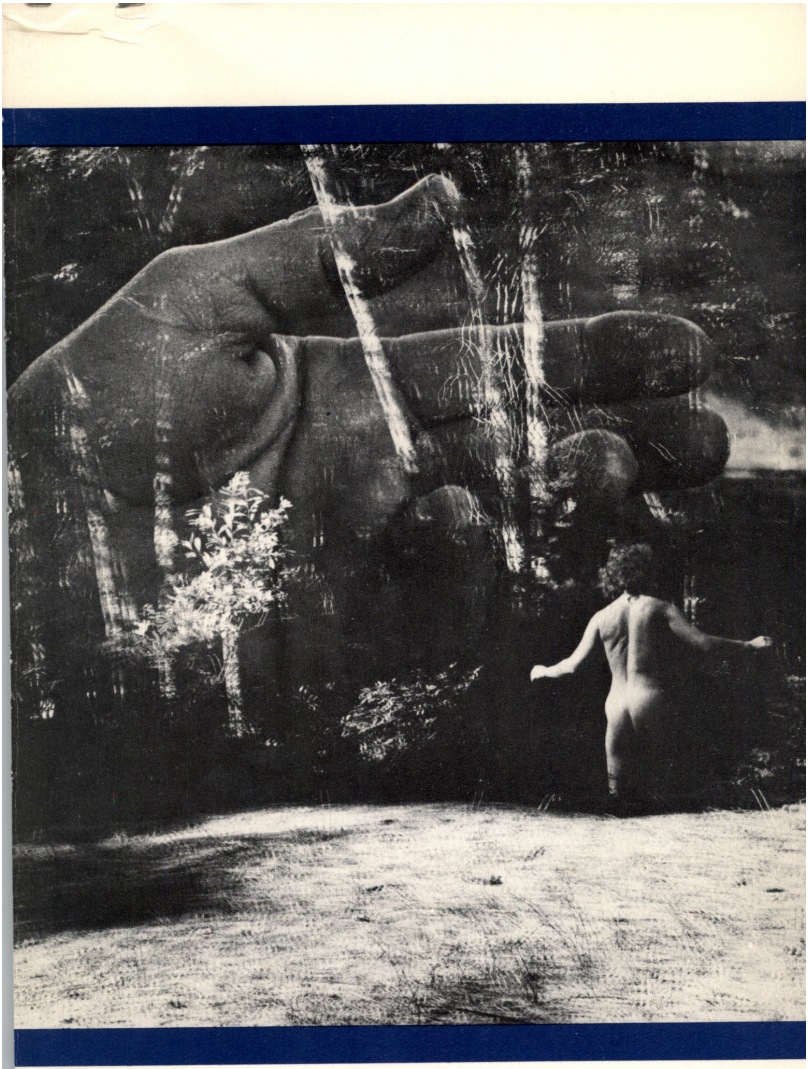

Lesbian Words II

Photographs and Writings

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Introduction

We are happy to be able to publish a second anthology of work by Santa Cruz area lesbians. *Lesbian Words II: Photographs and Writings* offers a glimpse into our world through the lens of lesbian experience. It offers an antidote against the distorted images of lesbians we encounter every day, a shout against the silence of our invisibility and isolation. From inception to design, from the typeface to paste-up, from the clicking of the composing machine to the rumbling of the press, this book is a work of hands as well as heart. Created out of the richness and vitality of our community and from the integrity and beauty of our lives, here are words to read and images to look at, page after page. This book is a gift to ourselves and a gift to you—our community.

Each of us brings our own perspective to the producing of *Lesbian Words II:*

★ ★ ★

Before I had a lesbian community, I had books about lesbians. Books furtively read while standing in the aisles of libraries, and books bought with much deliberation and courage, at not so alternative bookstores. I was eighteen and living with my family in Orange County. I had no lover, no gay friends, knew no people who were like myself. I had books, and in those books I found rendered the love between woman and woman that I so desired, the unmentionable mentioned, the invisible made visible. In books I found a home.

Sue McCabe

★ ★ ★

I watched a blind woman being led through the courtyard as I ate breakfast this morning. It made me think, who would I be if I couldn't see.

I couldn't be a printer; I couldn't be a photographer. I would miss seeing all of Mother Nature, including my sexual peers, lesbians.

As I look through printed materials for lesbians I may as well be blind. I hear our strong voice but rarely do I see our face. For me, a printer and photographer, seeing is believing.

The intention of publishing these images is not only for visual affirmation of lesbians, but to exhibit the artists' talent as well.

Terese Armstrong

I came out during a long, hot, lonely Los Angeles summer, my first summer home from college. I had always escaped the emptiness of LA by hiding in my room, reading books. But there was nothing in the library about lesbians, or in the bookstores in the local shopping mall. I bought my first lesbian book from a handsome white-haired dyke at the local women's bookstore. Its coffee-table-size and orange cover boldly proclaimed *Our Right to Love* in huge type, and I carried it everywhere, hid it under my bed, slept with it under my pillow. That book was filled with pictures of lesbians—lesbians marching, lesbians cooking, lesbians with kids, lesbians hugging. I looked at the pictures over and over, read the stories again and again.

That smoggy summer was almost seven years ago, and I have come out to discover the real complexities of lesbianism, the political questions, the challenge and honor of relationships with women, the pain of discrimination. I have fallen in love with the lesbian community, to become disillusioned with and critical of it, to come back to loving it again, despite those criticisms.

Throughout this process, books by and about lesbians have been tremendously precious to me. I continue to hunger for them, to haunt bookshops searching for new titles. Though I have found lesbian books to curl up with in bed, it is my belief that there can never be too many.

Irene Reti

★ ★ ★

Bettianne Shoshone Sien

Ida

First thing I remember about Ida, she comes to the farm saying, "Got any of those big boys of yours around here to help me with my haying this year?"

My mom tells her no, they're all hired out to neighboring farms already. Nothing she can do to help her out there.

Well, Ida's pretty desperate. She looks around, sees me; "What about that scrawny one?"

My mom snorts, says, "That girl is so lazy. You're not gonna get any kinda work out of her."

Ida says, "I'll give her a try, if you don't care."

Mom looks at me, I don't say anything.

"Okay. You can take her."

Off I go.

"You drive a tractor?"

"Yeah."

Before I know it, I'm driving that baler, she's throwing bales of hay onto the wagon as fast as any man I ever saw, and she wasn't that big, either.

Curly hair, sunburnt face. She would be blowing her nose on one of those big red handkerchiefs like any other guy out there with all that dust blowing around.

She grabs a bale of hay, yells up at me: "Hey, look at this!"

I stop, and get off. My legs are shaking from exhaustion, my nose must be as red as that barn.

What does she show me? A big rattlesnake wrapped right into the bale. She says, "Happens every year couple times, never saw one this size before."

I get back on the tractor, back to work. We must have been out there six hours, never stopping except for a few minutes after each load finished going up the elevator into the haybarn.

Finally she says, "You're a real good worker. Scrawny kid, how old are you? Ten? Eleven?"

"Almost thirteen."

"Twelve," she says, "Well, you're a good worker, I don't care what that mom of yours says."

She says, "It must be 3:00 — pretty hot out here. Better stop, have a bite."

I say sure.

We go walking up the road to the farmhouse, kittens all over the place. One skinny dog, Elmer, must be twenty years old, just panting in the shade.

There's Ida's mom, Pearl, she's almost 80 herself. Pearl says "Who you got there?" Sets some apple pie, lemonade in front of me.

Ida points to me, says, "This here is Bernice Greuning's girl."

"Never knew she had a girl."

"Only one, a darn good worker too," says Ida.

Well, I helped Ida out the rest of the summer. She gave me fifty dollars, told me she wanted me back again next summer. I heard her say to my mom, "Bernice, you can be real proud of this one."

My mom laughed like it was a joke.

In the fall I began high school and I was having a pretty hard time with my folks again. "All those boys," my mom would say about my nine brothers, "and it's this girl that is gonna be the end of me."

We were fighting all the time. They didn't like me wearing blue jeans all the time; I refused to go to church. My grades got worse. Heard the high school counselor say, "That girl can't be going around with her face all bruised up like that." She knew without asking where those bruises were coming from. She says to me, "I really suggest that you find yourself a home where you can work for 'room and board,' take care of kids or something. I don't think you'll find your parents in opposition."

Right there and then I knew where I would go, if she'd have me. Pearl had had a bad stroke in September, and I knew there was Ida having to take care of the farm and her mom all by herself.

The counselor drove me over to Ida's farm. We all sat and talked for a long time.

Finally Ida leans over to me, she says, "Listen, you think you can do it?" She means Pearl's chores: cooking dinners, doing the garden, and tending the chickens. "I'd want you to help me with Pearl, too."

As I shake my head yes, I think that anything would be easier than how I'm living now.

We shake hands; I move in.

Well, I was pretty nervous in the beginning. Ida's house was so clean. Quiet, too. No brothers around to beat up on me, no one sneaking into my room — pestering me at night, no one telling me what to do all the time.

I pitched right in, started taking my boots off before I came into the house, started looking out how I was dressed (clean blue jeans).

I liked cooking for Ida 'cause she always said how nice it was. I followed Pearl's recipes all neatly printed and filed in a box. We had chicken a lot; though I didn't like butchering them it had to be done — I feathered and gutted them, loving the silence of a quiet, clean house.

After dinner the cows had to be milked, then we'd come in and sit around the living room. I'd tell her about school, which I still hated but was getting better grades in. She'd talk about her family, sadly about Pearl, who never spoke or recognized Ida again till the day she died three years later.

One time Ida showed me pictures of her and her friends from the army.

"Never heard of women in the army," I said.

"World War II," she said, "my three brothers all went, only one came back. Pearl was terrified when I joined, but I was very patriotic," she said, "at the time. Oh, they took whatever help they could get."

I told her how badly I wanted to have a different kind of life than I could have in our little town. I didn't know what.

"Yes," she said, "you're a thinker, you wouldn't be happy doing this. And I don't think you're going to be as lucky as I've been with this farm, having all those brothers."

"So you think maybe I should join the army?" I asked, but it sounded pretty awful to me, all those men bossing me.

"I'd never join today. Good God, you'd end up going crazy! No, I think you'd better go to college."

Now, I'd never thought of that. No one I knew went to college. From then on, I thought of it a lot.

Once a week she'd come in from milking, get into the bathtub and soak for an hour, come out all fresh, a little "Evening in Paris" behind each ear, wearing some kind of pantsuit from Sears.

"You watch Pearl for me? You know where to get me if anything comes up!"

Off she'd go to play cards until late into the night, a nickel a game, with Agnes and Minnie just as she had every Thursday night for 25 years.

"What do you all play?" I teased one night, "Old Maid?"

Well, it cracked her up! She says with a wink: "A happier Old Maid you'll never find!"

Watermelon Field Women Photo by Abby Bee

Linda Lou Photo by Abby Bee

Anonymous Teacher

Silence in the Classroom: Being a Lesbian Teacher

What about homophobia?

The question came up in our group, and the room grew strangely silent. This group of expressive, committed, open-minded people seemed suddenly uncomfortable. My heart leaped into my throat; all my blood began to tingle. And I too remained silent, I who love to say what I think, especially regarding issues I know something about.

