, when everything changed. She'd come back late, fed us all, and gone to bed, Gertie following, Alice hurtling in at the last minute. The house went dark.

Then from my patio perch I observed the shadow of a figure, a He, slipping through the carport, up the steps, into the house. He played with the door a little, then left it open; I advanced to Alice's dish for one last snack, when Gertie and Alice streaked past me into the night, too frightened to hiss. I heard the sound of two quick pairs of

feet, first in this room, then in that; his hoarse, quick whisper snapping commands, hers answering, pleading; a brief scuffle. I abandoned the bowl for the steps and hunched in the darkness when she moaned, "Oh, no." Then for a long time she said nothing. Later he ran out and disappeared into the night, leaving the back door wide open.

It wasn't long after that that the place was a swarm of men and cars, cars whose lights whipped the darkness, cars which squawked and spat, men whose heavy steps ran in every direction, men who brushed black powder over everything. I returned to my haven under the house and listened to their footsteps overhead. She went away with two of them, returned as the sun was rising, then left again, stopping only to leave food for us.

The house sat silent in the growing sunlight. Gertie and Alice had fled, I couldn't tell where. For once I wasn't particularly hungry. Out of habit I made my way to my plate, anyway. The cat chow sat in the black dust of the night before. I pushed it around on the plate with disinterest, then returned to my perch. Now there was nothing to see, nor to eat. Later She would return to feed us, washing our plates, pausing briefly to sit with us, then leaving again. Gertie and Alice stayed back, unwilling to be touched.

When She finally came back, Gertie and Alice would no longer go into the house. She fed us all outside, and she fed us well, sometimes leaving us not only our usual meals, but her dinner, too. Whole chicken legs, plates of fish, stiff curls of pasta sat under a growing cloud of flies. We ballooned; she shriveled. She seldom came outside; when she did, it was to hold us in the hollow of her slouched body. She no longer cooed to us. She no longer said or did much of anything.

When She did become active again, it was to carry empty boxes through her back door, then to carry full ones out to her car. This she repeated until the big truck came and took everything else, at which time she grabbed me and stuffed me in a box riddled with holes, then carried me to her car, streams of light swaying crazily around me.

I was so frightened I peed on the spot, then I crouched over my dampness in the dark and waited for the ride to end. The car stopped, She hoisted and then spilled me into the living room of

what turned out to be the new house. For a time I wandered about, sniffing everything. Then she took me to my plate, my familiar plate. I knew we were home when she bribed me with sole and whitefish in a savory sauce and released me to the mysteries of the new back yard. She doubtless repeated this chain of events with Gertie, and finally with Alice. We all let it pass and didn't run away; our hunger, her can opener the ties that bound. It was during this time that She upgraded my name, according me the fullest recognition of my most noble lineage, my spiritual birthright. The Kid was dead. Long would live Buddha-Boy!

We settled into our new lodgings after resolving the usual territorial disputes with the locals, but the changes that had begun at the old place continued in force; Gertie and Alice refused to stay inside past the orientation period involving the sole and whitefish. They turned into sullen teenagers, rejecting her touch, ignoring her entreaties for comfort and companionship. Instead they hunched on the back fence, howling only to be fed, accepting little more than their meals and snacks from her outstretched hand. She found herself quite alone. One night she came to me with a shrug: would I care to join her?

I paused, afraid after all these moons, that the invitation was the result of some minor clerical error, then accepted. Soon the rains would come round again, and there I would be, curled on a comforter instead of hunched under an overhang. The good life was mine! I padded in that first night, determined to make her pleased with her decision.

However, She was having to make adjustments of her own. She began having company during what should have been our critical bonding period. Had not the weather turned nasty, I would have returned to the outdoors. The Sweet One, the Soft-Spoken one had returned briefly to visit, to help move, and then, to my sorrow and Hers, had disappeared again, leaving my benefactor to cultivate new ties.

These new guests assaulted my delicate ears at every turn; this one seemed to want to hammer everything, so busy was she with her tools, pounding, clattering, making herself useful: doing, rather than being, bustling about then disappearing, to where She did not know. Another one accused and whined incessantly, her perpetual sorrow

greater than any affection She might give; my own She, who is seldom given to more than the mildest forms of sternness and reproach, was reduced to screaming indignant denials in return. The last one brought loud, thumping music with her and nervously danced round the rooms, pushing and pulling my mistress in and out of the circles of her *pas seul*, first loving, then snubbing. Worse, she decried my sleeping with them, ruining my tendency to perform my *toilette* in the wee hours, unceremoniously kicking me from the bed I otherwise shared with my provider.

I am particularly sensitive to sound, as well as to assaults upon my dignity, as so many of us are, and I found myself wishing misfortune upon these attempts at union. Perhaps She did, too. For whatever reason all of them faded away, and we were left to the establishment of our own quiet dailiness.

Now, at night, lying abed as I lick her nose, She reads to me from the poets. Gertie and Alice have come closer: now in from the fence they sit as sentries upon the back porch, in their final fight with the urge to join us. All in good time. She reads to me again about that cautious, patient path to our eventual union. Each moment carries a necessity all its own: to survive, to retreat, eventually to reconcile. She turns another page and murmurs:

Grief, breaking again out of quiet, dies at last, quenched
under the waxing weight of fair things,
with destiny dropping
deep wealth from above . . .

"Well!" says She to me, quoting again, kissing my most kissable nose. 'In this time of life, let me strive for more attainable things.'

I couldn't have said it better myself. I ram my head under her chin and pour into a purr. Together we lie, awaiting the morning.

Love or Dominance?

Many Lesbians would not like to be accused of being in a dominance relationship. Nor would they want to admit to contributing to the eradication of entire species of wild animals. But Lesbian cat owners do both of these things, and call it "loving animals."

When I was a girl, the first thing I'd usually do after getting off the school bus and walking down our driveway would be to call to my goats in their pen. They'd call back eagerly, and sometimes I'd go get them out and play with them. Or maybe instead I'd go into the house and see what one of my little caged creatures was doing. I might go horseback riding. The cats were a little more elusive than the other animals, but I could usually find one or two and play with them for a while.

Even as a child, I dominated all these creatures. I don't mean that I was cruel or felt "superior." But because of human-created hierarchies, I had access to them, whether by virtue of fences, cages, ropes, my size, or their trained food dependence. In many cases they had no choice; they couldn't escape me. With none of them was the access equal or mutual; I usually could force access to them, and they could almost never force access to me.¹ And all of them had come to need me or other humans to furnish at least part of their food or safety.

Of all the pets and farm animals we owned, the cats were by far the most independent. We had barn cats who hunted most of their food. It did not escape me even then that the cats who were most interested in me were the ones who didn't hunt much, and the newly arrived ones who didn't have cat friends. It was pretty clear that humans were not their first choice for companionship unless they had been trained that way.

¹For a discussion of access and how it reflects differences in power, see Marilyn Frye, "Some Reflections on Separatism and Power" in *The Politics of Reality*, (The Crossing Press, Freedom, CA, 1983), 103. The application of her analysis to cross-species interactions is strictly my own.

Domesticating animals, whether it be by overt force, control over their food and water, removal from others of their own species or from their natural hunting or grazing environments, creates a “protective” relationship in which humans are dominant and animals, dependent. Dominance is not always brutal or even obvious, but anyone who exercises it perpetuates the conditions that allow overt mistreatment of animals.² Dominance is training a cat to be food dependent, and being the only one who can work the can opener. Dominance is being able to keep the cat out or in, whether it be for her “safety” or our comfort. Our dominance is what causes cats and other animals to act in manipulative ways. If they can’t open the door or the cupboard themselves, and are trapped in an environment in which they cannot hunt, what choice do they have when they’re hungry?

I have seen the devotion and companionship of cats do very healing things for Lesbians, and have no doubt of the love that many give their animals. I don’t begrudge any Lesbian something that helps her survive in a hostile world. But I do believe that interacting with cats in a framework of ownership, custodianship and dominance, urges on us many patriarchal assumptions and behaviors that we would do much better to unlearn. The patriarchal framework and the behaviors we learn and internalize because of it it actively prevent us from knowing what natural, consensual, cross-species relationships could be.

However much we praise their complexity and subtlety, having a relationship with a cat is easier than having a relationship with another human. Dominance allows us to take short-cuts. Your cat can’t verbally criticize you, though she can and will complain about your behavior as it relates to her. But you’re bigger, you have tools at your disposal; you can have your way. You can shut her up or out if she gets out of hand. You can get her spayed, bred, or euthanized. As a pet in your house, she is trapped in an environment unnatural to her, and having a curious nature, she will be interested in you and pay attention to you. You can make it so she’s there to interact with you as much as you want. Then she’ll always make you feel needed, because she does need you.

²Pointed out to me by Ruston, personal communication, May 1990.

It's nice to have animals to come home to. The variety of pets I had as a child and young adult enriched my life. But being able to take my access to them for granted did not. That was one extremely unhealthy lesson, and I'm still trying to unlearn it. On the other hand, I value what I learned about wild animals. Wild animals don't wait at the door for you to come home; they have lives of their own. It often takes a great deal of patience and quiet to even get to see them. You can't just act out your desire to touch and cuddle them; they run, fly, swim or crawl away if they can. You are not the center of their universe, and that's the way it should be.

I feel privileged to have grown up in the country, and I miss the variety of creatures I knew there. But even in a city there is usually some wildlife; I enjoy the spiders in my house and the various bugs and birds in my tiny yard, and the gophers in the park. I especially treasure the native creatures who are struggling to survive against the human encroachment, and I have no desire to add to the difficulty of their lives by procuring an "instant friend" for myself.

Species-cide³

All European-descent humans in North America benefit directly and indirectly from white genocide of Native peoples. Many European-descent Lesbians try to be responsible about their privileges in a racist society, and fight racism and genocide. But native humans are not the only ones endangered, historically and today, by colonialism and its values and power. Some species of animals and plants are completely extinct; many are on the verge. Many native species are not endangered as much by humans directly, as they are by the animals humans value and domesticate, as food sources and as pets.

Cats are not native to North America.⁴ They are predators. If allowed outdoors they will hunt birds, reptiles, amphibians, fish, all sorts of invertebrates and small mammals. If kept inside they will

³I am indebted to Bev Jo, Ruston, and Linda Strega for the basic premise and much of the information in this section.

⁴The domestic cat, *Felis catus*, is probably descended from *Felis lybica*, native to what is now North Africa. (*The New Columbia Encyclopedia*, Fourth Edition, 1975) Even in areas where their ancestors were originally native, cats are now advantaged by their relationship to humans.

still seek out spiders and moths. They will hunt even if well-fed, and they don't necessarily even eat what they kill. A study in Great Britain extrapolated from an actual body count by domestic cat owners in a test area that Britain's five million cats kill some seventy million animals and birds a year.⁵ This is a very conservative estimate; an American study indicates that house cats bring only about half of their kills home.⁶

The devastating impact of cats and other colonially introduced animals is accelerated and most apparent on a small island country such as Aotearoa (New Zealand). There are no native mammals other than bats in Aotearoa, and the unique and unusual birds, amphibians and invertebrates there are especially vulnerable to introduced predators. The yellow-eyed penguin (*Megadyptes antipodes*), rarest penguin in the world with a population of 3,000, is endangered because of human destruction of breeding grounds and predation by cats, stoats and ferrets. Two people were able to more than double the population in one penguin colony over eight years merely by trapping predators.⁷

The story of the kakapo is even sadder and more desperate.⁸ This giant, flightless, burrowing parrot has been endangered for more than a hundred years and despite much help from individuals and the government now has an estimated population of only twenty on the one island where it is known still to breed. Adult kakapo have no natural predators and their only defense is camouflage, which doesn't help against cats and other predators with a keen sense of smell. The New Zealand Department of conservation has made saving the kakapo its highest priority; yet since its program necessarily includes eradicating feral cats and other non-native predators from the few islands where kakapo still live, it has met with resistance from "cat protection" societies. So even in Aotearoa, where public awareness of environmental concerns is much higher than in the United States, there are still those individuals willing to

⁵Peter B. Churcher and John H. Lawton, "Beware of Well-fed Felines," *Natural History*, July 1989, 46.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ian St. George, "Penguin Diary," *Listener & TV Times*, March 12, 1990, 16-18.