For two days I reflected on my silence, and realizations began stirring me to my core. My silence became unbearable, and I had to tell them who I am. I had never, ever come out before to a group of fellow teachers. I told them:

I am a lesbian. I'm well-adjusted to the straight world, so well-adjusted that most straight people don't even know I'm gay. I'm not usually very angry, or in touch with any overt oppression. Both my immediate family and my partner's family know and accept us for who we are. I'm out to many of my colleagues. I have many close male friends, and I don't often get hassled in public.

It seems so normal an existence that I even sometimes forget I'm a lesbian. Except . . . when someone asks, what about homophobia? I begin to experience how subtle yet pervasive my oppression really is. That I would remain silent with you! Of all groups of people, wouldn't you be people I could trust?

How well we learn to hide the truth. I can discuss my relationship with you and never once use a tell-tale pronoun. I take it for granted that when I'm with people I'm not out to, it's as if a whole part of my life, and perhaps the most precious part, doesn't even exist.

Living a double life affects my teaching. I stay away from overtly controversial issues that might give someone a reason to scrutinize me. I'm a creative, humanistic teacher, and we do analyze critical issues, but nothing too political. *I'd better be careful. What if someone finds out?*

Is this undue paranoia? Am I feeding the sludge of American apathy by letting this fear affect my teaching? Shouldn't I have the courage to take a stand, and be proud of who I am? After all, most of the gay people I know are models in their professions. What is there to hide?

I am suddenly aware of the legacy of fear we carry. It's a very real fear, even with you, people whom I am coming to love, trust and respect. Let me scratch a bit at the surface of this fear. It is more than just name-calling.

They have murdered us, burned us, at the stake and in the gas chamber, because of whom we love, or how we live. They have taken our children from us. They have put us in mental institutions. They have fired us from jobs and blacklisted us. They have cross-referenced us in the card catalogs with "abnormal psychology," "see also suicide and depression." They have separated us from our mates, our lovers. They have arrested and incarcerated us. They have banned us from public participation. They call us sinners, or pretend that we don't exist. They have silenced us.

That's the overt oppression.

The covert oppression is having to listen to wisecracks in our families and on our jobs, often behind our backs. Or watching young people struggle with their sexual identity, wanting to offer our support, but remaining mute. It is not being able to publicly acknowledge the woman I love.

Gay people have existed in all cultures, through all time, and despite incredible odds against us. I take comfort and strength in reading about our history, or about gays in other countries, and realizing that no matter how hard they try, the homophobes of the world will never rid us from society. We will survive.

Yet in what kind of a world do we want to live? Certainly at least one in which it is safe to love whom we love. So in reflecting on my silence here with you, I realize that to remain silent about any of this would only perpetuate this oppression.

I invite you to examine homophobia. I especially invite you who are proven heterosexuals to use the safety of that position to help make this a more tolerant world.

Gay issues are issues which affect us all. Who is it proper to love, and how? What is proper behavior for a man, or a woman? A girl, or a boy? Who decides these things, and who gives them that right? These are issues not of sexuality or lifestyle alone. They are issues of political, religious and intellectual freedom.

I don't know the quote exactly, but it goes something like "when they came for the Jews, I said nothing; when they came for the gays (Blacks, Japanese, you name it) I said nothing; when they came for me, there was no one left to speak out, so they took me away in silence."

So what about homophobia?

Ruth Ovular '83 © 1983 Photo by Kate Hitt

Self Portrait Jambalaya Club Arcata CA © Jan. 1, 1985
Photo by Kate Hitt

Sue McCabe

A Letter to Kirk

I call myself a dyke
and let you kiss me
against the fender of your truck
and me, calling to your hands.

It could be your old-time truck
painted emerald green and red
a hole in the floorboard
a window broken open.

It could be your walk
inside faded jeans
your feet enclosed in leather.
Oh, those expensive shoes
splattered with paint.

Then there's the day
we sat outside to lunch,
a tiger joined us.
While his owner ate a sandwich
the tiger dragged its chain.
I didn't know what to say.

So I never came to your place of work,
a stone's throw from my house.
It made me scared to think of the tiger
so close to home.

I'm lonely in winter.
Did I tell you, Kirk,
a window broke inside my room.
It's cold at night
and I think of you
just a stone's throw from my house
and the tiger growing in its cage.

So why do I want to scream at you—
Get out of my life I'm a dyke
and why do I dream of you
and think to ask you
to make love.

A window broke inside my room.
It's cold in March.
The sky is a striped tiger
pawing the field outside my house.

Kirk, it is so easy to love women
like taking a breath.
So easy to love women.
But a woman hasn't found me yet
and I, well I am up against a tigered sky,
feeling its breath on my neck.
And a woman hasn't found me yet.

Jennifer Eisley

Girlchild

Father told her go graze in the field
If you can't be a human being at the table.

She spent hours grazing in the garden
Berries and insects and sweet-tipped nectar flowers
Sweet corn, centers of grass,
Violets and clover and phlox.
She'd pretend she was a horse
    and put her head down to chew grass
Pretend she was a toad and stick her tongue out at bugs
Pretend she was a tortoise and eat vegetables in slow bites
juice running down her whole front

Go change your shirt, you can't come in until you're clean
You can't go unless you wear a dress
Unless you behave like a lady
Unless you wash your face
You can't have your picture taken
Unless you take off that ugly denim jacket
Now smile!

Girlchild the earth was her friend
She rolled in it, ground it into her skin
Til she was black with loam,
Grinning, hair in snakes, rat's nests
Decorated with ropes of wilting dandelions
The juice stained her skin in small brown circles
and would not come out.

Father would strip her in the garden
hose her down until she was white and clean
and chilled to the bone.

Photo by Liz Camarie

Julie Litwin

Esperanza

March 15, 1984. I am a midwife. It's early morning. I'm driving south on San Andreas Road, through the posh beach towns . . . Seascape, La Selva Beach, Manresa Beach . . . under the bridge which is graffitied with a large red tongue and the words, "Watsonville Go Home" . . . through miles and miles of strawberry fields. At this time of year there are long strips of white plastic covering each row of plants. Only the little green leaves stick out. The plastic, I presume, keeps the chemicals in and the bugs and weeds out. The lines of plastic catch the morning sun and gleam brightly. I'm glad that it is March and sunny out. The long winter will soon end for the farmworkers who have been barely hanging on through all these months. Last season was bad, and there's been no work for most since September — six months with no income. Workers who are undocumented can't get public assistance. This year they couldn't even collect their due unemployment benefits without presenting a green card. I drive past the entrance to Sunset State Beach. I think of the sea otters playing in the shallow waves, the shells, the sand dollars to be collected, the pelicans coolly folding their wings in midair and plummeting straight for their breakfast. In the summer the campgrounds are filled with fancy tents and Winnebagos.

One mile further down the road is the entrance to San Andreas labor camp. You can't see the camp from the road. You turn in onto a very bumpy dirt lane which is lined with weeping willow trees and drive into the parking area. My car is very new and shiny, and I feel conspicuous as I approach. The parking area is filled with banged up old cars — muddy, with ripped upholstery. There are a number of long wooden barrack-type buildings up ahead. I guess they used to be painted pink. Beer bottles and glass lie scattered around. Doors and screens are hanging on by maybe one working hinge. A few clothes flap on lines. Everyone is hanging out, waiting for winter to end. There are lots of children running around playing on the bare ground. When it rains this place becomes a sea of mud. A group of several four or five-year-old boys eye me. A taunting little voice with a strong accent accosts me, "He loves you. He wants to kees you, baby." They use the English words and inflections that they've heard their fathers and brothers hurl at white women. I say good morning to them in Spanish. They giggle and run away. There is a group of about ten men sitting over by the dumpster — drinking beer, playing cards and looking at me.

I open the door of my car, take out the baskets of birth supplies and head for Esperanza's door, which is at the end of the first building. Each family in the camp lives in one room. The floors are plain concrete. The walls and ceilings are boards with lots of cracks in them. The few windows usually don't open, and the doors don't fit the frames. It's easy for rain to seep in. The rent, I hear, is $250 a month. Esperanza's room is very clean inside. There's a piece of carpet on the floor. The walls and the refrigerator (which doesn't work too well) are painted turquoise. There are hand-crocheted doilies on the back of the couch. Esperanza's two little boys, Miguelito and Juan, are dressed in matching outfits which she made for them — blue pants and vests with white shirts, a smiling duo. They both have bad coughs.

Erica, my midwife partner arrives.

I remember that a few years ago the water supply at this camp was contaminated with a variety of parasites. It took months to get anything done about it.

The little boys are eating breakfast now . . . potato chips and leftover popcorn from K-Mart. Later they're each given a boiled hot dog.

I remember the fire that happened in July of 1982 at one of the other labor camps. A faulty gas stove ignited and burned a pregnant woman and her one-year-old son to death.

Erica points to the crib where Miguelito and Juan sleep. There's an electric outlet right between the bars, very easily accessible to their fingers. She notes that we must remember to bring some safety plugs tomorrow.

Esperanza is in labor. This will be her third baby in a span of three years. I have helped her in all three pregnancies. She is tired from being up all night with contractions. She's trying to supervise her children and her husband and have her baby all at once. She's irritated. Her last labor didn't last this long. I like the nightgown she's wearing. It has seashells printed on it.

Her husband Miguel goes out, and some neighbor women come in to visit. They begin to talk to me, telling me about their births and their families. Esperanza complains and swears that she is never going to have another baby. The women roll their eyes and answer, "That's what we all say."

One asks me if I am married. "Uh oh," I think. "Here come the questions that I'm always uncomfortable answering."

"No," I say.

"Well, don't you want to get married?" she asks.

"No," I say.

They giggle. The concept of not getting married is unthinkable.

"How old are you?" another asks.

"Twenty-eight," I reply.

Again, it's unthinkable. All of these women have had several children by the time they're twenty-eight. Some have had as many as ten. Besides, by twenty-eight their lives may be three-fourths of the way over. The average life expectancy for a Hispanic farmworker is thirty-eight.

"Maybe you'll get married soon," says one.

"Maybe it's better not to," laughs another. "Children are so mischievous, and men . . ." They all laugh.

"Well," I say, "I do think about having children. Children are wonderful."

"Yes, a gift from God," says one of the women. "It's hard to keep them clean and support them, but they're beautiful. In Mexico we have big families. Here it's hard."

"Do you live with your mother?" queries one of the women.

"No. My parents live in another state of the United States, I tell her. "It's called Kansas. It's sort of near Chicago."

"How far away is that?" she asks.

"Oh, about three or four hours in an airplane, like Mexico," I answer.

"Well who do you live with?" one asks.

"Two other women," I say.

"You don't have any family here?" they ask, surprised. "Why did you come then?"

"I came here to work," I answer. They understand that.

"Oh, so you work and send money back to your parents to help them?" Since that's what many of them do, it's definitely a comprehensible idea.

"Not exactly," I say, trying to imagine myself sending ten dollar money orders to my wealthy father.

"Your mother must be very sad that you're so far away," says one of the women sympathetically.

"I guess so," I say, thinking of my mother who has told me that she thinks that midwifery is primitive and barbaric and who can't bear the thought of her daughter being a lesbian.