⁸Hugh Best and Ralph Powlesland, *Kakapo*, New Zealand Wildlife Service (John McIndoe Ltd., Dunedin, NZ, 1985), 30.

sacrifice unique, native creatures because of their loyalty to domesticated animals.

Certainly the fauna of the United States is not as uniquely vulnerable (except for that of Hawai'i and other island territories) as that of Aotearoa, but the larger size of the mainland United States won't protect it forever. Native animals are already running out of places to hide from humans, their pollution, and their pets.

Cats in the country and even the suburbs endanger the survival not only of the small species they hunt, but of native predators. Foxes, coyotes, wolves, birds of prey, and even big cats, many of which are endangered or threatened species, are vying for much of the same prey as domestic cats, and don't have friendly humans with can openers to go home to.

To many so-called animal rights activists who focus on the treatment and welfare of lab animals, food industry animals, and pets, it is as if the less glamorous wild creatures don't even exist. In response to a letter of mine printed in *Lesbian Connection* merely questioning the ethics of pet ownership, one reader accused me of "advocating a 'final solution' for domestic animals." I suggested no such thing, but unfortunately the animals she insists we all must rescue and adopt, have, as pets, already massacred millions of wild creatures and eradicated several entire species.⁹

The Rescue Argument

The "clincher" generally presented to prove the morality of cat and other pet ownership I refer to as the rescue argument. Many Lesbians will allow that I might be right, that in an ideal world we wouldn't own animals, but they feel a duty to rescue and support helpless, innocent animals in *this* world, because otherwise they would die. As a female and a Lesbian I know what it is to feel for helpless creatures, and as a child and young adult I did a lot of rescuing. But as a Lesbian, I must question this band-aid solution, and question the effect that pet ownership has on the owner and her

⁹My piece, "If Meat is Murder, Pets are Slaves" (not my title) appears in *Lesbian Connection* Volume 12, Issue 1, July/August 1989. Many responses appear in *Lesbian Connection* Volume 12, Issue 2, September/October 1989.

2) In your zeal to do right by your cat, don't forget about the animals she victimizes. If you allow her outside, consider putting a bell on her or finding another way to keep her from successfully hunting. Yes, this is cruel to her. But it is only a small extension of the original cruelty, that of domesticating her in the first place. And it will prevent the deaths of hundreds of small creatures in an ecosystem where her existence wasn't part of their adaptation. As your pet, she has guaranteed food, water, and comparative safety. They don't.¹³

3) DON'T GET ANOTHER CAT. And spay or neuter the one(s) you have. As pets, cats and dogs are among the most privileged animals of the many used by our culture. As species they are thriving. They are not traditionally used for food by the dominant White/Anglo culture in the United States, and are even singled out from other animals and protected (as *species*, not just as individual pets) from being eaten in some states.¹⁴ There are organizations for their care, treatment and "adoption" in practically every town.¹⁵ Those of us who care deeply about animals would do well to put our energies elsewhere than in the piecemeal rescue of high-profile domesticated animals.

¹³I want to emphasize that I am not upset by the idea of predation per se. I object to allowing cats to hunt because they are unfairly advantaged, having the privilege of human support, yet stalking animals who are not adapted to their presence. Neither do I support forcing cats and dogs to be vegetarian in their diet. Commercial food and store-bought meat are the best of many poor options, since the animals get the protein they need and the meat comes from other domesticated animals. The fact that there is no good solution to the problem of what to feed domesticated carnivores is just another indication to me that we shouldn't domesticate them.

¹⁴In April, 1981, the California State Legislature passed a bill outlawing the killing of any cats and dogs for food. ("State Now Opposes Eating Pets," *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 3, 1981, 8.) The measure was written specifically because the customs of many of California's Southeast Asian refugees allow this. Since our culture condones meat eating in general, this arbitrary protection of cats and dogs only is ethnocentric and racist.

¹⁵The San Francisco S.P.C.A. averages a 96% placement rate for healthy animals. ("King of the Beasts," *San Francisco Chronicle*, *Image Magazine*, July 16, 1989, 19.) I realize this is unusually high. My point remains that most communities put more resources into pet rescue than protection of wildlife. And certainly very few people seem to care that pets *hurt* wildlife.

I contend that we could learn a lot from the similarities between the invisibility of wild creatures, and the invisibility of Lesbians. Just as the general population of even this misogynist country will grudgingly grant *some* kinds of help to *some* kinds of females, it may also be moved to help *some* kinds of animals. Tortured lab animals, food industry animals, abandoned pets. But wild animals, except for a few token celebrity species, or those treasured for their "exoticness" are, like Lesbians, at the bottom of most people's priorities. Because we are both "useless" in the eyes of men.

Men's hierarchies are so easy to internalize. I've witnessed many a vegetarian stomp a harmless spider, many a proud cat owner stand aside as her well-fed pet toyed with a still-living victim. They've bought the male lies, as I did for so long, that some creatures are more deserving, more *real* than others. An individual with such a discriminating attitude would be more accurately called a *pet* lover, not an animal lover.

I am not selective in my feelings; when I see *any* animal or plant hurt, abused or abandoned, I hurt too. I do what is within my power to help. But my greatest efforts go towards helping wild creatures. They are the least likely to appear at our doorsteps; they have no way of asking for our help. And they are in desperate need of it. If our sole efforts on animals' behalf are to rescue and care for those which are already domesticated, they will soon be all we have left.



Marie and Tiffany

Photo by Susan Logan

Virginia E. Smith

Mourning A Cat Lady

in memoriam for Margaret

Though trained to help the troubled
in Manhattan's canyons, you longed
to be a veterinarian
and turned away from people
to care for cats—a long line of strays.
Now you no longer watch the window
view we shared for twenty years.
This morning stretches in fog,
fathomless as your future.
Now where trees and birds replace
city alleys, your two tabbies
outlive you in a feline home.
Who knows what they remember,
or if someday they'll purr as you pet them
in an unknown sanctuary?
Sundays I catch my throat—
skipping over coupons I used to cut
for *Fancy Feast*, *Friskies*, *9 Lives*.

Sally's Stress

dedicated to the memory of Enid L. Royce

"Hi," Josie says to the plant that sits by the door, as she enters the apartment. Another evening to sit and ponder her meaning, watch the endless drub that shows on the television. She approaches the kitchen table with her grocery bag. "I wonder where Sally is? She always meets me at the top of the stairs. She must be off hiding somewhere, sleeping off her dinner." Josie notices the empty dish on the floor. "But did I remember to feed her this morning? Here kitty, kitty, kitty," hmm, funny, no Sally, must be mad at me for forgetting to feed her.

As Josie stands in the kitchen, waiting for the tea water to boil she wonders, "Can Sally sense my depression and not want to be with me? Can she feel the tension? Do I express my hurt to her by forgetting the simple things?" She carries her tea into the living room, pauses to look into the bedroom. No Sally in her favorite place on the bed. No Sally in her second favorite place on the couch. She settles in on the couch, hears a soft mewing. Towards the end of the couch sits Sally with a curious look on her face, as if to ask, "Did you have a better day? Is it all right to come out?" Sally must sense a change in her woman's mood because she gently presents herself into Josie's lap and just sits there waiting for a response. As Josie gently caresses Sally all her troubles seem so small and far away. All that exists is soft fur and the gentle purring of a satisfied and content feline.

Sally slowly strolls through the empty apartment wondering why the food dish is empty again. "What did I do now?" she ponders, "Why am I the last to know what I did? Maybe it's not me. Josie has been preoccupied since the death of her lover and really is on the verge of totally neglecting both of us." But Sally loves this woman and she thoroughly enjoys the living arrangements. Josie doesn't expect a demonstrative, obnoxious animal and Sally doesn't need a forboding depressive who constantly requires coddling. But things have drastically changed. Sally realizes her woman is in trouble. She

needs her to be close. As she hears the door close she doesn't automatically jump to the top of the stairs on cue, even when she hears the "kitty, kitty, kitty," and the can opener. "Dinner is two evenings late. I wonder how come she remembered tonight? It's a good thing that I am reserved and have an even temperament. I could have done a number on this house while she was gone."

Watching Josie enter the living room with her tea, Sally realizes that Josie is real close to giving in to her depression and that she has to do something quickly. Without a second thought, she gently jumps into Josie's lap. The slow gentle caresses mixed in with the overdue tears are all that Sally needs to know that together they will recover, together they will survive.

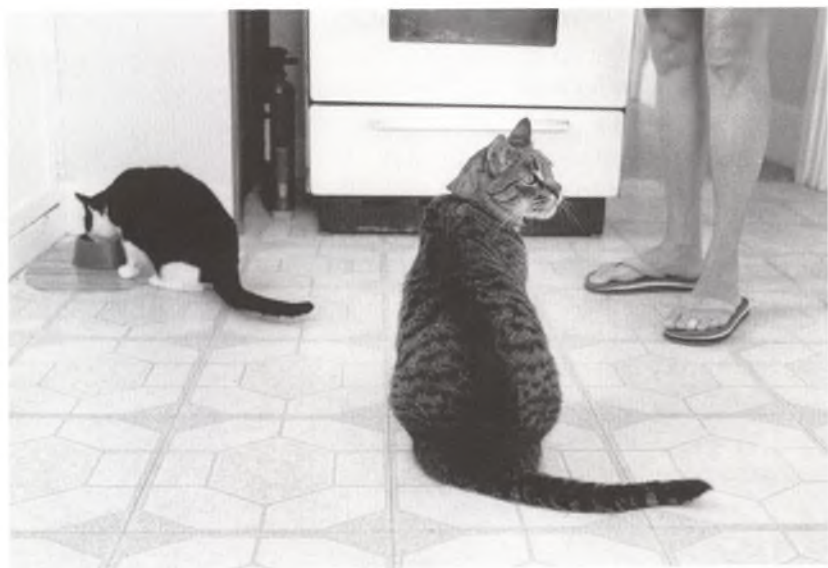


Photo by Cathy Cade, 1990

Penelope J. Engelbrecht

View From a Flat above a Tavern

To look out, I stood on the back porch
between the gaps and not on the mossy boards
dodging the wasps who ventured
from home in the weeds and
gaping refrigerator by the ashpile.
Spot where I tossed the dishwater dried up
quick, only a white crust remaining,
alkali flat.

Back-side of the pool hall on my left beyond
a brick wall, and side wall of
the dry cleaner's steaming on the right,
used car lot of beige gravel
across the pitted alley: our old Chevy radiating
heat waves distorts
the length of July in my mute domain.
I stand by the mound of fallen plaster
dumped in convenience by the backdoor, and pitch
green garbage bags toward the alley from
my wobbling two-by-four eyrie.

I stand awhile and lazily
watch striped yellow Charlie the cat
stalk flies across the rooftops: funny
he doesn't burn his feet.
I get sweaty and go back in.

Catnap

Chic Lozano put down her third cup of red zinger tea and pressed her thumbs hard against her throbbing temples. At 8:45 on New Year's morning, with no heat in that sparsely furnished apartment, she shivered in her jade velour robe.

"Damn woman doesn't even have any coffee in this place. Red zinger—sure doesn't describe her." She poured the rest of the tea down the drain and continued massaging her head. "She's the one who doesn't like sex and I'm the one with the headache. The joke's really on me this time. Feliz año nuevo."

Under the kitchen table, Smudge caught the woman's self-pitying tone and decided to act on it. She leaped to the kitchen counter in one continuous motion, her sleek body aimed for the side of Chic's torso. Smudge wanted to press herself against that plushy velour and hoped the woman would be receptive.