We talk some more and then the women leave, taking Esperanza's children with them so that she can concentrate on her labor. Miguel enters again. He's dressed in a tight shirt and is wearing his beige-colored cowboy hat with the white feather in it. He asks me how everything is going. "Fine," I tell him. "The baby will be born soon." In the rooms all around Esperanza's and in the cars outside there are radios blaring. The noise gets to an intolerable level. Esperanza bangs on the wall between her room and the loudest offender. The music increases in volume. She bursts into complaints about the inconsiderateness of her neighbors and this "dirty awful place." She sends her husband out to try to quiet the neighbors. He knocks on the door. They don't answer. It's getting hotter and hotter inside. There's no ventilation. I feel nauseous. Miguelito comes in.

Esperanza gives him a plastic ball to take outside. She tells him to be careful so that the older boys don't take it.

At 1:01 p.m. the baby is born. It's another boy, very tiny but very spirited. Miguel comes in to make sure that everything is alright and to see if it's a boy or girl. The neighbors and their children come in to inspect the baby. After everyone leaves, Erica and I give Esperanza the usual postpartum instructions and tell her that we'll be back tomorrow.

I head north again through the same strawberry fields and beach towns. I think of my work and why I love it. I think of the new baby and the world that he has been born into. I think of Esperanza. Her name means hope.

Love Echoes

Photo by Abby Bee

Cactus Flower Photo by Abby Bee

Photo by Lauren Crux

Urban Camouflage

Sequoia

No, I'm not thin
No, I'm not thin
No I am not thin
the world is looking at me
through anorexic glasses
and I am wide
I do not fit into
their little round
spectacles
I do not fit into
their anorexic
lenses
I am too big
I am too strong
and I will not belong
I will not be cramped
and crumpled
into a small
bite size package
I will grow out
in all directions
like a sequoia
and you will hear booming thunder
and know that it is my laughter
and that I am laughing at you
in pity
for I am a strong
sequoia
and you cannot even
look at me through
your glasses.

S. Hope

Remembering

*

I am six, I think. That's the age
I was when we moved to Cotati.
Betsy's brother has lured me into
his bedroom. He may have bribed me.
The attention itself may have
been enough to get me here.
I am lying face down on his bed,
his hands have worked their way
up the legs of my red knit shorts.
He is an adult, almost, babysits
me often, will start junior college
in another year. I only know enough to know
that this is wrong and somehow my fault.

*

For the past several weeks I've been helping my new lover write a sociology paper examining the institution of compulsory heterosexuality. I get irritable, slogging through the language of sociologists, but the topic sticks with me. Why did it take me so many years to realize I *could* be a lesbian? I never stopped getting crushes on my female classmates. In high school I dated men, held my friend Alicia's hand, begged to kiss her after everyone else had left the locker room. I was just then starting to learn I didn't have to let someone touch me, just starting to learn to defend my body, to understand it was mine.

*

It's almost embarrassing. *He never*
fucked me. I am sitting on a coarse,
beige couch trying to explain to my first
therapist what happened. Somehow,
the fact that he kept his cock outside me,
outside my vagina, is tripping me.
I'm afraid what I'm saying isn't enough
doesn't serve to start that litany
of things-since-then we've been working with.

He expected me to touch it, to kiss it,
to take it in my hands, rubbed it against me,
used his hands on me, undressed me,
pried my body open with his fingers.
And I am worried this isn't enough.

In another year I'll hear worse stories
from my lover Rosa. Her list is endless.
The workers on her father's farm. A friend's
father. Strangers. Her own sister, even.
She almost rhapsodizes telling me
and refuses to believe when I say I don't
ever remember liking it.

*

Rosa and I took off one weekend,
drove to Salinas, used my tips
from that week's waitressing for a room
at the Travelodge. We hadn't been able
to sleep together because of her fear
of her children, mine of my parents.
Our first night, I dreamed
I was serving her, the booth a great
bed I curled into
before handing her the food.

*

I'm not much for conspiracy theories. Child molesting as an indoctrination into the workings of the patriarchy. As an introduction to the life to follow. Even after talking to friends (there's literally *no-one* who can't remember something once you get talking), I prefer to think of it as unique, my private horror. Something other women don't have to worry about, don't have to teach their children about. When my friend Becky got married, I told her. And I felt ridiculous. I couldn't even believe myself, felt it was some story I was making up for the sake of the attention.

*

I am trying to picture a six-year-old.
The way you told me it was. The hot
air buzzing above the yellow field
of your father's ranch, twenty miles
from Salinas. He is at least ten years
older than you, brown, rich
with the blood your family never married
into. You are enjoying this,
your hands free on his huge body
scaled to proportions far from your own.
His palms the size of your
hands, his eyes each the size of your mouth,
his cock how many times bigger
than the hole he guides it into.

I am trying hard to believe
the pleasure you put into this story.
I am trying hard to take some of it
for my own, to rewrite my own history
and I can't do it and I scream at you
to stop, stop talking.

*

I don't know if this has something to do with the dreams I have. Not nightmares, though they should be; that's what bothers me. When Luisa and I wake up in the morning, we trade dreams while we shower, talk slowly, lather each other's backs, write messages in the foam. Luisa can't usually remember hers; I remember mine all: infants left in the fields at night to be eaten by rodents, my father roasting people at a family cookout, wrapping them carefully in foil after marinating, being forced at gun point into a car, bearing children who are horribly deformed, being raped. I don't understand how I sleep through these.

*

It is only a week ago and I am telling
Luisa everything. The details,
number of times, for how many years.
She wants to know *how often?* Sometimes
every day, sometimes only twice a month.

After we moved when I was eleven,
I went back one weekend to stay with Betsy,
my best friend. I still didn't know
how to avoid her brother, now in his
twenties, though when he backed me into
his room I made him promise
not to touch me. He does anyway, and,
I tell Luisa, *I hit him across the face.*
I hit him and ran. With your fist,
she asks, or with your hand? *With my hand,*
with only my open hand.

Photo by Lauren Crux

Rachel Harwood

July

this is July to the bone
foxtail wild
bleached
the clay cracks under my feet
sharp with heat
you know it:
you are what I want
I can feel
the hard light
in my own body
fierce, well-known
listen:
I want you
smell the sagebrush
burning in the sun
it's like that

for my father

Turning dark wood in my palms
(a bowl for my lover)
I think of you
your careful hands
which I've always loved
thick-fingered, heavy
scarred and maimed
handling the stuff of your work
delicately and gracefully
touching wood and stone
along the lines of life.
Hands, wood, stone
the same in my heart:
foundations of my world.

You showed me how to hold
the hammer and nails
mallet and chisel.
"Each saw has its own angle,"
you told me. "Never carve
towards yourself."
You gave me your tools
and loved what I made.
You told me I could make anything.
You carried me on your shoulders
and let me hold on by your hair.

Your sweat, sawdust and beer. That was
the smell my kid's-nose loved.
"Do as I say, not as I do," you joked
warning me against short cuts.
Bittersweet. Meaning more than that.
But you taught me to chug-a-lug
ale from the can. That was
the tool that slipped
gouging you murderously
while I watched, helpless
then as now.

I never drink and rarely see you
I bought my own tools
almost secretly
unable to tell you what I was making.
Friends showed me how to cut through the sapwood
to heartwood; I had forgotten.
Now you see what I'm carving
and I see what you're carving
but we don't talk. Silence is
another sharp edge
between four hands that look alike.

Photo by Lauren Crux

Julie, KZSC © 1985 Photo by Terese Armstrong

Julie, KZSC ©1985 Photo by Terese Armstrong

Julie Hannah Brower

The Day the Nuclear Bomb Went Off

Bombs always go off when I am at KZSC. KZSC is the radio station where I work, where I'd been working about two years. It was Tuesday, August 14, 1984. I was doing my six to nine a.m. radio show.

I was playing records. I don't spend a lot of time previewing albums, and I get tired of playing the same old things on my show. So I thought ah ha — I'll play this song off a folksong album. It was a Fred Small album — *The Heart of the Appaloosa*, I think. I'd played a lot of music I knew. It must have been 6:35 a.m. already. There was a song on the album called "Dig a Hole in the Ground." I had Fred Small cued up on Turntable Two, and I was watching everything else — two other turntables, trying to preview Public Service Announcements to read over the air, and generally taking care of business. After the song on Turntable Three was over I hit Turntable Two for Fred Small. It was a song I didn't know, but I trusted it because it was on a Fred Small album.

I was cueing Emmylou Harris on Turntable One when I heard the Emergency Broadcast Signal. "This is not a test. I repeat, this is not a test. This is an actual emergency. KABOOM!!" I knew KDON (the emergency information station) had just blown up. I had a clear image in my mind of the Monterey side of the peninsula blowing up. I even saw the white dust from the explosion. I got on the air and told all the listeners to tune into KDON for emergency information, because a bomb had just gone off. My voice was shaking. I was almost crying. My legs were shaking too. I didn't know what to do. I was surprised that no glass shards were in my back — all the accounts of nuclear explosions I've read have had people with glass blown into their skin. I thought about moving away from the KZSC window. I wondered how it could possibly matter.

Emmylou Harris was going around on Turntable One. I called my lover to ask her if she would come up to the station because I was scared. She said no. She said she didn't really think a bomb went off. She switched the dials on her home radio and didn't hear any news about a bomb exploding. I tuned into the KPFA remote signal and listened for bomb news. There was none. I thought KPFA was not telling the listeners about the bomb. I was furious at my lover for not coming up to the station when I was so scared. She said she thought the safest place to be if a nuclear bomb went off was Northwest Washington State. I think that

was the beginning of the end of our relationship. Anyway — I thought of leaving KZSC (and Emmylou Harris) on and heading to my (then) gal's house. But I'm not supposed to leave the station transmitter on with no one attending it. So I stayed.

I was still alive. I didn't understand how. I wondered if I was in the only existing building on Earth. KPFA was still going. I didn't understand how. I still had the shakes. I remembered my friend Halfmoon talking about the United States invasion of Grenada, and that the radio programmer on the one radio station there picked a very socially relevant song to play as the United States Military was landing on the shores of Grenada. I wondered why I was playing Emmylou Harris during the nuclear bomb? It was very inappropriate.

I don't know how I kept playing songs. I don't remember if I played the first edition of the news at 7:00 a.m. Oh yeah — I did, and I talked to my girlfriend during the news broadcast. She helped me figure out what could have happened, since obviously the bomb didn't explode.

You'll never guess . . . It was the Fred Small song "Dig a Hole in the Ground" that I hadn't previewed. It was an anti-nuclear song, and part of the song was a simulated Emergency Broadcast Signal. I listened to the song during the news. Sure enough, Monterey hadn't blown up, I didn't have glass shards in my back, and KZSC was still on the air. I was still shaking, and still angry at my girlfriend for not coming up to the station when I was so scared.

Now I preview anti-nuclear songs before I play them.

Dykes on Bikes 1985 San Francisco Gay Parade Photo by Terese Armstrong

Jo Storsberg

Tell Eileen I've Come For Her

It was raining.
I was driving.
You were leaning forward, looking straight ahead,
talking.
Telling me secrets.
You never turned to face me.

For seven years you lived in terror,
you were now getting free.
"Finally," you sighed.
I heard it for the first time.
You had been beaten
by a woman.

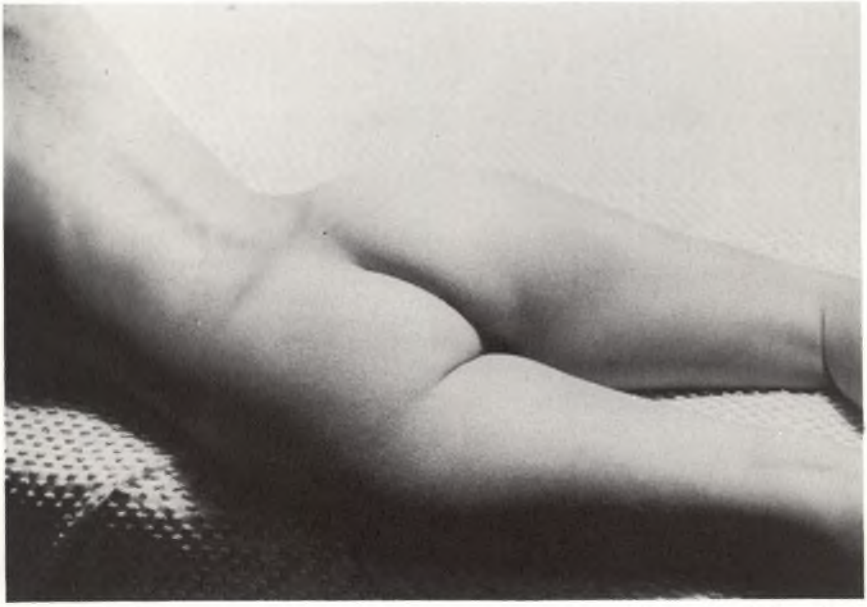
I came to your door
because of your cries over the phone.
There was fire in her eyes.
I had heard her pounding on your flesh.
I didn't know women did this to women.
I didn't know.
"Tell Eileen I've come for her."

I read feminist poets, philosophers,
they saved my life.
I celebrate feminist culture,
run workshops on nonviolence.
I've spoken of the connections between patriarchal society,
military buildup and violence against women.
But I had never heard of this.

Women do rape women.
Women are brutal to women.
Women exploit women.
I was not prepared.

We live together as lovers,
partners now.
We sleep so close, so entwined
that sometimes I don't know when our
lovemaking ends and our sleeping begins.
I awaken feeling your body tense,
your hands clutching
another nightmare.
"She was coming at me again . . ."

Somethings have changed for me.
I can no longer assume
that we are all sisters.
Nothing prepared me for this
betrayal.



Untitled, 1978 Photo by Abby Bee

Ellen Bass

Eighteen White Swans

for Janet, who asks me how I can be so sure I want to join my life with hers

Yesterday on Martha's Vineyard I canoed down Deep Bottom Cove
The wind was strong and my muscles laughed to know their use.
Past the last spit, the channel opened into Great Pond
and across the wide expanse of water, through the distant cliffs
white caps of the ocean frothed.

The eyes are grateful
for this large, soothing blue: blue-gray
of pond and sky
and haze of blue-gray moisture in the air.
    Some beach grass, wild roses
    and tan of sand, a couple gray weathered houses
    to one side, but mainly this
quiet blue-gray, the wind warmed by a hazy sun
the sound of rippling water, the constant
small motions of the pond
reflecting light, darker in shadow, changing
and the same, the breakers always white at this distance
through the opening in the cliffs.

And onto this come eighteen white swans
their great graceful wings flapping, louder
than anything I've imagined. They wing
amazing sound from air. Long necks extended
they slow, feet reaching for the water
wings high, splash
and subside
quiet. So quiet then.
The near rippling of pond and dull roar of ocean
all that's audible.

The swans float and feed, curved necks dipping
down into the shallows, raising again.
Two or three lift their wings, arching huge, feathers
distinct at the tips. But only for a moment.
They settle again. Drifting, feeding: eighteen—
    those farthest from shore are indistinct. I can barely
    count them—but yes, eighteen
white swans in a vastness of blue-gray.

After a long time, I walk along the beach.
A man sits looking out, as I did.
"It's pretty, isn't it?" I say. He answers slowly,
"I think this is about as pretty as it gets."

Rose Petals

for Janet

I draw your bath
with rose petals:
peach, fuchsia, lavender
ivory rimmed in wine.
The fragrance steams the tiny room.
I shed my clothes. You
relax into the heat
as I jewel you, one dove-soft petal
    harboring each nipple
several across your shoulders
    like a summer shawl.
Then one shell-pink on each cheek, a blush
a row across your brow like honor
and a flock loose in your curls like bird song.

You sit cross-legged,
sunset petals float like joy
in the pool between your legs.
There is moonlight everywhere.

When I rub you, the blossoms
release their scent, the petals give up
    color and their down,
become transparent, veined membranes.
You sign into my palm, your face
calm as a landscape.

I have saved some petals
for our bed. I glide their oils
into your skin until you gleam.
You open your mouth to me
like an August bloom, fluttering
my body like petals in wind, filling my mouth
with summer rain. You drink
at my wet brilliant rose until
I lift my arms and legs like branches
    to the generous sky.
Stars tremble
and I cry out like wind through stars.
I cling to you, sobbing
an overflow, an abundance of life.

Then I hold you lightly, tears
slipping from me as these minutes
these days, slip away.
The exquisite sweetness—and the transience:
change, loss
and the sharp precision of all I cherish.

For Janet, at the new year

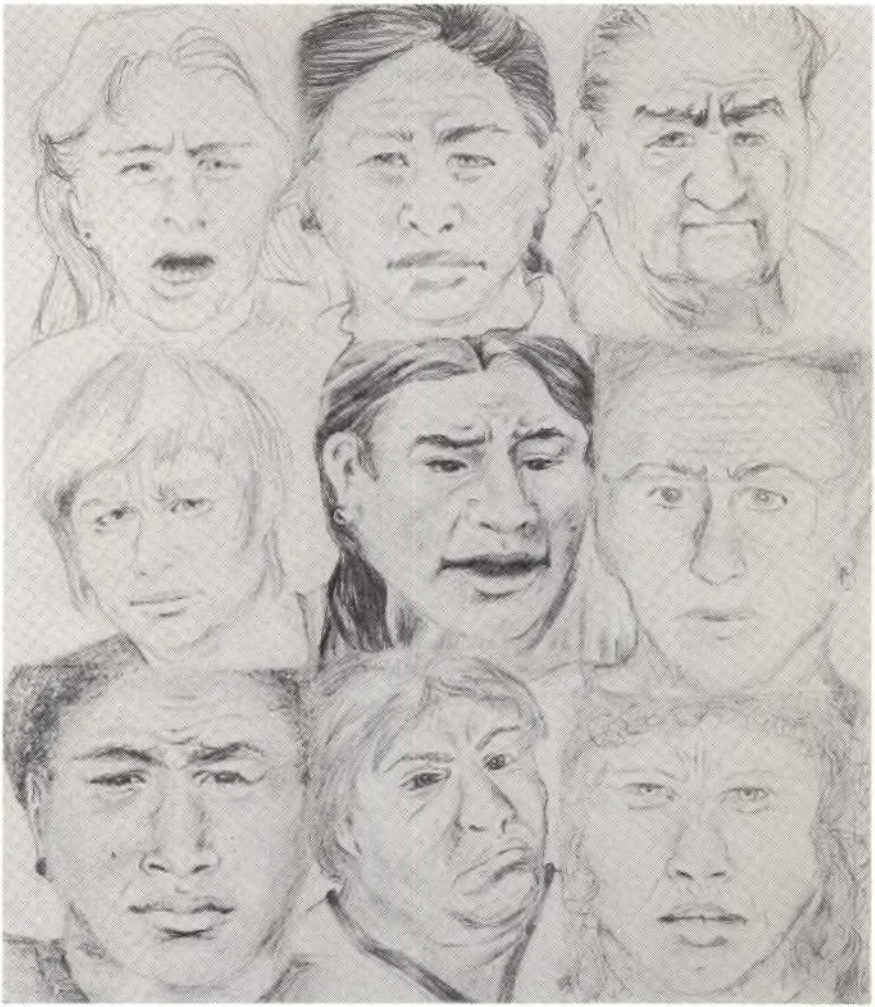
The way I want to love you, the way
I want to be loved is
with such abundance, with
so much willing profusion—
like those tiny blue flowers
that turn a glade into a sky blue lake,
or our stars, brilliance strewn
across the black felt sky like a
child gone wild with glitter and glue.

The way I want to be loved
the way I want to love you is with
courage, the knowledge we may be
ripped apart, cell torn from cell, but choosing
this capacity—tender, glorious, common.

The way I want is nourishing
so sustaining that from each others' breasts
we suck what will commit us
to leave our nest, warm and musky:
you to harvest coffee in the Nicaraguan hills, or me
to steady a Boston woman exorcising her father's thrusts,
you to offer sanctuary, me to blockade.

I want a love that quickens the dead
wood of our hearts, rubbing life into the sticks
with the power of the seasons, revealing
brittleness to be only winter
with buds straining against the bark.

Photo by Lauren Crux



Nine Women Frowning Pencil drawing by Rachel Harwood

Irenia Quitiquit 1983 International Women's History Week
State Capitol Sacramento © 1985 Photo by Kate Hitt