"How many times do I have to tell you, dumb cat. Off! Yuck! How unsanitary can you get? Get off the counter!" Chic grimaced and pushed the cat aside. Smudge landed deftly, her winding tail tickling the woman's brown legs. She backed away, around the corner of the counter.

"Damn it, why don't I just go home?" Chic groaned and slumped into the nearest kitchen chair.

Smudge watched her briefly before jumping to the opposite seat. She would try another approach.

Chic glared. "If you get on the table, you'll be sorry. Understand? Maybe she lets you get away with murder—" She broke off, rubbing her head again. "Talking to a gata now—jeez, Lozano. You're really in terrific shape. It's bad enough having this scrawny cat for a rival—"

Smudge began to groom herself, oblivious to Chic's commentary.

"That's what you've been since I met Gretchen, you know."

Smudge looked up at hearing that. She kept one paw suspended, watching Chic with an impersonal air.

"Don't tell me you didn't know." Chic stared into the black cat's impassive face. "Smudge—well, I have to admit she named you

right. You've got a tiny white spot on your chin. Only sense that woman showed was naming a silly cat."

Chic rose and went back to the counter, rummaging through the tea tin for something caffeinated. "Looks like Gretch the wretch doesn't have anything stronger than wimpy zinger. You know what, Smudge? This is the first and last time I'm hanging out here."

Smudge cocked her head and meowed quietly. She had only met this strange brown woman the night before. She certainly had made herself at home since, sleeping in Gretchen's bed, making tea, bringing in the morning newspaper, searching through the refrigerator. Well, Smudge wasn't complaining. After all, the woman had fed her. Usually she had to wait for hours until Gretchen the heavy sleeper stirred.

"You're probably trying to figure out who the hell I am, huh?" Chic refilled the tea kettle and turned on the burner. "Pues, I'm the one who tried luring Gretch away from here the past two weekends. And every time I wanted her to stay over, she'd say, 'I have to go home and feed Smudge.'" Chic mimicked Gretchen's Eastern accent while twirling a tea bag by its string. "Like she couldn't have her roommate do that. So finally, when I heard the roomie was going away for the holidays, I said, 'Hey—I'll go over to your place for New Year's—we'll spend the night together after the dance.'" So much for my romantic plans. She shrugged elaborately.

Smudge blinked. She liked watching this woman—she was so animated compared to Gretchen.

"Mira, Smudge—I don't even know how I wound up in this fix. For the first time, I fell for a woman's brain—and guess what—that's all she is, a brain. It's like Gretchen lives in her head all the time. She's one of those cerebral dykes, you know?"

Waiting for the water to boil, Chic sank into the chair. Smudge tentatively leaned closer, again longing to cuddle against the velour. She stared for several seconds before stretching herself nearer. One black paw tentatively patted the soft fabric.

Chic did not seem to notice. She closed her eyes and leaned her head against the back of the chair, sighing loudly, not even stirring when Smudge snuggled into her lap. But soon the whistling tea kettle roused Chic and she rose abruptly, dislodging the purring cat. Flicking her tail, Smudge stayed beneath the table, miffed at the sudden disturbance.

"This pinche tea isn't doing the trick," Chic muttered after she had downed half a cupful. "I'd better split for my place and brew some café before my cabeza cracks. Jeez!" With a clatter, she set down the cup and stalked into the adjoining room.

Smudge scampered ahead, bounding atop the futon for a better vantage point. When the woman leaned over to pick up her clothes, she quickly grabbed the edge of the sofa. "Ay! I'm starting to get dizzy. Get out of my way, gata!"

Smudge darted off as the woman keeled over. She peered around a beanbag chair to see Chic flat on her back on the futon. The woman moaned and held her head for a few moments. Then she went quiet.

Hesitantly, Smudge approached, senses alert. She stood on her hind legs and sniffed, noting that the woman was fast asleep. The velour's texture was tempting and the reclining woman offered no resistance. Smudge wasted no time and settled herself on the woman's warm abdomen. She curled herself into her favorite napping position and dozed off.

"I gotta to get out of here," Chic muttered some time later. Her head still ached, but at least the dizziness had passed. She felt an unfamiliar weight upon her and warily eased herself up, smiling on viewing the sleeping cat.

"Que cute." Gently, she reached over and patted Smudge's smooth fur. "Listen, muchachita. I gotta leave now."

Lazily, Smudge yawned and unwound herself, her thin legs arching out. Amber eyes unwavering, she made no other move to rise.

"Hey, cooperate. I don't want to be here when Gretch finally ends her beauty rest. I'd rather make a fast getaway. I've had enough." The woman carefully lifted the cat and set her down while she swung her own legs off the sofa and began to dress. Smudge hovered near, rubbing herself against the velour garment and toying with its sash belt.

Chic laughed and dangled the belt, encouraging Smudge to tug it. The cat had just begun to enjoy the game when the woman stood up and finished buttoning her Western-style shirt.

"You're fun, Smudge. But this is it. Gotta go."

The woman zipped up her black jeans and tugged on her suede jacket, folding the velour robe under her arm. After a bit of indecision, she bent over and gathered the Sunday newspaper, too. Her

cowboy boots thudded harshly against the hardwood floor as she strode to the door. When she opened it, Smudge whizzed outside.

"Hey! You're not supposed to go out. Damn cat!"

But Smudge did not wander far. She sat on the low brick wall surrounding Gretchen's duplex. Yet when Chic approached, the cat scurried away, nestling near the rose bushes.

"No way am I gettin' near those thorns with this jacket on. You stay put, okay? Don't run off." The woman spoke in a stern voice. "She's damn lucky I fed you. Sure didn't come over here to babysit her cat. You be good and stay there, all right?"

Chic turned and headed towards her VW. Unlocking the car, she tossed her robe and the newspaper into the back seat and turned her key in the ignition. The car rumbled to a start and Chic rolled down her window, hoping for a last glimpse of the cat. But Smudge was no longer by the rose bushes.

Shrugging, Chic started to drive away when she noticed the cat sitting in the middle of the street.

"Hey—get back! Want to get pancaked?" Chic made extravagant gestures towards the cat.

Smudge meowed and watched Chic with interest, but she did not leave the street. Instead, she crouched, ready to spring. Before the woman knew it, the cat landed directly in her lap. Content, Smudge liked the feel of the suede jacket even better than she had the velour robe.

"Wait a minute, cat. You can't just—" Chic broke off, suddenly grinning when Smudge snuggled nearer. She lightly touched the cat's purring head. "Pues, why not? You're pretty good company, you like to cuddle, and you don't talk back."

Smudge purred loudly and leaned against the woman. With a laugh, Chic accelerated and headed home.

Abby Bogomolny

Because I Turn on the Light Switch She Thinks I Make the Sun Come Out

cats know they are an ornament
for the book on your lap
the clothes on your bed
the page on which you write
they are made to stretch their
claws into your leg

they prefer dumping vases for
water, the algae makes them
more resilient to disease

cats do everything on purpose
if, at first, a meow is
not understood, stronger
measures become necessary



Alena WordSmith

Shopping List

cat food, toilet paper, cat food,
toilet paper, cat food—
constant, eternal, quest this is
a must, much needed,
cat food, milk, dental floss,
toothpaste, mineral water, recognition,
red bell peppers, real fruit juices, real love,
assorted grains, flea powder, flea mist,
another flea comb, more cat food,
day in, day out, week after week,
food, liquid, food, liquid, necessities
for sustaining life shared with felines
who knowing not, caring not,
my wish, hope, desire for
undiluted, very real, no-sticky-sweet,
no-sugar-coated kisses with chocolate-lies,
always on my shopping list,
dependable, determined, willful,
honest love
with no preservatives, please!
and no reservations.

My Step-Cats and I

It's a familiar scenario: a nuclear family breaks up, one parent gets custody of the kids, that parent eventually starts dating again, and then the kids and the parent's new friend have to learn to deal with one another. There's resentment and cajoling, pleading and fighting, and occasional threats and bribes. The story has been told in *Good Housekeeping* and it's been told on *thirtysomething*, and now it's part of my life.

My lover Liz has two cats from a previous marriage. She and her ex-lover got them together, raised them together, loved them together. I knew they wouldn't accept me immediately—I needed to have patience and let them resent and mistrust me. I also knew that setting limits and being firm were more important than slavishly giving in to their every whim. But I slavishly gave in to their every whim anyway.

The five-year-old is Lil, a beautiful tabby. Lil is never comfortable until her body is perfectly postured, with her tail wrapped around her at an angle that echoes the elegance of her pose. She can open the door to the cat food cabinet and can even handle some doorknobs. She answers to her name, taking only long enough to let you know that she's coming because she wants to—not because you called. She sleeps across people's laps if they're sitting or heads if they're lying down. She's great.

The four-year-old is Chirpy, a bear-like black cat with white markings. If Chirpy were human, he'd be a beer-drinking pot-bellied guy watching football on TV and burping. He often misses the litter box when he pees, and he isn't very bright. But he has an endearing sweetness to him and a most handsome face. His favorite place to sleep is wherever is most inconvenient to the humans in the house at the moment. He's usually standoffish except at mealtimes.

I was so desperate to please Lil and Chirpy that I did nothing that might upset them. When Lil would lie across my lap, I wouldn't move until she left. And on the rarer occasions that Chirpy visited, I would bear his 17-pound lumpen presence and his kneading until part of my body went numb.

They still resented me. One night, Lil threw up on my pillow. I am a deep sleeper, so I didn't wake up until I turned over into the vomit. Luckily, it was my hand that landed in Lil's gift and not my face, or I might still be shuddering.

But time passed, and we got used to one another. I fed them occasionally, which put me on their good side, and they grew fond of the expanse of softness provided by my large belly. One night, as Liz and I read in bed, with Lil on my lap and Chirpy on hers, I realized that we were the average, normal, lesbian nuclear step-family.

I grew pretty sure of myself after that. I became willing to get up even if one of them was on me, though I always apologized politely first. And they always accepted my apology.

On one fateful night, during a low key and meditative love-making session with Liz, I noticed that I was petting Lil. I stopped immediately, worried that I had chanced into bestiality. However, as Lil often chooses to hang around during such times, I have grown to understand that I'm not into bestiality; Lil is into human-ality.

A few months ago, Liz got a roommate, Karen. Karen is someone I know and like, so I was pleased at her addition to the household, but I must admit I felt a twinge of jealousy. What, I worried, if Liz and Karen fell in love? Stranger things have happened in our small lesbian community. Then I dismissed the idea from my mind—but it was quickly replaced by a larger worry. Chirpy, who rarely graces anyone with his presence, took to greeting Karen at the door and spending time with her. What, I worried, if Chirpy likes Karen better than me?

Well, things have evened out. I live there too now, and I've grown to accept that Chirpy does like Karen better than me (and I like Lil better than him, though I try not to let on). Also, we're soon going to get a new cat, and I've heard that a new child solidifies a family.

I'm not walking around on eggshells anymore. A little while ago, I was reading on the couch. When I got up, Lil went flying off my chest, where she had been sleeping. I hadn't even noticed she was there.

Laurie A. Posner

Imagine now

Her tiny head
a triangle of fur,
Upturned
The bits of leaves
and light don't
flicker in her eyes
but in my mind.

Her grey-blue eyes
could catch
the Autumn air
and hold it spinning
there like pools
of water, glass—
the flashing leaves would rise
like fish to the surface.

Now I ache for
her—a body clinging to my legs
and always tripping,
calling, scratching her way into
my thoughts

My fingers—
touching
the furry body,
softer,
than perception.

When she died
I saw depressions in
the sleeping bag for days;
and hairs clung to my clothes,
incessantly,
like claws.

Grey Day

There I was, embarking on my first lesbian love affair. What an adventure! A time to live, love, and learn about one another. First step, an apartment, a home to share together. Next step, a cat. A CAT! She loves cats? I hate cats! She wants a cat. I start looking for burrito recipes and other hints on the uses of a dead cat.