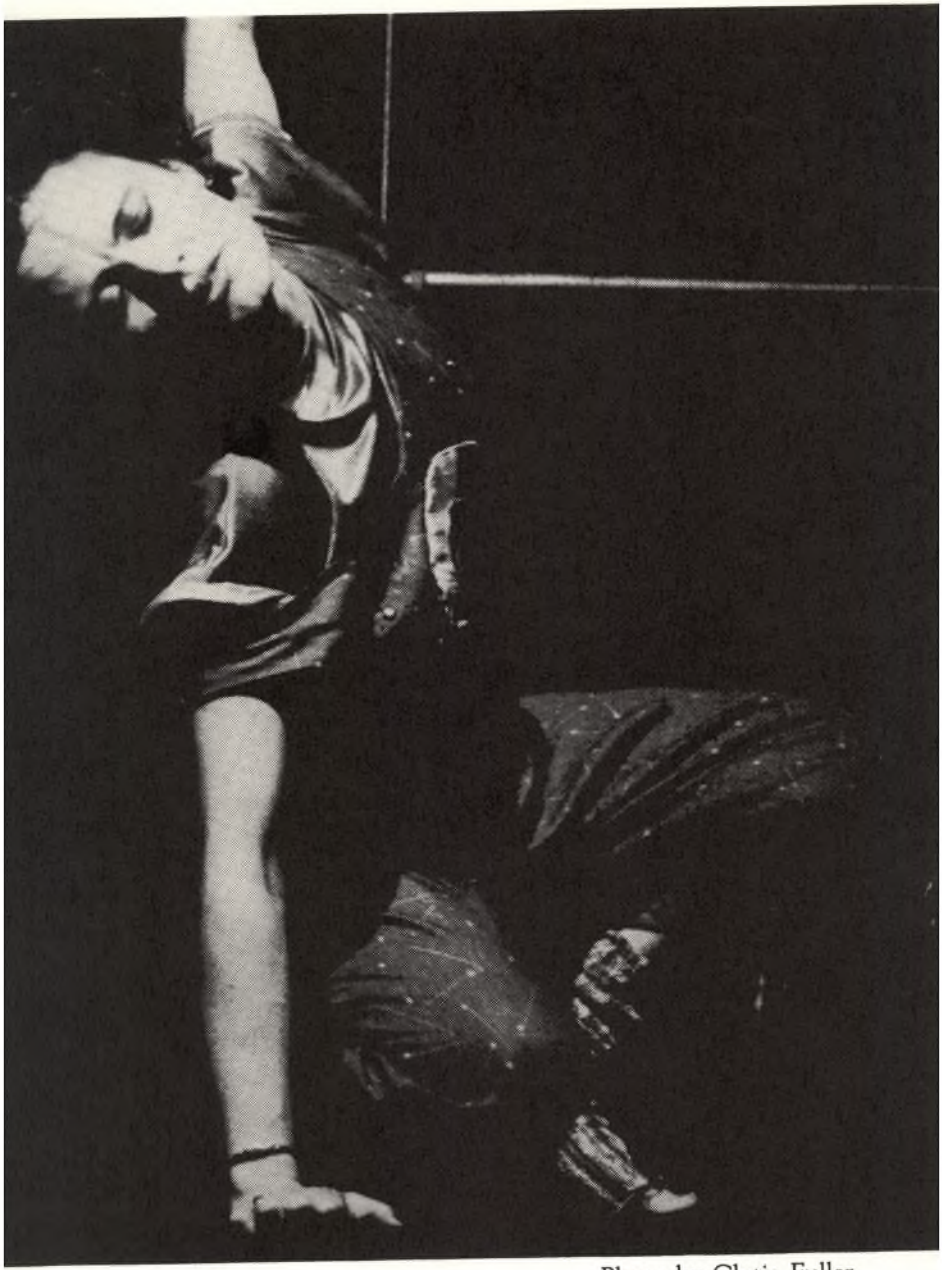


Photo by Clytia Fuller

Helen Langley

Letters: A Trio

Mississippi, 1864

Dear Ma,

It's almost dawn, and we have orders to move into Vicksburg at first twilight. I've been thinking about you, Ma and the way you used to sit on the porch, singing to me and my brother when we were young.

I feel so old now, this war has gone on so long. I want it to end. I'm so afraid of what is out there in the field beyond those trees. That's where I have to go in the next hour or so, into that field, to kill the enemy. It's funny, Ma, how the enemy looks more and more like me.

My rifle is propped against my knee. It is well oiled and ready to fire. I know what I have to do as soon as we move out.

The sweating starts now, Ma, like in the night. Remember when I would wake up afraid, and call out to you. You would hold me, wiping the sweat from my brow, talking to me sweetly.

I have to go now, Ma, it's getting light. I have to go out and shoot a Yankee in a blue uniform.

The sweat and the fear come faster now. My heart beats quicker, shouts are heard. It is time to move out. Branches and twigs snap under our feet. We are all running, screaming, charging the enemy. My anger rises and falls in nauseating, terrifying waves. A scream erupts from my throat. It is a wail, a battle cry, an infant cry.

I see him now, almost too easy a target. As I get closer, my breath comes in short bursts. Soon I am almost on top of him. He crouches as a frightened animal, then rises to meet me, as bullets leave our rifles, exploding into the dawn light.

As I look hard into the enemy's face, I see my brother, his head torn open from my shot. My chest opening, and my heart falling. Death happens to us in an instant.

We see you on the porch, Ma, weeping as the news arrives, telling you of the death of your sons. Your tears stream forever. Did it give you peace, Ma?

Capitola, 1984

Dear Mom,

It's been days now since we spoke, really, about true things. I've tried to tell you in many ways how much you mean to me. I remember things so long forgotten.

This war in me will only end when I end it. I remember the nights when you sat on the couch with me, silent and knowing. You, you alone did believe me when I told you how much I wanted to die. How much I wanted to be at peace with myself at last.

I'm going to go Mom. I'm going to wait until I know you're asleep. The cliffs across the street beckon me. A perfect place to end this pain, this life of misery.

We both have pushed so hard, so long, against this time. I knew I had to do it tonight, Mom, when we sat on the couch together, you so brave, so strong. Not like the other nights when we sat close.

A while ago you hugged me, and kissed me good night. You looked me in the eyes, like you do, and said "I love you, Brian," and I knew you meant it.

I said, "Just let me go" and you knew I meant it. You told me often that life and death are something we do alone. And now I go alone to the cliffs.

Good-by Mom and good old Bro Warren; like a good Boy Scout I'm prepared to die, and maybe now, Mom, you are prepared to live.

I'm standing on the cliff now, ready to take flight. I am running and screaming the cry of every son who ever died in war. An infant cry. A warrior's call. A chilly and final battle cry.

My lifeless body lays on the beach. Soft ocean waves embrace this face that was once mine now bloodied from the fall. I watch and wait.

I see so clearly the blood shed by countless boys who fought and died for peace. Peace for God and one's country, peace for family, and most of all for Mom.

Mom, I did not find that peace I sought in death. I just killed myself, my brother, my father. But why am I not dead? I cry until I have no more tears.

I'm looking in a Kaleidoscope at a myriad of color and images, then darkness and then colors once again. My life was never in black and white.

A coloring book sits in front of me. I'm in kindergarten, a box of crayons at my side. Mom, I forgot to stay in the lines. I colored the wrong picture.

Your loving son
Brian
10-5-66 to 10-2-84

Dear Son,

I have a thousand years of tears to shed for boys like you, and thousands more for mothers like me. I wait for the rain to fall believing it is the tears of all mothers weeping for their sons, and for themselves. I think of our tears falling to earth in winter storms, watering the soil that grows new life. Filling the rivers with sadness and sorrow.

I know Son that you found no peace, neither in the living nor the dying. Each time a boy like you fights for peace, the battle continues. Brian, it is for you that I say—Mothers, don't give your sons to war, to die in some chilly foreign land, or just across the street. Hug them often. Don't make men of them. Make lovers of your sons.

Each day now I take a moment or two and give my life to peace. Seeing once again the scene where the police came to tell me they had found your body. That my son was dead. And your brother, screaming, kicking and hitting the policeman, yelling "What have you done to my brother?" Like a scene from some movie. A movie that cost too much to see.

I will remember you, son, and all that you meant. You fought a private war, alone and frightened. Now you watch me crying, I know, and you watch me laughing, the gentle laugh of joy. For me the fight is over. The sun/son shines brighter, and I keep the promise I made to a boy. I let you go.

Your loving mother

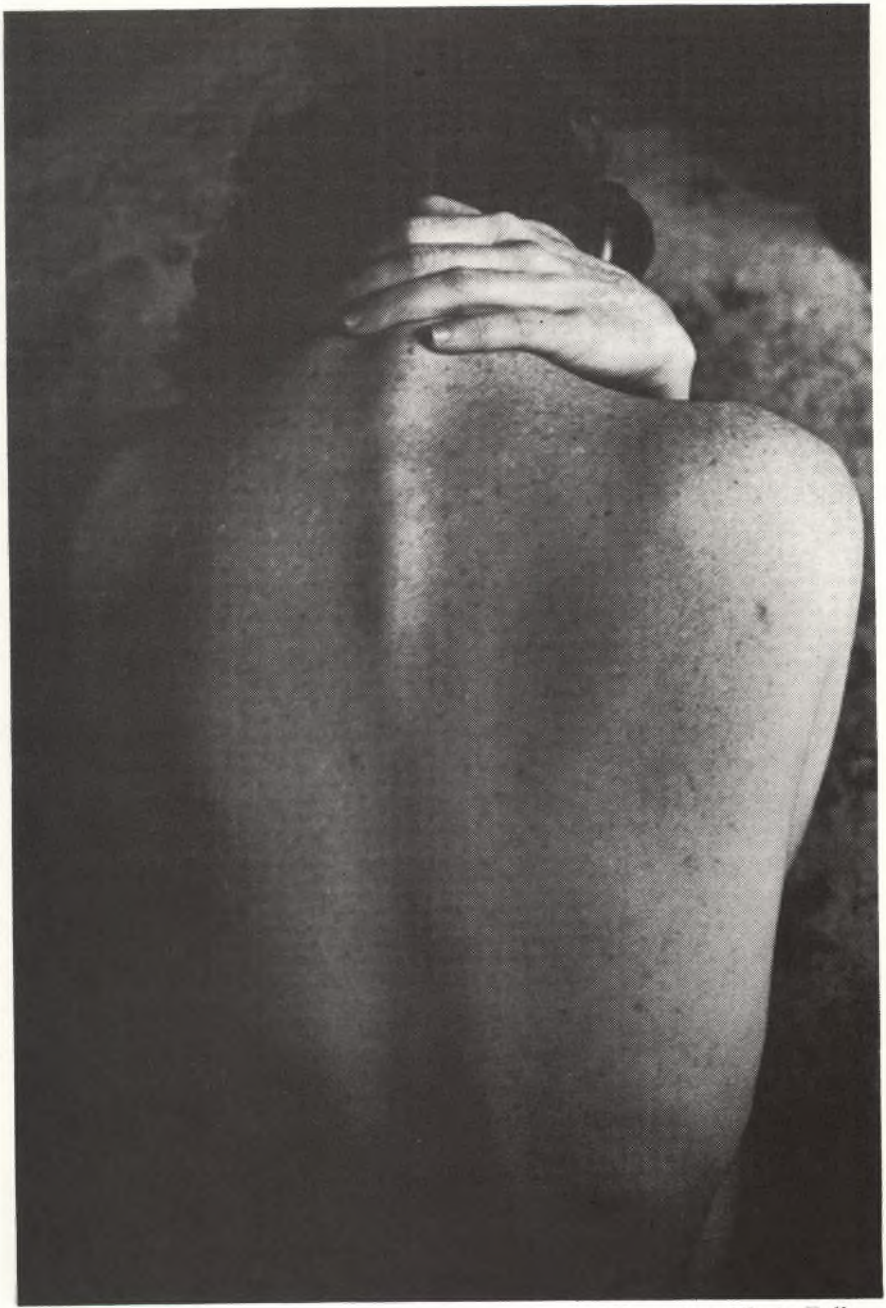


Photo by Clytia Fuller

Sunday Afternoon

Photo by Abby Bee

Linda Matlie Hooper

Smoker's Confession

Bless me Sisters, I have sinned

I am a relapsed and unrecanted smoker.

I started smoking because I thought the design of the Camel cigarette pack looked cool. I was right.

I smoke packs of Camel Filters until my throat dries, my tongue catches afire, and my head fills with snot. Then I switch to Camel Lights.

I buy two packs at a time. I carry upon my person at all times a lighter and two books of matches.

I steal ashtrays at every opportunity.

I give cigarettes freely to those who need them, especially non-smokers who "only smoke while drinking."

I dump full ashtrays out of my car into Safeway's parking lot before dawn. Because full ashtrays are disgusting.

I will think about smoking before I think of people I love. The first smoke of the day is best.

I smoke in my dreams.

I steal spare change off my housemates' bureaus to buy cigarettes between paychecks. I never admit this.

I promised my grandmother on her death bed that I would quit. I didn't even try.

Sheila Miriam Granoff

Untitled

I am going to have a scar
on my breast the day
after tomorrow I'll
carry a scar going sideways
or around, I don't know.
He didn't tell me this—I had to ask him
when he said, "There's no other way."
I said, "Well, it sure beats dying, I guess
you can't just spirit it out without any cuts"
offhand, not to trouble him too much in
his white coat busy on my loose white
breast that not many eyes have seen unscarred—
not intimately, not closely to take note
of the fact that it's clean of incisions
as of yet when somebody looks, there
will be something new on my old forgotten breast
but my mother will see for sure sometime
in the near future and tomorrow we will
see each other but I'll hide the secret
from her and my father I can't stand the worrying
I don't want the worrying, Sheila you know
it's the closeness you don't want.
Even from myself I denied it, the worry
the doctors at first told me to come back
for a check, but that it's only a cyst
I didn't, and now this new doctor says
it's not—he says it's no cyst and we have to take
it out and now
if it's something
I'll know that I've as well as
done myself in
by showing my
scarless breast to no one.

1981

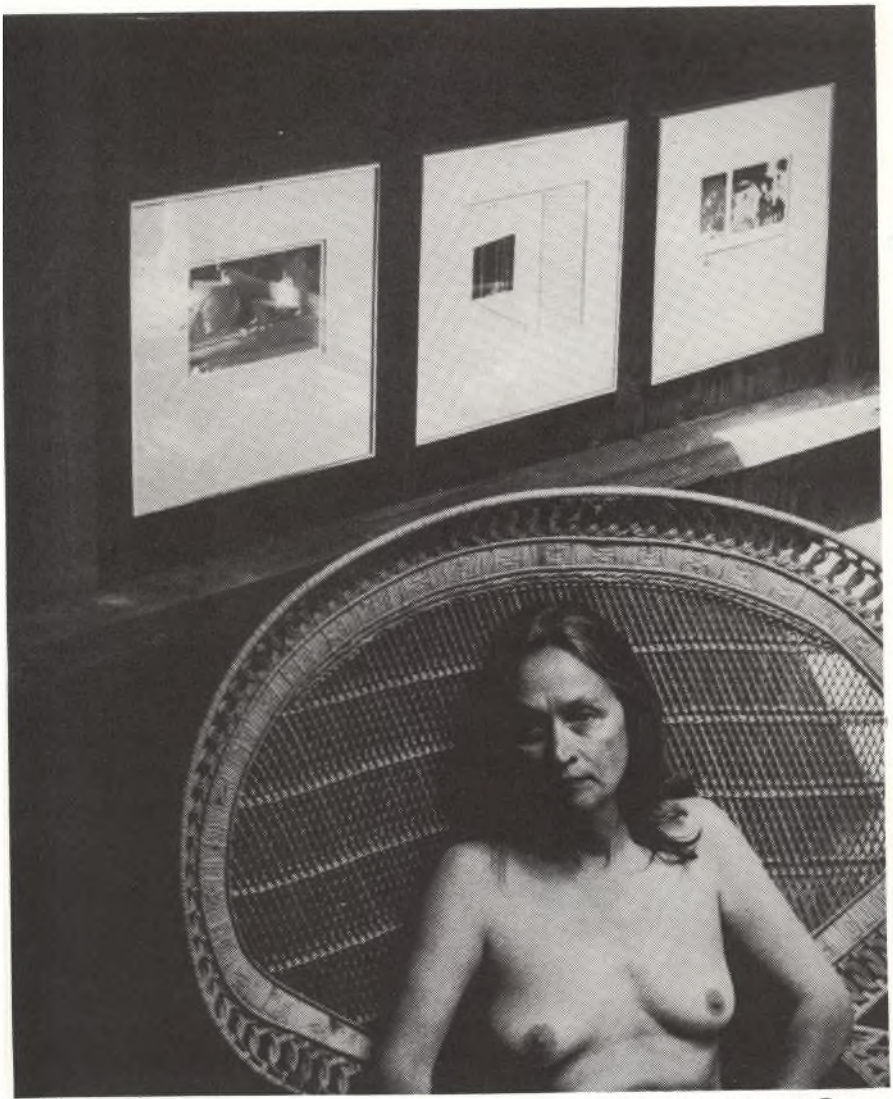


Photo by Lauren Crux

Lauren Crux

Vegetation Spirit

And she kept saying: 'There's more. Believe me, there's more.'
Irena Klepfisz

It is often our early habits, daily choices, which form and create the patterns we live by the rest of our lives. These small details are seemingly insignificant and often overlooked. Yet, as the process of erosion, carried on over centuries can wear away the earth's surface, so too, the minutiae of our lives can wear slowly, with great subtlety, until one day we wake up wondering how we became who we are.

What I describe here is something which at first appears trivial — a small incident. Yet as I wrote I sensed something significant which eluded me at first. Eventually, I came to understand the enormous power of erosion, and how an ingrained attitude shaped and influenced my entire life.

★ ★ ★

I have lived on this street for ten years. Although it is five minutes from the center of town, the street has remained rural. Farmlands lie on one side of the road, edging along a river. The side on which I live, is hilly, and once was covered with grape vineyards. Now only wild grapes wind through the gardens of the houses built here over the years.

Many of the original Italian families who lived on this street remain and in addition, there are now many artists, professors, a Buddhist monk, students, workers, and wanderers. It is a friendly street. Almost anachronistic in a busily developing town where if I lie quietly when I first awake, I will hear roosters, cows, horses, an occasional coyote, my neighbor's dog yelping, the slapping of early morning joggers' feet against the pavement, and the soft beckoning of brass wind chimes.

A few years ago, we, the residents of this street, organized to ward off developers who wanted to build hundreds of townhouses on the adjacent farmlands. Then we fought off the men who wanted to build a factory on that same land to make — I forget what. Then the begonia farmers came. They filled the fields with flowers, which I loved. We were all grateful, not only for the beauty of the begonias, but for their presence which preserved the land.

Each day as I drove to work, and again on my return I would think how enjoyable it would be to walk through the rows of brilliant blossoms. I wanted to feel the intensity of their colours close to me — salmon, coral, tangerine — but I never took the time. Then one day I drove home and the vivid beauty of these fields had been ploughed under, and the growers had departed. I had waited too long. Filled with regret and an unnamed fear close to panic. Would developers come and would we have to fight again?

But instead, two young men arrived in an old faded blue Chevy truck. They ploughed and planted the fields, and set to work to provide Santa Cruz with fine organic produce year round. The land responded to them and their gentle ways by bursting forth with lettuce, potatoes, strawberries, squash, melons and corn — acres of abundant fruit and vegetables.

I promised myself that this time I would walk onto the land, into the vast garden. There was a spirit in those fields that I sensed; I knew that I had to walk down the rows, to touch as well as see.

Two years passed and every time I drove or walked by I was reminded of my desire, but still did not take time to stop and enter the land. Once, early in the morning, I walked over and photographed the unusual dome greenhouse of white plastic pipe and polyethylene sheeting, but I felt like an intruder. I walked quickly, photographed and left. Again, I promised myself to come back some day and stroll slowly through.

Not long after, my lover and I were taking a walk. It was a long slow evening where time is gracious and extends itself, each minute elongated, sunset lingering on and on. Janet stopped at the house adjacent to the produce farm and went over to the pony munching grass in the yard. She stroked the pony's neck and began to talk to it. I stood and watched for a moment and then wandered as if propelled, into my neighbor's garden. I felt drawn into it, a child's sense of wonder pulling me, my Canadian reserve for once left waiting back at the road. One of the residents was there and I introduced myself. Her name was Angela, a soft faint Dutch accent warmed her friendly greeting. She offered to take me on a tour of their garden. "Let me give you some golden beets," she said, and then asked, "Have you ever seen them before?" I shook my head no. She pulled up huge globes, golden orange in colour. I was astounded. They were the most beautiful vegetables I had ever seen, and the colour captivated me. I called to Janet, saying she must come see them. Angela returned to tending her garden, leaving us to continue exploring on our own.

We admired the small patches of flowers that had been planted between rows of vegetables. I spent time standing amid tall bean plants, touching them, marvelling at the small red blossoms that soon would produce red beans. Janet pointed at the onions which were doing so much better than those in our garden and said, "Now *there* are some onions." Angela came back and invited us to come talk later with her partner, Daniel, whom she said would tell us how to grow better potatoes. She invited us to come at any time for vegetables, then pointed at the organic produce farm next door and suggested that we walk through it. I thanked her for her generosity, turned, and again felt irresistibly drawn toward the fields of produce growing next door.

I walked past the lettuce, the squash, and the potatoes, and headed for the rows of strawberries. Janet and I had the same thing on our minds. Seeing a man far off thinning more strawberries, I walked over to ask permission to pick some as well as a few carrots. I was raised an upper middle-class Canadian and have a terminal case of politeness as well as a horror of trespassing. As I approached him he looked quizzically at me but kept working. He was thin, angular, his brown skin taut with youth and sun, and had intense light blue eyes. I introduced myself as a neighbor and asked if I might pick berries and carrots, offering to pay whatever he thought appropriate. He looked at me, then grinned looking past me. I turned to see Janet walking down a row of berries, exclaiming to no one in particular how delicious they were as she popped them into her mouth as quickly as she picked them. The man and I laughed, and he told me to help myself, offering me a basket for the berries, then showing me where the best carrots were. "No need to pay," he said as he returned to his work.

After I picked a few carrots, enjoying the sound of the earth as I pulled them up slowly and carefully, I returned to help Janet pick. Another man had joined the first and was standing watching as she continued to extoll the virtues of the berries as she wandered down the rows eating. I enjoyed her lack of inhibition: I had asked if we might have one basket of berries, Janet would see to it that we had many.

Finally she joined me as I talked to the second young man. This man's white skin was darkly tanned, dirt powdered him as if he lived in the earth and his curly black hair hung down to his shoulders. He was shy as he spoke with us, his tousled head leaning to one side, and smiling crookedly. Both men told us they loved their work and that they made enough money for their needs. I turned to Janet and said, "Let's be farmers." She laughed, knowing my tendency to want to do and be everything, yet knowing also my aversion to hard physical work, and replied, "Okay, let's begin by picking strawberries." I quickly declined, and she said laughingly, lovingly, "No, you'll never make a farmer."

When we were ready to leave I said goodbye to the two young farmers who encouraged us to come any time, saying that not many neighbors visited. As I turned to go I saw that Janet had reimmersed herself in a row of strawberries, and like a woman possessed was muttering about their beauty and full flavor — "They *never* taste like this in the stores."

As the sky darkened we both turned silently, of one accord, and looked at the rich fields, their edges lined by trees which stood against the backdrop of the mountains beyond. I sighed, feeling content, and sensed that this had been an important walk for me — something beyond the obvious.

★ ★ ★

Today writing, I find myself pensive. Why did I wait for so long to do something so simple and easy as walking across the street to visit the garden and farms of my neighbors?

Janet walks freely and enters freely most places. She tells me some of her attitude is her response to growing up working class, Jewish, in New York City. She teases me about my WASP Canadian reserve. I was raised in a part of town where it was impolite to meet your neighbors until after a grace period of two or three years, and where respect for property was primary. One response I made to this environment was to become obedient to authority and highly respectful of private property. Even now I react to much of the world as if there were a "no trespassing" sign on it. Consequently, I find myself often standing and looking on, wishing I could enter, but holding back, waiting.

I think of all the hours I've spent hiding under my covers, curled tightly. I think of years wasted looking on at the garden across the street and never entering. I think of the woman in my writing class who carried pens and papers with her, but never wrote. And I see that it is these daily hesitations which restrict and limit, even scar our lives.