Pet shops. We couldn't pass a pet shop without stopping in to view the current cat shipment. My lover would always croon the same lines, "Oh, isn't he cute. Isn't she adorable. Let's see if they will let us hold that one." I must admit, some of these creatures were absolutely exotic looking. Others reminded me of women I had admired from afar. Still others were plain ugly. Try as I might, nary a one could melt my cat-hating heart.

My idyllic lesbian love affair had suddenly turned into the Cat Conflict.

- Her: "Cats are easy to care for."
Me: "Cats jump all over everything."
Her: "Cats aren't like dogs."
Me: "Cats leave hair all over everything."
Her: "How loveable."
Me: "How cold."
Her: "How sweet."
Me: "Cats are evil people reincarnated."

I honestly said that. I had called my grandmother for every Mexican superstition about cats she could think of or make up. I was desperate.

One rainy day on our way home from work, we pulled into the parking lot of a local pet shop. My surprised "and here we go again" look was met with a "just to see what they have" look. The only cat available was a grey thing that immediately gave me the all too familiar "get out of my face" look. Fortunately we went home empty-handed. Two weeks later, another rainy day, same pet shop, and lo, same cat. My lover, a woman who could have invented the word butch, might have been cited to personify the word dyke, turned to

oatmeal. Tears welled in her eyes. She moaned, she groaned, she carried on about how nobody wanted the poor baby kitty. She never moaned like that for me! But, finally, I couldn't resist. Besides that moaning sound really intrigued me. "Buy the damn thing!" I snapped. One hour, one cheap cat, and all the expensive "cat things" later, I suddenly was the proud co-parent of a bouncing baby boy.

"What should we name him?" she mused while stroking the cat.

"Name him?" I asked.

"Yes," she sweetly replied while nuzzling the cat, "what should we call him?" Cat-icide quickly crossed my mind. "Hey," I smiled, "We're both Catholic, shouldn't we baptize him?" No reply. Crossing out cat-icide, I looked out at the grey clouds, noticing how dark and rain-heavy they had become, and contemplated other cat-astrophes. Out loud and to myself I commented, "grey day." I was jolted by a joyous scream from my lover.

"That's it. That's perfect."

"What's perfect," I asked.

"Grey Day. He's grey, we bought him on a grey day. Grey Day it is. Grey for short."

Thus I forever had the honor of naming the cat. I quickly looked for my recipes.

As time went by that cat and my lover started bonding at the breast. Literally. We would go to bed, I would lean over for a good night kiss and there nestled between her breasts was the cat. Thus our bedtime conversations became rote.

Me: "Uh, excuse me," I politely nudged the cat. "I believe that's my spot."

Her: "Oh, he's just resting. Come on, give Grey a good night kissy."

Me: "Pardon me!"

Her: "O.K. Grey give Mary a kissy."

Me: "You really are sick!"

Then I would turn my back to her and dream of cat-icide. By the way, the damn cat could kissy on command. Many was the time I would find them both catnapping on the couch. Where was the cat? Between her breasts with his nose in her neck. Needless to say a lot of wicked cat-icide fantasies were forever crossing my mind.

As Grey and my lover's bond grew and the years passed by, Grey and I developed a tolerance for one another. During that time my lover and that cat supported one another. When she went through a rough period in her life, that damned cat helped her in ways I never could. He was also very helpful to me during this period. He would alert me to her moods. If he was playful with me, she was happy; if he didn't greet me at the door, she wanted to be left alone; if he would nuzzle my legs and purr, she wanted to be held. To this day she doesn't know how I knew exactly what she needed. When the cat had to have a claw removed, she took a day off work to nurse him. When he was neutered, she took another day off to nurse him. When I had a terrible bout with the flu, I was left alone by both of them to heal myself.

Grey's and my tolerance slowly became an unspoken and vehemently denied love for one another. Grey would kissy me and I would forgive him for always finding and eating at least 1/3 of any lemon meringue pie I would bake. (I did try to hide them.) Grey would sleep on my lap and I would feed him real-people tuna.

Grey was always an indoor cat but when he was about 3 1/2 years old, the wild outdoors suddenly became his desire. He would claw at the front door until one of us would let him out, then he would claw again until we would let him back in. One rainy Thanksgiving, we went to run a quick errand. My lover looked at Grey and instructed him to stay on the patio, that we would return in about 15 minutes and then she would bring him in and feed him. I remember her exact words as well as I remember mine. I added, "If you're lucky, she'll feed you."

On our way back home we spotted our neighbor in the middle of the street looking helpless and confused. We pulled into the driveway and he came to us and said, "Your cat has been hit by a car and I think he is dead." My lover raced over to see if our neighbor could possibly be mistaken, while I stayed in the car, too numb to move.

She came back crying and ordered me to get a box and a blanket. "Grey?" I feebly asked. She couldn't bring herself to say it was Grey and that—indeed—he was dead. I had never before lost anyone or anything close to me and immediately went into a combination of hysterics and guilt. To this day, my lover believes I just acted like a hysterical female; she doesn't know that in a flash I realized how much I really loved that cat.

I could go on and on about the warm and wonderful relationship my lover and I shared with Grey, but I won't go into detail, only to say that that cat and my lover forever changed my life. I now definitely love women and am very fond of cats.

Six years have gone by since Grey left my life. Never a grey day goes by that I don't recall how he got his name, nor is a Thanksgiving prayer recited without his name being mentioned. More memories of Grey cross my mind than those of my then lover. This one's for you Grey. My way of saying I love you and miss your uppity ways. I can't make a lemon meringue pie without telling all who partake of it how lemon was your favorite. You came into my life on a grey day and left my life on a grey day and I just wanted to make sure that you know I really do love you and some day we'll share a lemon pie.



Ours

Photo by Cathy Cade

Jan Hardy

Separatist Paradox

The only male ego I can endure
belongs to Leroy
who found me at the Animal Rescue League,
decided I was worthy,
stood up and squeaked
"Me! Me!" through the screen.
Now, chest-beating tactics
like that from any other male
would leave me cold,
but when I saw this tiny furball
with huge blue eyes
dancing for me alone,
it was love at first sight. So
I clean up after him, pay the rent
and work out the politics
any way I can,
and he's happy, stalking birds
from the safety of a third-floor window,
alert and cool as any macho kid
hanging out on the street.
The few times he's been out
he was crazed with fear.
He'd much rather be
the cock of this little walk,
lying tummy-up on the floor, inviting
affection and giving his claws,
pacing up and down beside me
as I lie on the bed, depressed; finally
offering the surest cure he can think of,
he lowers his head for me to pet.

Sometimes I Wonder if You Want to Hear This: Life at an Animal Shelter

There is nowhere else to start. I thought I was going to write a little story about La Jalouse, the telepathic cat from under the house. In fact, I even came up with a rough draft a couple of months ago. But you know what? I can't do it. I can't pretend that's what I have to say about cats. Be forewarned, this is what needs to be said about the cats I hang around and some of the people I hang around with who love them.

I work at an animal shelter. I've studied philosophy and political science in college, worked in bookstores, advertising, factories, and on a farm. My last job was working as a janitor at an art school in Chicago. I have been around the block a few times, but I have yet to experience anything that approaches the intensity, frustration, pain and joy of working in an animal shelter. Now I've been doing this work for almost six years.

I used to kill animals on a daily basis. Some of those animals were cats: *Spunky Ginger Jenny Maxwell Punkin Patches Murphy Jamie Eve The Grand Bahati Bruce Sally Boda Liz Kami Oregon Sky Holly Tiger Ice Doc Emmie Chip Katie Bird Fred Bingham Rio Sooner Daisy Sam Clare Freeway Bungie Kitty Eight Alma . . .*

Some of the cats were kittens. Throughout the spring and summer, when there are hundreds of unwanted litters born throughout the county, we have to kill up to twenty cats and kittens a day. This happens all across the country. We're talking hundreds of thousands.

Carl and Bob used to do the killing. They would hold a struggling cat in place by putting their boot on its neck. Then at arm's distance, they would inject the cat in the belly with a lethal dose of an anesthetic. If they were lucky, in a few minutes the cat or kitten would be unconscious. If unlucky, the cat would go into a phase of struggling and thrashing about while going under. The Grand Jury heard about some of these atrocities and brought in a new director. The new director brought in new people. I was part of the "new wave." Some of us were dykes. The cats' luck was about to change. We learned about humane clinical euthanasia techniques, and

instead of putting boots on their necks, we cradle the cats in our arms, thus providing a death with dignity and love.

I've found that people have a misconception about me and the people who work here, about what we do. They refer to us as a "pound"—images of dark, damp places without light and dog-catcher scenes from *Lady and the Tramp* abide.

But our long-term goal is education. We have a full-time educator who makes daily classroom presentations to schools, prepares class aids for teachers and publishes a newsletter. We have an education director who spends her time getting SPCA and humane issues in the media. She also networks with "animal people," local activists and legislators to coordinate lobbying in local, state and national legislatures for votes that reflect the animal constituency. There are a couple of exciting things going on locally: a county ordinance proposing a moratorium for breeding all cats and dogs; and work toward in-house pet care education classes, like traffic school, in lieu of citation fees.

Rarely, the Shelter is quiet . . . following an earthquake and now in the middle of the night while I'm writing this. Most daylight hours there is much hustling and bustling about. At 7 a.m. every morning the cleaning begins and at 6 p.m. there are the finishing touches. Like housekeeping, there is always one more task to complete, one more litter pan to clean. We take great pride in providing a clean, safe and sanitary environment for the animals in our care.

Saturday is our busiest and best day. People come to the Shelter to adopt pets. It's lovely to watch this. We do our best to educate people about animal behavior and caring for a new pet. Most new pet owners are attentive and excited about bringing a new friend home, but some people take offense at this process because they think they know all they need to know about cats. Sometimes I ask them to just humor me. I tell them to put identification on their cats and to be concerned about their cats' whereabouts, particularly during periods of disruption in their environment, such as a move or the introduction of new people or animals. Most owners don't realize their cats are lost. They think they have just wandered away. Only about one in ten stray cats brought to the Shelter will be reclaimed by an owner. I tell them not to have their cats ride in the car unconfined because the motion of the car and watching things go whizzing by will give cats vertigo. I tell them that cats are nocturnal but safer at

home at night when they are more likely to be hit by a car, chased by predators, or harassed by humans.

When people surrender their own animals to us we are required to tell them that chances of adoption are slight and their animals may be euthanized. Adult cats are less likely to be adopted particularly when kittens are available. Many people seem to be in denial about this. They hide their children and say they don't want to know.

Pet overpopulation is preventable. We offer low-cost spay and neuter certificates at local veterinarians. But last year we put to sleep, we euthanized, we killed upwards of 4000 animals—sick, injured, or unwanted. Often abandoned kittens and cats are at the top of the list. We witness this societal secret, this outrage. Taxpayers and donors pay our salaries to do this work. Sometimes I wonder if they pay us to keep it quiet.

Gratefully, I don't do the killing anymore. Carl and Bob left long ago. The procedures and infrastructure have changed to prevent the hiring of other Carls and Bobs. I see more dykes around the Shelter, but employee turnover is a problem. It's difficult to love animals and have to kill them. Those of us willing to persevere grow but there are lifetimes of sadness. A therapist told me once that the reason I chose to continue this work was because I'd "carried sadness" from my mother. I listened carefully and considered this idea, looked at her and said, "I stay in this job because I feel love and respect for animals . . . and I learn a lot from them." I never went back to her. Since then I've learned a new thing about working at the Shelter: I can and do make a difference.

So listen to a truth: dykes like you and me, cats like ours, intersect on a path too tragic to name. Do me a favor, do the cats a favor: put identification on your cats, keep them indoors at night, spay and neuter your pets.

I try to explain these thoughts to my outside-of-work dyke friends. Some want to know, some don't. Sometimes they hear me, sometimes they don't. I struggle with the right words, like I struggle with words to the general public. I'm more invested in dykes, so I try harder.

Cat Fights

"You and your goddamn cats!" She stomped off into the night. From the darkness came a post script: "If you didn't care so fucking much about your lousy cats you might care a little more about people and maybe even have some friends." I was having a rough year; she had always known how to hit a nerve.

Anna and I had been lovers once. It hadn't lasted long and we'd both been a little relieved when she'd given me the boot, but we were each other's first lovers of this new kind, and maybe that, maybe something else, had given us an intimacy we both cherished and dreaded. We tended to see a lot of each other for a little while, then have a screaming fight like this one and blast out of each other's lives—until we met at the laundromat or at a demonstration or in a restaurant neither of us had ever been to before. Then the whole thing would start again.

As I stared after her, wishing all kinds of horrible events to befall her on her way home, I flashed on the last time we'd screamed and stomped. The cats had provided the match for the fuse that time, too. Sam, my first cat, had collapsed and Anna had gone to the vet with me. When he died a week later, I was inconsolable. As I remembered it, she'd said on that occasion, "How come you're so upset about a lousy cat? You were never that upset about a human in your life, were you? Maybe you should save your love for people; they can give it back." And I'd yelled back, "You don't know a damn thing about love so don't preach to me. Besides, no human ever loved me as freely and joyfully and constantly as Sam did, so why should I waste my time, you asshole?" "Asshole" was her term. I'd decided to use it on her before she threw it at me. That fight, too, if memory was correct, and I was sure it was, had been started by her. They all were. I of course was pure, perfect and picked on.

The vision that immediately followed that one was of our first night together. We had played and cavorted and bounced until we broke the bed, split the frame so that it folded at both ends and formed a cocoon around us. After that we lay quietly and held hands. I'd never held hands with someone who had smaller hands

than my own; I felt at once cared for and protected, strong and protecting. It was intoxicating.

She was at the street light now. She turned, dramatically haloed, and yelled, "Bloody cats!"

I hardly heard it. I was thinking of one night when we cooked dinner in her kitchen. We laughed a lot that night—it was not an ordinary night for us—and at one point she waved the spatula at me and said, "If your family asks about me, say 'You wouldn't like her, she's Catholic.'" And we choked on our wit and wisdom and she dubbed me Sister Mary Margaret, but she missed and anointed my hair with the potato-and-onion-covered spatula. By the time she reached the corner I was feeling all warm and tender toward her again.

But then it came back to me that I had written poem after poem for her, had written her long letters in my head, had even sent her one, and that she had never ever written a word to or about me. Little did I know that when I finally settled down with the woman of my dreams, it would be two years before it would even occur to me to write about her. But that was because I'd spent two years in the trivia of happiness and the complications of interweaving two lives. When Anna and I were together neither of us had ever been happy, let alone intertwined, so that wasn't the reason she'd never written about me. Whatever the reason, I felt exposed and silly that I'd scribbled about her and she'd never uttered a word about me. That night of the second cat fight I still felt vulnerable enough that thinking about it made me angry all over again, and by the time she'd reached the mailbox in the next block I was again wishing terrible fates on her. Such has been the nature of our relationship.

The night of the broken bed was so long ago that we were both still working on the *Vancouver Women's Liberation Newspaper*, where we met. Our heady liberation was equalled only by our insecurity about it. Anna was still getting over having been a nun and was writing poems to a woman she had loved from afar for years, things with seagulls and tides and a solitary woman—her—walking into the sea á la Kate Chopin whom we hadn't yet discovered. I was still getting over having been a wife and was writing things like, "If I die for you will you love me then? Will I be able to say at my funeral,

‘Somebody loved me once?’” We were big on what we’d now call melodrama. Then we called it reality. I guess it’s both.

One of the things we fought about, and viciously, was the fact that I insisted on wearing a bra. Much as we like to deny that any of that kind of lunacy ever happened, it definitely was a major hurdle in our early feminist days. Anna insisted that it signified my worship of the patriarchy, and, therefore, my lack of any kind of liberation at all. I told her over and over that it was painful not to wear one, and I would be turning myself over to a totalitarianism as thorough as that of the patriarchy if I willingly gave myself pain in order to be politically correct—only we didn’t have that term then. I also told her that I couldn’t watch her softball team because it hurt my boobs to watch all those braless wonders running around the field. She still doesn’t wear a bra. I still do. When I visit her and stay overnight, I wear the tartiest, laciest black number I own, just to bug her. It’s very old and pointy and stands up by itself. It makes me feel like Brunhilda of the Killer Tits. It works every time.

The *Vancouver Women’s Liberation Newspaper* folded just after the first cat fight. The grapevine told me that Anna had bought a house on a hilltop with four other women and two children and that they were all living there in collective bliss, and that if I wanted to call there not to do it on Sunday or Thursday nights as they had their marathon house meetings then. They had lists of chores and whose week it was to do what. They shared the child care. They shared the car that had been Anna’s. They ate dinner together five nights a week; anyone who missed two nights in two weeks was asked to account for her behaviour and commitment at the next house meeting. They alternated bedrooms every six months so that everybody would get the two big sunny rooms as well as the three smaller ones. It all sounded very fair and egalitarian and rather like terminal summer camp to me, and I was very glad I didn’t live like that.

I meanwhile had set myself up in a cheap and wonderful little house all by myself on a block where I was the only native English speaker. The bedroom was my altar to sensuality, the study that to order and the life of the mind. The kitchen was cosy, the living room flooded with light, the bathroom had a tiny round sink in the corner with a faucet that dripped the whole time I lived there. The new kitten, who is now almost nine years old, adored that sink and slept

in it constantly, despite the soggy spot it always left on her back. It was solitary and it was splendid, I kept telling myself. Several people told me that Anna thought I'd lost my mind.

One Saturday I walked into the laundromat just as some woman was laying claim to the last four washers. I walked up behind her and said, "You just took the last washer." From the look on her face, I thought she was going to hit me. Instead she got all glad and grinned and said yes, it was her week to do the laundry and there was always tons of it, and why didn't I dump mine in her car and we'd go across the street for espresso. So we did, and began the period that would end in the second cat fight. I've never told her that her car smelled so funny that day because one of the cats had thrown up all over the laundry earlier that morning.

One of the things Anna was working on then was starting a general interest magazine *By Women for People*. It would be written and produced by women with articles on things like women on fishing boats and goddess mythology and women's basketball teams and women doctors. It would have beautiful graphics and be printed on heavy but not glossy paper. The staff would, of course, be a collective. If they got it off the ground, would I be interested to write for it?

They did and I was and I did. After the second cat fight, one of the other editors would phone once in a while and say, "Anna thought you might be interested to write an article on whatever for us. Are you?" And I always was.

A couple of years later we ran into each other again and began again. This time it lasted only six weeks, ending the day before Easter. Anna thought that the kids must have those giant Italian Easter Eggs that were hanging in all the windows along Commercial Drive. She was short of money and wanted to borrow the last two dollars from me. I told her I was short for the weekend and I'd never had Easter Eggs so I didn't see any reason why the damn kids should have Easter Eggs that were paid for with my grocery money.

That night, Easter Eve, as I sat in my living room, a truck pulled up in front of the house. Someone ran up the stairs, shoved a two dollar bill through the mail slot, and ran back to the truck which then took off in great screeches of breaks and tires.

I decided to leave Vancouver. Maybe 3000 miles would make our relationship a little easier. A week before I left she showed up. The meeting was subdued and almost calm. We made clear what we

already knew: we were tremendously important to each other, we were there for each other, and we both regretted that we couldn't stand being around each other much. Maybe someday.

By this time the magazine and the house were both in their death throes. Anna decided to write full time, cushioning herself with the income from the sale of the house. She moved into an apartment alone. And she met a special woman.

At the same time that Anna was deciding that she wasn't totally a social creature, I had discovered that I wasn't so much of a loner as I'd wanted to think and had moved into a collective with three other people. I also gave up my secure job to freelance. When the isolation drove me crazy, I'd phone Anna. Still do. At almost \$1 a minute I complain and recover fast. In the long run it's cheaper than therapy. And nobody came into my life. And just as living alone didn't kill Anna, and even nourished parts of her that had been ignored for too long, so living with other people perked me up.

One of her plays opened in Vancouver. It was a wonderful play, full of real people and relationships and issues that are real to feminist lives. That much I'd expected. It was also much more tolerant of human foibles than I'd thought Anna could be. It was a kind play. That alone was worth the plane fare.

The day after the opening we fought horribly about I have no idea what anymore. The only thing I do remember is that at one point she got me right in the solar plexus of my fears. She said that I was going to turn out to be the neighbourhood cat lady, with dozens of half-starved stinking strays in my two room apartment. I left without saying goodbye.

She must have realized how much that hurt, because when she phoned she apologized. Apologies were not part of our pattern.

Shortly after that Janet blasted her way into my life, and after five months of my insisting that splendid isolation was my choice as well as my habit, we moved in together and I began to live happily ever after. Mostly.

Sometimes I can tell when she's going to phone, but not tonight. "I thought I'd better tell you before someone else does," she started. Oh, God, I thought, she's moving to China. Or worse, to Toronto. "What." After a long, long pause, "I've got a cat." "A WHAT!?" "A cat. C-A-T. Cat. I thought I should tell you." "Jesusgod." It was all I

could think of to say. "Her name is Mitzi. She's the most wonderful, marvellous cat in the world."

STONEWALL RIOTS

BY ANDREA NATALIE



ALEXIS COULD NO LONGER DENY SHE
WAS LOSING TO THE COMPETITION.

And Baby Makes Two

It was 1:00 a.m., the first day of spring in 1974. I heard strange squeals which awakened me. I turned on the light and looked under the bed. My cousin, who was living with me and came home late from work, had let in a very pregnant cat who hung around my building. "Princess" was one of those cats who didn't belong to anybody but belonged to everybody. I looked under the bed just in time to see her scream as the fuzzy new entity emerged from her body. There were already three others. This was the last one.

I'd never much cared for cats and I certainly didn't know how to care for kittens. I tried to keep Princess from eating an ugly huge glob of something. My lover, Barbara, explained that it was afterbirth and that it was normal and healthy for the mother to eat it. Oh.

Barbara wanted us to keep one of them. I agreed. I do like animals and they were cute, after a few days, that is. We disagreed on which one to keep, but we disagreed on most everything.

Each kitten had a temporary name. There was the coal black one named after me, Pace (pronounced Pa chay), the black and white spotted one named Spot, the gray and white spotted one named Aardvark Doo-Doo (Barbara named it) and then Baby, the gray tabby that I saw born. I wanted to keep Aardvark Doo Doo, but the name had to go. Barbara wanted Baby. But, thanks to my cousin again, we ended up with Baby when she thought that was the one I wanted.

After six weeks of watching these little ones grow into circus clowns, Barbara and I were left with Baby. She was very timid, watching from a distance as the others played. She was the one most kept out when they fought over nipples. Baby's lack of aggression suited her name. And Baby was the one I never saw in the litter box. Coincidental or what?

As time and nature progressed, we discovered Baby wasn't a girl. I also had the grim discovery of finding Baby's personal litter box. He used the hardwood floor in the closet to do his business. He couldn't quite understand the litter box. We let him be an outside cat.

Barbara slept with Baby curled in her arm and took him to school with her. I fed him and got up in the middle of the night to let him in or out, little things like that.

Barbara and I grew further apart. She also spent less time with Baby. The day came when she had an affair, fell in love with this other person and moved out with her. I felt devastated. It had been my first relationship and I thought it'd be my last, like my parents'. I felt lost without her and I was going to be damned if I was going to let her take Baby from me. It was Thanksgiving, 1975.

I was severely depressed, but seldom cried. One particular day I sobbed while lying on my bed. Baby ran from another room, jumped on the bed and got close to me. That's when I realized dogs didn't have a monopoly on comforting their masters, although he'd never call me that.

My second relationship began a few months later. Erin was a super co-parent for Baby, giving him lots of attention. They'd often nap together. Erin was a large woman and Baby would cuddle and snuggle in her warmth. I got jealous of the attention she gave him sometimes.