When I ask myself the question, what is the waiting for, I know that I do not have an answer. I must let go of this attitude which dries up spontaneity, discourages discovery, and daily carves a hollowness in the soul. A space which I must learn to fill by letting go of habit, learned behavior, which keeps me from my fullest growth and joy in life and relationships. I too must tend my garden.

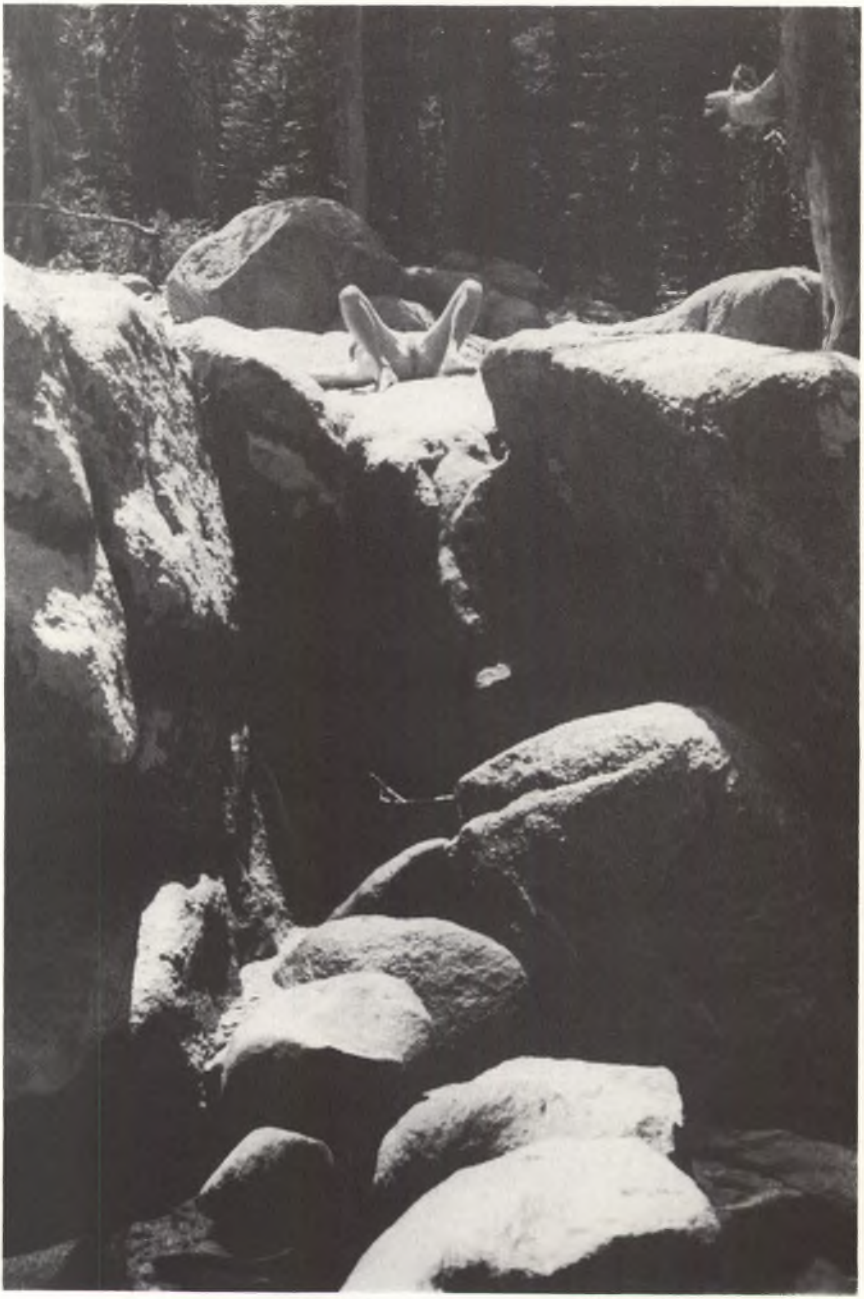


Photo by Clytia Fuller

Photo by Clytia Fuller

Untitled

Photo by Terese Armstrong

Donna George

Every Woman/Every Poem

I want you too much
every woman
every poem
I can't have you
I've forgotten how
you want to reawaken my passion
leave me alone
the world does not want my passion

I must want you
because I came here
but when I arrive
and could be at home here
I remain in this vise
my words are strangled
I am silent
and talk in my sleep

When I was five I wrote plays
directed them
on the picnic table
wrote newspapers
sold them door to door
when I had no paper, I wrote
in the margins of old books
on napkins
nothing could stop me
not then

When I was eighteen I married
burned my writings
a huge bonfire
in the backyard
settled down
learned my roles

I didn't die in the flames
it was later
somewhere along the way
I didn't even notice
until I had nothing to say
and feared the intensity

I always felt too much
they told me
dreamed too much
wanted
things they said did not exist
and there was no one
who understood

Now I meet you
who feel
who want
who dream
too late
I am broken

I never learned to articulate passion
a language you speak well
I gave mine to lovers
who meant nothing
became the paper
on which I wrote volumes
ecstasy
the only language I was given

You entice me to live
what do you know?
in your middle class world
with your literary allusions
your lovely home
your fine cheeses
your well-bred children

I have hated you
your education
how easily you disdain
your suburban childhood
your mother's misguided love
my mother, cruel
my father, drunken
there was no music in that town

I know that I am bitter
I know who I am
and I want to write like you
beautiful imagery
butterflies
but I write savage
I am still five years old

I want to be like you
your feelings are appropriate
I am wild
I have no technique
no manners
only these feelings
buried
feared

I imitate you
work two jobs
my car is registered
my children eat well
my hair is cut right
but somehow I don't pass

Something gives me away
my brittle laughter
my hunched shoulders
it's my insides
it's my memories
it's the knowing

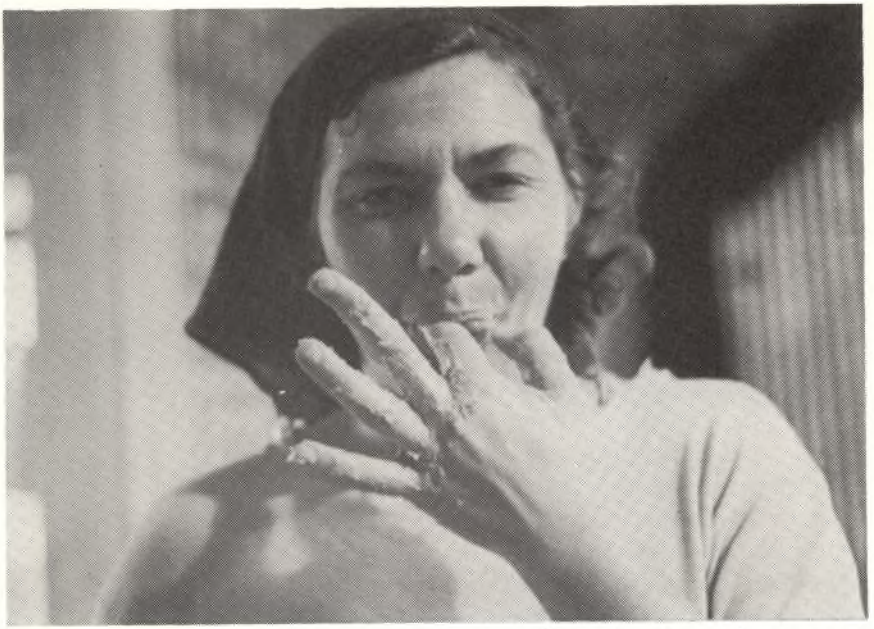
Each night I think
tonight I will find the key
unlock the secrets
it will come to me in dreams
I will wake up, and
I will know what to do
it will all make sense

Each day I say
today I will find the way
when I am not thinking about it
something will snap into place
this will be a memory
and I will laugh, remembering

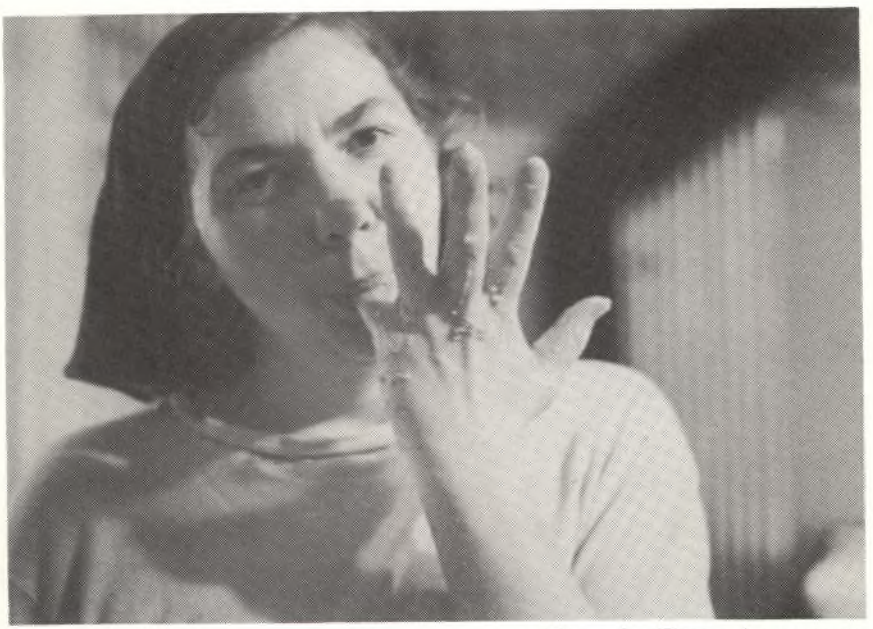
I tell myself I deserve this
I gave up too easy
if I was really an artist
I would have painted the trees with my tongue
bled my words on the sand
nothing would have stopped me
others have done it

I am a bitter woman
I know this
I try to laugh lightly
to speak casually
but I am a bitter woman
and you know this

I need too much
I can't be filled
you know it
and you stay away
I hold back
and sing in my sleep
and dance in my living room
and cry alone.



Kathie the Baker Photo by Terese Armstrong



Kathie the Baker Photo by Terese Armstrong

Anita Adams

After Talking with Mom

To those of us who were born from
mothers who couldn't mother
and fathers who molested us
this is for us.

It's supposed to be ok
We're supposed to be adults
now, and able to understand.

But I still don't understand
why she can't love me
why she wasn't there
why she still isn't there
why she blamed me for her life
why she thinks she did nothing wrong.

why he used me— almost destroyed me.

I would pay you back . . . if I could
pay you back pain for pain
anger for anger
belt for belt
indifference for indifference.

I'll learn indifference!
I'll learn how to say
convincingly, to others,
"My mom and dad are dead."
How much better if they were
and not as they are:
cold
rationalizing
defensive
with no regrets, they say.

I damn sure have regrets!
I regret
that I've had
no mothering
no fathering
no brothering
no loving
no nurturing
from them.

I must nurture myself—
love myself
mother me
father me

And I do . . .
I will.

Jodii

Photo by Terese Armstrong

Irene Reti

I Never Knew I Was Jewish

I.

My mother, born Jewish
in Nazi Germany
cannot remember her childhood
even going to school,
except for fragments.