One night, I got into a fight with our next door neighbor. He and his sister beat Erin and I outside my front door. I got inside after another neighbor came to our defense and Baby nearly flew up the stairs and into the apartment. He seemed petrified and I figured he probably saw what happened from beneath his favorite tree downstairs.

Erin and I lived from friend to friend for three weeks until we were able to find an apartment. I boarded Baby. I didn't know what else to do. I felt terrible that he was locked in a cage all that time, but I could hardly cope with my own emotions. One time I visited him and he jumped out of the cage and out of the building. I found him under a tree, wailing. I felt horrible.

When I moved into my new apartment, I slowly became agoraphobic, fearful of leaving it. Baby, too, had a strong aversion to the outdoors. When he'd walk with the door in his sight, it was with great hesitancy. He didn't want to go out, just as I didn't. It wasn't until I got better that he did.

Baby began having recurring urinary problems. I kept giving him medicine from the vet, but the problems always returned. It was around Easter and a weekend when Baby kept squatting around my apartment, dripping blood and trying to urinate. His body looked bloated as the day went on and he began walking as if in combat,

low on all fours. I wanted to wait until the next day and avoid the emergency clinic cost.

I was watching a religious Easter movie when the sight of Christ hanging on the cross made me realize that Baby was in a lot of pain and would remain in pain during the eight hours I slept. I swooped him up and raced him to the clinic. The vet said I would have probably found Baby dead the next morning. His urinary tract was completely plugged. Toxins from the unreleased urine were generating throughout his body. It was by catheterization that his life was saved. I would never let the concern with cost keep me from getting him needed help again. I would've never stopped feeling the pain of his dying had he died that night.

In time, because this problem was ongoing, I had my vet perform an operation which basically turned Baby into a transsexual cat, cosmetically. His penis was removed and he had a new exit under his tail.

All this time, I was still severely agoraphobic, but I did improve, and as I did, my relationship further soured. Erin hadn't wanted to leave when I was the most ill. She'd felt trapped with me, and so, when I got better, we broke up. She moved out December 15. Baby and I spent our first Christmas without Erin in five years.

The next two years were filled with insanity as I was obsessed with a woman who "committed" to me for two weeks, yet had two affairs in that time. It was the worst pain I'd experienced other than being in love with my best friend when I was 19. I thought the pain would never stop. Baby was there, my sole solace during this time, my only friend who didn't want me to stop talking about this woman. I was a drain on my friends.

After two years of hell, I met Tina. She loved Baby and Baby was happy to have two parents again. I'd learned to judge lovers by how much Baby liked them. Unfortunately, he wasn't a barometer of how long the lover would like me.

Our family of three was expanded when Tina came home with a bulge in her jacket. Beneath it was a shivering kitten so young that her little hairs stood up instead of flat. She was black with wisps of white on her toes and she was hungry as a freelance writer. Baby, not the brightest cat for all his wonderfulness, was frightened by Lucky, named for her fortune of being found. After days of hissing, there

was a peaceful time when I'd find the two snuggled together, nose to tail in a circle. *Little House on the Prairie* couldn't have been sweeter.

Unfortunately, this didn't last. Lucky was part Burmese and full tyrant, even if lovable. But Baby, being of sound mind, found peace by willingly escaping to a travel cage.

Tina and I had problems that peaked around the time my mother died from a lengthy time with cancer. When we'd fight more, so did Baby and Lucky. The heavier the air, the more their fur rose.

Then Baby became increasingly lethargic and vomited often. A blood test showed that he had Feline Infectious Peritonitis, a usually fatal disease. Baby was 13.

I didn't understand how he got ill since he'd been indoors for several years and F.I.P. is contagious. Tina and I had come home once, however, to another cat in the apartment. It had come from a litter of sick cats and lived downstairs but often climbed the trees to our balcony. Lucky was hanging from a limb outside, apparently having fled the apartment to keep from this cat. Baby had stood up to this cat and was perhaps protecting his little sister. And maybe that's how he got F.I.P.

Tina and I were together nearly five years. I was worn and tired after my mother's death and the war zone atmosphere with Tina. I had trouble eating and sleeping. Baby began losing weight, yet meowed as if starving. Then, when given food, he'd snub it. I, too, was hungry, but never satisfied, trying to fill an empty hole when Tina moved out the day after Thanksgiving, 1988.

I had little patience for Baby. I felt him dying and I couldn't bear another loss. He meowed constantly, he begged for food, he lost weight, he had diarrhea, he vomited. I was aching over Tina. I didn't feel the energy to clean up more shit than I already had to.

I made steak for Baby, chicken for Baby, still, he wouldn't eat. He'd meow. Frustrated, I'd push his face in his dish and scream at him, "Here's your food, Baby!" I felt helpless and my life felt out of control.

It was January 1989 when I called Erin to tell her she'd better see Baby soon because he didn't have much time left. She never came. Meanwhile, I tried different medications and the vet tested Baby's digestion. He wasn't digesting carbohydrates or fat at all. He had minimal digestion of protein. So he was starving. The vet put Baby

on a digestive enzyme. I got the powdered form for him. Like me, he choked on pills. He was down to about seven pounds.

His condition stabilized somewhat and he was around to check out my next love, Michele. She wasn't overly affectionate with him, but there was affection. Baby also had the foulest smelling bowel movements which nearly caused Michele to gag. But she lovingly tolerated him and we'd talk to him in a high-pitched voice as if we, too, were Baby. He must have thought we were nuts, but we interpreted what we saw as his personality, one of both low intelligence, yet genius.

For eight months we were together, although Michele never moved in and we never moved together as planned. She broke up with me around Christmas of 1989. The holidays have not been the best for me. Michele got a job in another state and I was in a state of severe depression once again.

I lost ten pounds in one month. Baby lost two, down to five pounds. I felt alone again, left with a dying cat, increasingly incontinent, who no longer played. His only desire was eating. I pulled away, knowing he'd soon die, and angry that he was part of all the other "deaths" I'd experienced since I had him.

But I realized that it's Baby, at 16, who jumps on the bed to sleep with me at night. It's Baby who sits on my lap when I watch television or read. It's Baby who snuggles behind me as I tap out words on my typewriter. It's Baby who greets me when I get home. It's Baby who rubs his head against my hand and face. When I'm happy, he's happy. When I'm sad, he's sad.

Sixteen years ago, Barbara and I had Baby's mother put to sleep because we thought it was the best thing to do since she was a grown cat and we figured no one would want her. I have never stopped hurting from the memory of that action and I have sworn to never do that again. Baby doesn't appear to be in pain. In fact, he seems rather content. My vet doesn't understand it. Michele refers to him as "the cat that wouldn't die."

I've had five intense relationships with lovers in the past 16 years. I've had one "lover" who's been consistent; that's my Baby.

The Princess of 18th Street

"In Salinas, she loved to sit on top of the chicken yard fence and stare at the chickens so they'd get nervous and start squawking. But she never hurt them. She just liked to stir them up!" said my friend as he grinned at the cat. "That's all I know. I work with a woman whose husband died and left her with his twelve cats. I told her I'd take one, thinking I'd get to pick it out. The other day she came by, rang my bell, handed me this cat, said thanks, and left. Sunday's pretty, but she makes three of my cat. And she keeps beating up my little cat. I really don't like her now. Why don't you take her?"

Sunday's golden eyes looked right into mine while she talked with me, meowing and sort of chirping. Her short hair was mostly white with large, red-gold patches the same color as my hair. But she was older and heavy, with skirts that really swayed when she trotted. I'd really wanted a tiny, new, orange kitten with whom to start a whole new life.

I'd just spent a year in one of the Army's toughest assignments: a year near the front lines of Korea in an Infantry Division. My arrival there happened to follow the assassination of the President of Korea. After that, we were on alert the whole year, and I'd only had one weekend off.

Before that, I'd wanted to become a civilian, leave Alabama, and return to San Francisco forever. However, I was deeply in love with a sweet young lieutenant who wanted us to stay in the Army and go teach together at West Point. That meant I'd have to go overseas before I could have another stateside assignment; so, I volunteered for Korea—the shortest tour.

In Alabama, literally hundreds of us were stationed together, and we all had our own homes. We had a strong community, known only to each other. Our parties were wonderful—outdoor barbecues with the headiest of liqueurs: strong, intelligent, fun-loving women who daily took our own power in the world. We were drill sergeants, training commanders, and everyone else it took to train the young ones—in many cases "our" young ones, whom we recognized as they came through the doors in classes of 200. (Much later, we

named ourselves "The GOD Network" for Good Old Dykes. Some of us, though, still can't say "Dyke.")

So, when the Army said, "Transfer time!" I said, "Short tour!" which meant Korea. My lover would keep the home fires burning. Then, we'd both transfer to West Point, teach together, and live splendidly ever after.

Suddenly, my father died, having finally drunk himself to death. My mother had already done that, and I had no sisters or brothers. The same week I buried Daddy in Texas, my Godmother went into intensive care with Parkinson's. In two weeks, I was out of my Alabama home and into one-room quarters in a cold, East Coast Army school. Four weeks later, my sweet lieutenant said she'd never loved me at all, and that I was "no fun" since my father died. Then my Army school roommate, one of our Alabama friends, turned me in to cover her own dyke tracks. I endured an excruciating witch hunt for six months while trying to study and be the military class leader.

At that point, I knew I was in hell and didn't know if I'd ever get out! My two cats went to foster homes, never to be seen again. I descended into a state of bare survival. THEN, I went to Korea—one of the most dreaded assignments in the entire Army—and descended even further. All that saved my life (my sanity felt long departed) for 18 months was the guaranteed return assignment to Ft. Ord (Monterey), California!

So, returning stateside, I wanted brand-new beginnings, including a brand-new cat.

My return assignment was my second official hardship tour in a row: to a huge remote field testing area near King City, California. Each weekend, I drove 3 1/2 hours to San Francisco and stayed in the back corner of a friend's apartment in The Castro. Every weekend I walked through The Castro and marveled at the freedom in the Heart of Gay/Lesbian America (more Gay than Lesbian then). The love and energy of my friends and The Castro healed me a little more each weekend, until the Sunday afternoons when I had to drive south again. Then, I had to go back to work for the power-hungry military men. To get ever-higher promotions, many of these senior officers ignored safety and basic human needs in order to impress their raters, and often caused severe injuries to their own young soldiers and equipment in their efforts to best each other. They

became furious with me whenever I was able to stop them. I was fed up with the whole scene.

On a Sunday afternoon going back to King City, I stopped to see my friend Tim in Salinas. He wanted to get rid of his new cat, and I was very lonely in King City. I'd decided I couldn't have a new kitten while I was working such long hours and was gone most weekends. Tim urged me to take Sunday on a "Try her out for three days, guaranteed return if not satisfied!" offer. I did. I put her in my Subaru, and she howled for 60 miles to King City.

In three days she had my heart.

We were meant to be together! We talked to each other morning and evening, and our "fur" was the same color—reddish-gold and white. As more mature females, our bodies were rounder than we used to be, and we both liked to sit in the recliner at night. I'd sit down to see the news at 6:00, and she'd wake me up at 10:00 for our walk along the river. The neighbor woman across the street got a kick out of seeing my cat take me for our nightly walks. I began psychic studies, so each night I ended our walk at a short wall. There Sunday sat elegantly as I learned to use the Goddess energy from the moon to begin my deep cleansing and healing.

Sunday loved to hunt at night. Although she jumped lightly to the tops of seven-foot fences, her eighteen pounds made her nightly gallops across the apartment's flat roof cheerfully thunderous.

Each day, she sunbathed atop the wooden hot tub in our tiny yard. When I got home, she always made me laugh no matter how bad my day had been. She was so happy to see me that she would chirp, stretch in the sun, roll over and wake herself up by rolling off the hot tub about four feet to the ground.

Over the next three years, I had a couple of affairs—one with a nurse stationed two hours away. I kept the road hot, spending the night in Monterey and getting up at 0330 to drive south, get in uniform, and to work by 0700. I abandoned Sunday on the weekends and the nights when I was out doing my own catting around. Sunday withdrew and slept at the far end of the bed if she bothered to come in at all.

The night after the nurse and I broke up, I was in my bed feeling rotten. Suddenly, Sunday was there with me, sleeping with her head on my shoulder as if there'd never been another woman between us. That was a serious turning point in our relationship. I realized she

was, indeed, a magical cat and a very wise four-legged being. I began to pay more attention to our relationship.

As much as I'd wanted to tell the Army to "shove it," my return from Korea had coincided with a recession, so I stayed on for three years until it was time to move again. Then I became a civilian and made the move I'd dreamed of—directly to San Francisco!

Our new home was a flat in a Victorian on 18th Street and Hartford, one block from the center of 18th and Castro—the heart of the gay free world. When I took Sunday inside, she looked around, saw "her" furniture, and took immediate possession.

The front bay windows were our favorite place. We were directly across the street from Hot n' Hunky ("Possibly the World's Best Hamburgers"), which we loved. We both spent hours in the front window, watching everything. I put a Korean chest in the window which became Sunday's throne. She would be in one of two poses: Regal Cat Princess of The World, or sprawled in the window, sound asleep, with her large pink tummy to the street.

Why a Princess instead of a Queen? Anyone familiar with The Castro understands that possibly the world's greatest gathering of Queens (elegant drag queens and "others") parades there nightly and on each weekend. Sunday maintained her own separate identity.

We made friends with the neighbors. Being a Texan, I figured they all knew everybody. Well, they didn't, so I introduced them to each other. Sunday was always an ace conversational opening, as everyone noticed her right away.

When I'd get home after being gone for a while, neighbors from across the street would come over to tell me about the people who had stood in front of our bay window that day talking to her highness. Usually she was in her elegant mode—sitting tall, facing the street, and never flickering an eyelash. I have personally watched up to six people stand out front for a long time trying to get her to respond—trying to figure out if she's real or some sort of statue. From the neighbors' hilarious reports of the viewers' antics, she rarely gave away her secret.

As I petted her in the window one night, a fellow called up to me and asked her name. He gave historical walking tours of The City and had seen her often. He really liked her and put her on his tour.

Over the next six years, we both grew in many ways and learned wonderful new things. We both loved the "Hunky Burgers," and we

both ate them cheerfully. After all, as neighbors, we even got extra fries. Within two blocks of our house there were 22 eating places. Being a non-cook, I happily patronized the restaurants and brought home kitty bags. Our outlines expanded a little more.

I began psychic classes, studying for years with Tamara, a wonderful teacher who taught us the skills to empower our own lives. When I began to learn about rituals and ceremonies, I began holding my own. My altar was my Grandma's dining table. Though Sunday could have been sleeping soundly in another room, as soon as I began she immediately appeared and sat with me until I finished.

Thanks to the Goddess, I was able to take a few months off to heal from the painful Army dramas I'd been through, and those months were grand. Sunday and I slept late every day—after I'd convinced her that civilian cats do not need to eat breakfast at 0530! We visited with our neighbors. I sat on the front steps and talked with folks who went by, in good country Texan fashion. She maintained her vigil in the front window.

Our first year, 1984, seemed a great dream of personal freedom come true. I have beautiful memories of thousands of Lesbians and Gays in The Castro—and we were all healthy, carefree, and proud. This time included the LA Olympics, from which we had athletes from all over the world, and our efforts to affect the Democratic Convention. Then, changes began. Being unfamiliar with civilian businesses, I didn't find a good job for a year and a half. The rent, \$1000 a month, was easy on my Army salary, but wiped out my savings quickly. I worked part-time at night while job-hunting in the daytime, and took in roommates. Our 18th Street Palace was forever changed.

AIDS quietly surrounded us, slipping in much like the fog. It consisted of small and curious stories at first, then quickly flamed to demand our attention—and portions, if not all, of our lives. Sunday did her part, sitting on friends' laps and soothing them as they came by to talk of the nightmarish stories we quickly realized were here to stay. Often, after we'd discussed the latest painful event, Sunday would hop off our visitor's lap and scratch at her pink ribbon on the floor, wanting to play. Then someone who had recently been sick, or just seen a very sick friend, or maybe had just been to a memorial service for a lover or a close friend, could take their mind off of their immediate pain and focus it on this large, comfortable, loving being.

Our friend could laugh and spend a couple of minutes in a happier world playing with The Princess.

I had several dyke relationships, during which Sunday grew distant. As I studied with my teacher, I realized that Sunday began staying away from me when I gradually stopped giving her the nurturing she needed—which was exactly at the same time I stopped nurturing myself in favor of another. I have now learned to recognize those “relationship alarms” when they ring. Perhaps most importantly, I have realized that Sunday is the mirror of my inner/spiritual self, and of my relationship with myself. Now when I start thinking something is wrong with her attitude, I know I need a serious tune-up.

The job I’d finally landed kept us afloat in The Castro for five years. Then came cutbacks, and we were advised to transfer wherever we could. So, on Friday the 13th of October, 1989, I accepted a job in Texas. I have unfinished family business in Texas, housing costs are about 1/10 of San Francisco prices, and I was promised a burgeoning Lesbian community.

The following Tuesday, 17 October, Sunday and I were both in our house at 5:04 for the 7.1 earthquake. I thought I’d never see Texas again. After the house stopped shaking, I (and everyone else in The City) immediately realized that not one item in any house mattered at all. Life instantly became all-important. I was okay, but I couldn’t find Sunday. The front door, through which she was never allowed, stood wide open. My heart sank as I had to accept that she was likely to have bolted into the 18th Street traffic. A couple of hours later, she appeared in the house as my housemates and I ate a campstove supper. As always, she sat in our laps with her cool princess charm, as we shakily talked of our brush with death and continued jumping while the house rocked with each aftershock. I then directed traffic at 18th and Castro all night, coming back after midnight to sit with Sunday once again while painfully watching the TV coverage.

We are now located in Texas, wondering if we’ve made a BIG mistake! However, everything is created with the guidance of The Goddess, and Sunday and I both needed a sabbatical. We have a small (for Texas, huge for SF) house all our own. She sits on a rise in the back yard and continues to watch—this time it’s the cats in the house behind us.

At 0500 this morning, we had a monster thunderstorm with 3" of rain in one hour. I was sleeping in our big waterbed when it started, and I stayed awake to watch. After a powerful blast of lightning and thunder, I felt for Sunday and couldn't find her. I grinned, thinking she was under the bed, since she'd never seen a storm like this. When I rolled over, I found her stretched out beside me, watching with me out the open window with her cool princess look. She seemed to shrug and say, "This is nothing after a 7.1 earthquake!" (But we both still jump immediately whenever the house creaks!)

I guess The Goddess gave us to each other, because Sunday is a major part of my heart and growth this decade. In another couple of years I'll be 50, which seems impossible! Only about five years ago I was 30 and joining the Army to get out of Amarillo. I'll never know just how old Sunday is, but she beats me to bed at nights now.

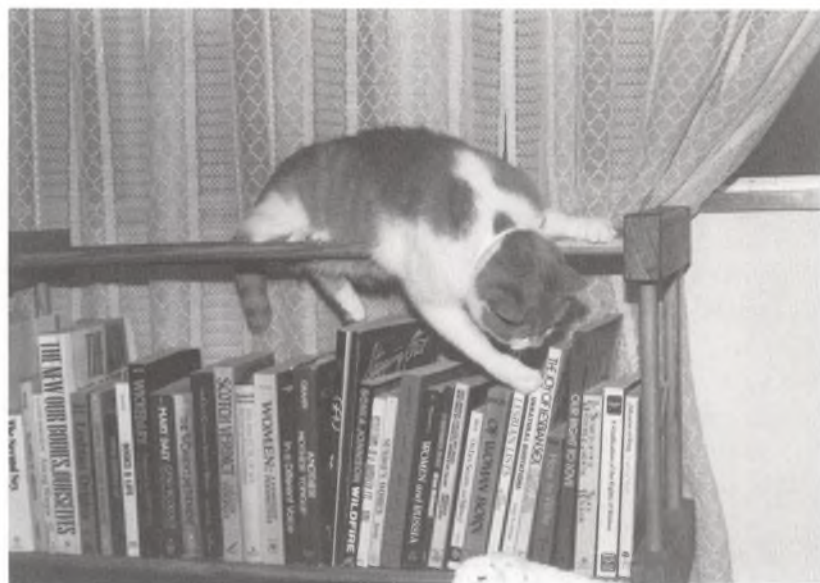


Photo by Karen J. Hall

Janet Harrison

C A T S

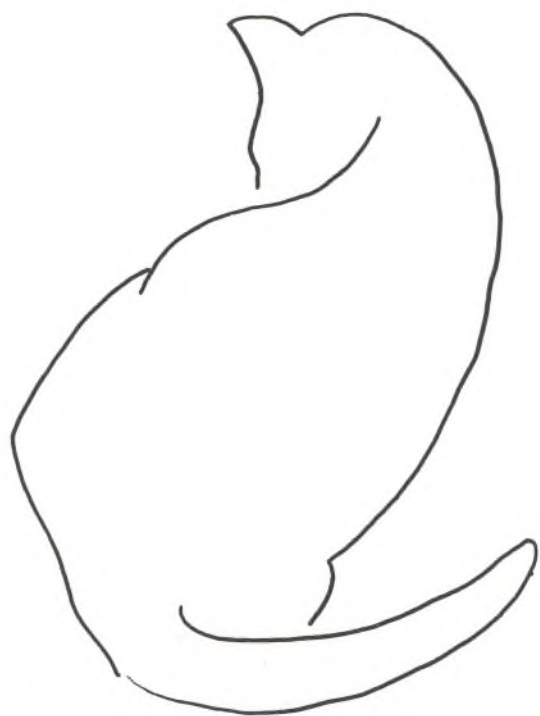
I loves cats
Dat be dats
Be deys skinnies
Be deys fats
Be deys tits
Be deys tats
I loves cats
Dat be dats.

Be deys here
I say scats
Be deys gone
I say drats
Where yous ats?
Where my cats?
I loves cats
Dat be dats.

Deys needs talks
We gots chats
Deys needs love
We gots pats
Deys needs food
We gots rats
I loves cats
Dat be dats.

Deys needs shoes
We gots spats
Deys cold head
We gots hats
Be deys nice
Be deys brats
I loves cats
Dat be dats.

Ain't no dog
Rhyme like dis
Come here cats
Gimme kiss.



Denise Mauldin



Watch Cat, New York City

Photo by Shoshana Rothaizer, 1978

Contributors' Notes

Eileen Anderson is a Separatist and has recently moved to the South. She has more animals and plants, of both the wild and domesticated sorts, in her life than she did in San Francisco. She's white, middle-class, able-bodied, born in 1959. She feels that her questions about owning and domesticating animals are organically related to her Separatist views, habits, and goals, but wishes to acknowledge that many Separatists differ with her about pets.

Abby Bogomolny is an active/writer/photographer/musician/teacher, originally from New York, who lives in Santa Cruz, California. Her Leo, Booga, has been offering training in the fine points of feline etiquette for 17 years.

Tamara Bower is a visual artist living in New York. She has lived with her cat, Mazie, for seven years.

Betsy Brown: I am a lesbian feminist living in Eugene, Oregon. I was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in 1956, and grew up white, gentle, able-bodied, thin, Protestant and middle class. These days I'm an amazon witch with latent agnostic tendencies. I long for a world free from all forms of oppression, and in the past year I've decided that being a lesbian separatist is the best way for me to help bring that about. For the past seven years I've been part of the collective that publishes *Womyn's Press*, one of the oldest surviving feminist newspapers in the u.s. My work has also been published in *Lesbian Contradiction*, *Sojourner*, and *Gay Community News*.

Kat Brown lives in Santa Cruz, California with her three cats and a dog. She works as a California State Humane Investigator at the Santa Cruz S.P.C.A.

Cathy Cade, a lesbian photographer for 20 years, lives in Oakland, California with her two sons and Silver—a great photographer's cat. Cathy is working on a series of postcards from Lesbian and Gay Freedom Days and a book on lesbian mothering.

Wendy Caster's column, "Double Mischief," is nationally syndicated, and her story, "Jennifer," appears in *Lesbian Bedtime Stories 2*. She lives with her lover, Liz, a flute player and rune reader, and their cats, Lil, Chirpy, and

newcomer Zina, named after tennis player Zina Garrison (her mom's name is Martina).

Susan Dambroff is a poet, performer, and Special Education teacher living in San Francisco. Her book of poetry, *Memory in Bone*, was published in 1984 by Black Oyster Press. Other works have appeared in the anthologies, *Ghosts of the Holocaust* and *Of Shadows Emerging: An Anthology of Bay Area Women Writers*.

Terri de la Peña grew up with assorted cats bearing such original monikers as Lucky, Tiger and Kitty. As a pseudo grown-up apartment dweller in Santa Monica, California, she has since strayed from cat monogamy. Her most recent pets were a rat named Liza Rattoni and several anonymous goldfish. These days her frequent drop-in guest is Maxwell, a vain but humorous cockatiel.

Rhonda Dickson is creator of *The Lesbian Survival Manual* and believes that nature's finest triumph is the Cat. "With her sleek and graceful physique, independent and mysterious demeanor, the Cat is the essence of perfection, and when they tell you what to put in your bio, you do it!"

M.B. Doane is a San Franciscan by choice and a Native Texan. She comes from a Texas pioneer matriarchal family, and shares their heritage of adventure, travel, and an obsession with people and books. She loves to write, but being a Gemini, is just now applying the seat of her pants to the chair in front of her great-aunt's rolltop desk long enough to put a whole story together.

Amy Edgington: I am a disabled artist and poet from the South. I have written for *Sinister Wisdom*, *Common Lives/Lesbian Lives*, *Heresies* and other periodicals. My poetry also appears in *And a Deer's Ear*, *Eagle's Song* and *Bear's Grace* and in *Wanting Women: An Anthology of Erotic Lesbian Poetry*.

Pen Engelbrecht, recently 30, always a white lesbian, keeps house in Chicago for The Cats: Beowulf, Pokey, and Evie. She also teaches at DePaul University, pursues a PhD (medieval English lit), "does" lesbian/feminist theory, and sometimes writes/publishes something—lately in *Sinister Wisdom* and *Feminist Studies*.

Tam Garson lives with her lover Tara and works as a Certified Veterinary Technician. This is her second photograph to be published in women's books, and as a part-time freelance photographer she hopes this will lead to future work. P.O. Box 3443, Enfield, CT, 06082.

Diane F. Germain, M.S.W.: I am a French-American Lesbian Feminist psychiatric social worker conducting a strength group for Women Survivors of Incest and/or Childhood Molest which is over four years old. I was arrested

and jailed for protesting the objectification of women in the "Myth CaliPORNia Kontest." I create cartoons and written humor as a hedge against the misogyny of heterosexist phallocentric patriarchy *and* to tickle the Lesbians.

Veronica "Nikki" Gosch was born in a small town in Texas, but quickly found herself hustled about the country and abroad as the daughter of an Army officer. After studying commercial illustration, she settled in Santa Cruz with her wife Deirdre Smith. She hopes to eventually publish a book of her cartoons and is aspiring to be another woman in the Sunday funnies.

Pamela Gray is a poet, playwright and screenwriter presently living in L.A. with her cats Artemis, 14, and Zorba, 16. She can't imagine what it would be like to write without Artemis biting her pen and Zorba trying to lie down on the paper.

Karen J. Hall is a graduate student in English at The Ohio State University. Her poetry has been published in *Sinister Wisdom*, *Common Lives/Lesbian Lives*, and the *Evergreen Chronicles*. This is the first publication of her visual dabbling. Doug is my stepson and he's concerned that his aunt outed him.

Jan Hardy: I've published in *Sinister Wisdom*, *Common Lives/Lesbian Lives*, *Sojourner*, and other journals, and edited *Wanting Women: An Anthology of Erotic Lesbian Poetry*. I am owned by two cats, and I've promised the other one a poem very soon. I've always admired cats for their ability to be both dignified and foolish, often at the very same time.

Janet Harrison: Back when I lived in Nashville, a Michigan native (recently brokenhearted, no doubt) once warned me: "Beware of these Southern Women!" I thought I'd just pass along that sage advice. Now I live in Oakland. So you can let your guard down.

Jodi: I'm a Jewish Disabled Leo Dyke, and the editor of *Hikané: The Capable Womxn* disabled wimmin's magazine for lesbians and our wimmin friends. Oog would have wanted you to subscribe. Send SASE for information to: Hikané, P.O. Box 841, Great Barrington, MA 01230.

Beth Karbe cleans houses in Gainesville, Florida to support her camera habit. She lives with Judy, Dottie, Francis, and Louise (three of whom are cats).

Susan Logan: Marie and Tiffany had been together for 21 years when this portrait was taken. Tiffany lost her eyesight when she was only two years old, but with Marie's love she lived a full and independent life. Tiffany had the ability to be loving and irascible at the same time.

Mab Maher is a writer living in the North Bay Area of California.

Lea Matthews: I was born in Jackson, Mississippi but lived there only five months. After having lived on 115 acres near New Orleans for about that same length of time, the intervening 40-odd years seem a strange aberration. Lea is a chosen name and Matthews is my mother's maiden name. I am a Lesbian-Feminist interested in writing, organic farming and creating a barter economy between city and country Lesbians. I brought twelve boxes of books with me to Louisiana to create a lending library for rural lesbians.

Denise Mauldin: After being injured in a motorcycle accident and temporarily unable to work, I started drawing. My favorite subject is my 16-year-old tabby cat, Orange.

Ruth Mountaingrove is an artist, photographer, writer, poet, singer and songwriter. Amazonia especially enjoyed the songs for her, created on the spot and never written down. Ruth has published in *Lesbian Contradictions*, *Common Lives/Lesbian Lives* and *Off Our Backs*. She was part of the WomanSpirit collective for ten years.

Hilary Mullins was raised by some twenty-odd barn cats on a farm in Vermont. At the time of this printing she resides in Burlington, Vermont where she works at the local food co-op and is writing her first novel—a young lesbian's coming of (coming out!)-age story.

Andrea Natalie's single-panel cartoon, *Stonewall Riots*, is syndicated in numerous lesbian/gay papers throughout the United States. Her first collection of cartoons, also called *Stonewall Riots*, is available in bookstores now. In 1990 Andrea founded the Lesbian Cartoonists' Network, which now has over forty members and publishes a free quarterly newsletter.

Lesléa Newman used to be a "dog person" until Poony Cat and Couscous Kerouac changed her persuasion. She has published nine books, including *Sweet Dark Places*, *Secrets*, *Love Me Like You Mean It*, and *Gloria Goes to Gay Pride*. In 1989 she received a Massachusetts Artists Fellowship in Poetry.

Anita L. Pace: I'm a freelance writer, 39. I've lived with Baby for 16 years, 7 months (as of November 1990), since he was born under my bed. I'm editing an anthology of writing by lesbians healing from relationship loss, while searching for a real job to pay my real bills.

Linda L. Pollard is a native of Baltimore, who enjoys stories usually for small children, and has supplemented all her college expenses with these writings. She is presently catless as she is still trying to cope with separation from two foster cats, Seymour and Matilda Bay, but has an undying love for LB, Bear and Ms. Peanut and their company.

Laurie A. Posner: I am a health worker and a student in the Hutchins School at Sonoma State University. My poems have been published in *First Leaves* and *The Sonoma Mandala*. I am grateful for Katie Anderson, yellow leaves, and rain.

Raven: I'm a 47-year-old disabled Jewish dyke. I'm committed to lesbian community, especially lesbian land. I want to create lesbian land that's accessible to disabled wimmin and children. I believe lesbians have the possibility of creating safe community for all of us. I have published in several lesbian publications.

Frances Rooney's articles, interviews, reviews and short fiction have appeared in magazines and anthologies in the U.S. and Canada. Her slideshow, *Finding Lesbian Herstory* has toured widely. Her anthology of lesbian personal writings, *Our Lives*, was published in March by Second Story Press. Meg, the cat in "Cat Fights" and Mika and Mad Max give her constant joy.

Shoshana Rothaizer is a Native New Yorker Amazon who has lived and travelled in various parts of the U.S., North America, Europe, and the Caribbean. She feels most creative with photography, and hopes that her photos create a bridge between different people and lifestyles. Shoshana has lived communally on various women's lands in the U.S. and Europe, most notably, on Kvindelandet, the women's land in Denmark, from 1979-1980. Her essay, with accompanying photos, can be seen in *Lesbian Land* published by Word Weavers.

Barbara Ruth: I am an environmentally ill dyke, currently living catless because of my own disability and my commitment to making my home as accessible as possible to other disabled lesbians. There seems to be a myth among cat-lovers that people become allergic to cats because we hate them. This is a cruel lie! I urge all dykes to educate themselves about access and to emulate feline inventiveness, sensitivity and persistence so that we can create the lesbian worlds we dream. My beloved Ursula died in 1988. We lived together 14 years.

Maud Samuel and her cats live in Vermont.

Sandia: I am a Jewish lesbian presently working on her third novel: a re-working of Sarah's story in the Florida Keys.

Patricia Roth Schwartz, author of *The Names of the Moons of Mars* (New Victoria) which received a Lambda Literary Award, is the caretaker of Kali, Lilli, and (a recent addition) Vanessa, mother of four. Their household also includes Dusty, a rabbit. In between caring for this crew, she is hard at work on her new novel and a book of humor.

Nina Silver is a trance medium, healer, body-oriented therapist and writer whose work on feminism, sexuality and metaphysics has appeared in such journals as *Gnosis*, *Common Lives/Lesbian Lives*, and *Green Egg*, and the anthologies *Wanting Women*, *Lesbian Bedtime Stories*, and *Women's Glib*. She is currently working on a full-length book, *A Gateway Through the Channel*.

Virginia E. Smith climbed into contemporary poetry after 25 years as an advertising copywriter in the East. A Bryn Mawr College alumna, she studied locally in California and has published three books of poems. Attempting to keep up with the new poets, she enjoys solitude in her "room of one's own"—also cherishes a computer librarian daughter, missionary son and two grandsons.

Julia Tóth lives deep in the Adirondack Mountains not "owning" any cats at present, but puts out a bowl for the feral cats religiously. Her son tamed two last Xmas eve. This story is part of an as yet unpublished larger work.

Alena WordSmith: A Santa Cruz resident for twenty-one years. Membership with L.G.C.C., N.O.W., W.I.L.P.F., A.C.L.U. (No T.V.) Recently published book of poetry. Trained by Rosebud and Frances to cater to their every whim and meow. Enjoys sharing affection and erotica with humans. Prefers to sleep with her cats.

zana: i'm 44, mixed-heritage (jewish/anglo/cherokee), disabled. i've lived on lesbian land for 11 years. i consider it my life's work to participate in the creating of dyke communities that question all we've learned in patriarchy and lead us to our deepest selves.



About the Editors:



Photo by Valerie Jean Chase

Irene Reti is a writer, owner of HerBooks, gardener, and hiker. She is saved from certain word indigestion daily by her two magnificent black cats, Wicca and Wizard. They slept on the keyboard as this book was typeset, and tried to stick at least six black hairs on the paste-up.

Photo by Koré Hayes Archer



Shoney Sien is an artist, writer and mother—and friend to Chelsea, an independent calico cat. She is the author of a collection of very lesbian short stories, *Lizards/Los Padres*, and is currently writing about lesbians and class.

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