But she remembers
November Ninth, 1938 —
Kristallnacht.
She was eleven
lying in her room upstairs
in her tall brick house.
They broke into the houses of the Jews,
took many fathers away.
They did not take her father,
but wrecked every room except hers.
Her mother said,
"There's a little girl in there."

Kristallnacht —
I look for it in a book on the Holocaust.
I have read manifestos of lesbian liberation
to rooms of women, boldly,
carried gay books on crowded buses in strange cities;
but this history I absorb in a dark corner of the bookstore,
with furtive glances and cold hands.
Kristallnacht —
synagogues burnt
homes broken into rubble.
Seven and a half thousand
Jewish businesses destroyed in a single evening —
a rain of shattered plate glass.
One thousand
Jews murdered.
Twenty Six Thousand
deported to concentration camps.

But I want to know why, and how.
How did they get in the door?
Did they
dismember tables
burn feather beds
crush china
shred family portraits
steal money
rape women?
Whom did they take away and why
and why not my grandfather?
It was not compassion.
Why did they leave my mother's room alone?
Was it something in the
set of my grandmother's face —
"There's a little girl in there."

It is 1985.
Tell me why
ninth graders draw swastikas across blackboards,
why a swastika is embedded
in the concrete of my neighborhood sidewalk;
who buys
genuine Nazi officer insignia
proudly sold at the antique store in San Francisco?

Tell me why immigration quotas for Jews
were set so low.
My mother's family was among few to escape.
She and her teenage sister
crossed the Atlantic alone on a steamer
through a submarine war zone —
flotsam from sunken ships
dresses
dolls
chairs
floating mid-ocean.

My grandfather lost his toy factory
came to America, worked as a butler
my grandmother a seamstress
my aunt a punch press operator.
My mother, the "enemy alien,"
had to apply for a permit to go
to Girl Scout Camp,
dated boys in smart GI uniforms in high school
tried to be an American girl,
felt ashamed of her immigrant parents
felt ashamed to feel ashamed of them.

II.

My father was also a Jewish refugee.
Yet they raised me
without Jewish history, without Jewish culture.
They hid it from me,
till at my grandfather's funeral
I asked, "What language are they speaking?"

Then I congratulated myself on not looking Jewish.
My red curls will protect me, I thought.
My blue eyes and white skin
give me amnesty.

Yet this was the same
frizzy hair and anemic complexion
they teased me about in school.
"Pale legs! Carrots!",
they taunted me.
They were straight, blonde.

Sitting at dinner with my cousins
I insisted I didn't have a Jewish nose.
They laughed bitterly.

In the schools of the 1970's
we watched films on the Holocaust,
studied the obligatory chapters
on black slavery, Indian village life,
the unit on the suffragettes.
We all read *The Diary of Anne Frank*
and sobbed into our pillows.

I remember feeling
bewildered, appalled by these stories.
But I was not Jewish;
I did not grieve or rage.
I shook my head sadly
as liberal white people do
over black unemployment
as sensitive men deplore
violence against women.

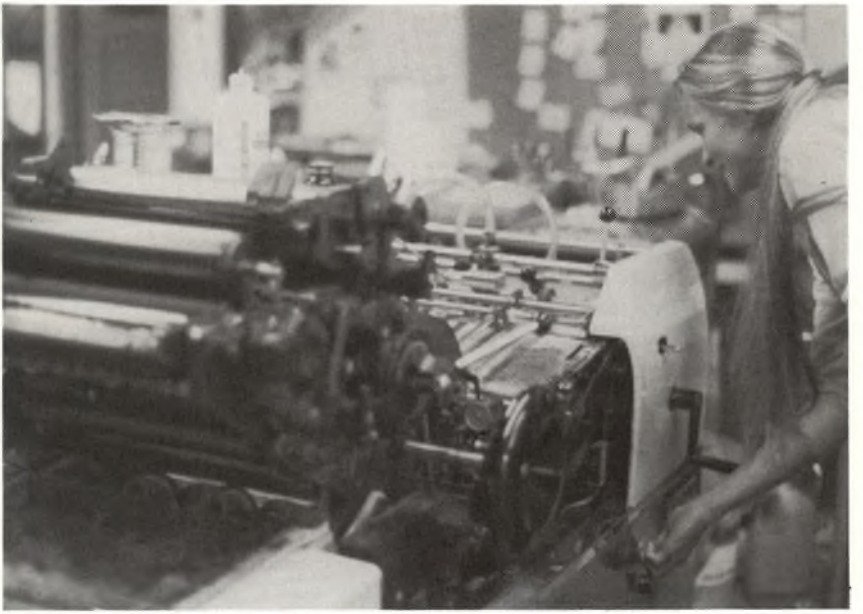
I did not grieve or rage.
I shook my head.
Now I hold my mother's
shattered memories in my fists.
How shall I use them?

Tell me
how shall I mourn?

My best friend and I eat brunch
at a deli filled with Jews.
She orders lox.
I stare at the bright pink strips, salty on her plate,
fascinated.
I tell her —
Kristallnacht.
Her blue eyes see directly through
my nervous smile.
She cries.
People stare.
She cries
but I stare mutely at my eggs.
Tell me
how shall I mourn?

III.

I am the woman with double vision.
I have been the sympathetic outsider
and the one whose parents survived the fire,
who cannot speak with pride of holidays, folklore,
whose Jewishness is mute,
who knows everything about silence
and nothing about dancing.



Robin Women's Offset Printing Class © 1985
Photo by Terese Armstrong

Contributors' Notes

Anita Adams: I am recovering from incest, alcoholism, a severe child abuse back injury and my first lesbian relationship. I am on a psychic spiritual journey back to my own power and back to the Goddess. I am loved by my eleven-year-old daughter Sybl-Alexandra, my two dogs, Sissy Tara and Brigit, and special friends who are placed in my life when I get too close to despair. Becoming recognized as a writer has been the most important change in my life. It's a positive identity and a joy!

Anonymous Teacher would love not to be anonymous. Maybe in the year 2,000. I've always been a writer, and love teaching. It's difficult to be so expressive a person, and yet have to be so mute at work about my personal and spiritual life.

Terese Armstrong is a printer with ten years in the trade. She works in a successfully run collective in Santa Cruz, and enjoys going home to her three pussies in their cabin in the redwoods.

Abby Bee creates portraits of life through photography, poetry, silkscreen, film and song. She is currently the radio talk show host of KMFO's "Psychic Insights." Be it humor, fantasy or the documentation of stark reality, expression through art in an attempt to touch others is her life's work.

Julie Hannah Brower wears many hats. Her favorites are those of KZSC staffer, and writer. Her heart is with politics, friends, and change.

Liz Camarie enjoys being outdoors, spending time with cameras, women, (most) children and animals, and attending theatre, films, poetry readings and art exhibits. She lives in Aptos with two rampaging kittens and an overgrown garden.

Lauren Crux: The story, "Vegetation Spirit," is the second chapter of a book in progress. Happily, since writing the story I have learned to travel easily in the farmlands nearby. I work in Santa Cruz as a feminist therapist, consultant, and speaker. I balance my varied interests and loves by following the wisdom of a friend's martial arts teacher to daily "train, stretch and play."

Jennifer Eisley: I am a perpetual student. I read a great deal and do not write enough. I juggle badly and ride horses well. My coming out as a lesbian was neither as painful as for some, nor as easy as for others, and took three years and as many colleges. I have found home and community in Santa Cruz.

Clytia Fuller has been photographing and printing for about 10 years—with an emphasis on women. She believes that the photograph can represent the future, as well as the past, and is particularly interested in photographing those aspects of women not traditionally shown.

Donna George is 35 years old, has two teenage daughters and a two-month-old grandson. I'm a recovered addict and am currently employed as a counselor in a residential drug program. My lesbian identity is new to me, and this is my first published poem.

Rachel Harwood: I am a lesbian feminist. I cook and teach self-defense for a living (I'm lucky right now). I love my family, lesbian and otherwise. I write poems when I get desperate one way or another, which isn't too often, and draw mostly for self-defense posters.

Kate Hitt is an offset and letterpress printer who works with women in Pacific Grove. Her contributions to the literary and photographic worlds are included in publications such as *On the Rag, Belles Lettres, The Blatant Image,* and *Babs Blabs.*

Linda Matlie Hooper: I changed my middle name by computer error. Always inspect the unexploded. Write everyday. I no longer live with my lover, her daughter and two cats.

Helen Langley: I am a woman who believes in the goodness of humanity and moves that belief through my life with the tools of courage, freedom of thought, feeling, and a kind of justice that was born in pain. I write from the heart with boldness and honesty and some fear!

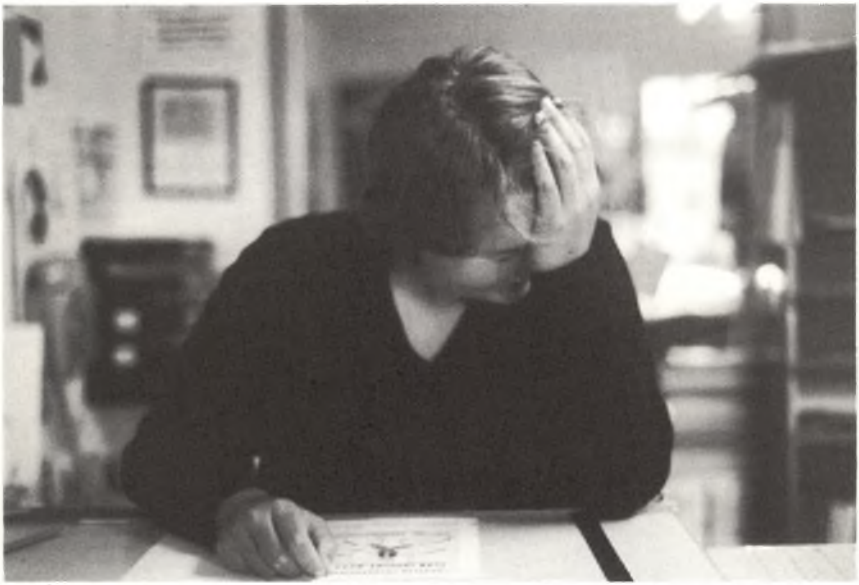
Julie Litwin: I am born of a Jewish family from Topeka, Kansas. I am a midwife. I struggle each day to make our world a better place.

Jodi Su Morgan: I am a student of Womyn's Studies. Travel, art, language and process intrigue me. My partner and I live happily with our kitty, Dr. King. Peace.

Sue McCabe is a part-time baker, a part-time writing assistant, an occasional papermaker, and a full-time dreamer.

Irene Reti: I have worked at 11 jobs in the past 3 years, including bank teller, backpacking store clerk, phone solicitor, proofreader and writing tutor. At this rate I will have had 55 jobs by the time I am 36. But my real work is lesbian feminist publishing. I edited and published *Lesbian Words: A Santa Cruz Anthology* with Sue McCabe in 1984, and printed and published De Clarke's book of poetry *To Live With the Weeds* this year.

Bettianne Shoshone Sien was born in 1957 to a large family in rural Wisconsin. In 1979 she received a degree in Fine Art. For the last five years she has lived in Santa Cruz, where she is currently raising one young daughter. She has a long term commitment to feminist, ecological and class struggles/joys.



Sue McCabe Photo by Terese Armstrong

Self Portrait Photo by Terese Armstrong

Irene Reti

Photo by Terese Armstrong

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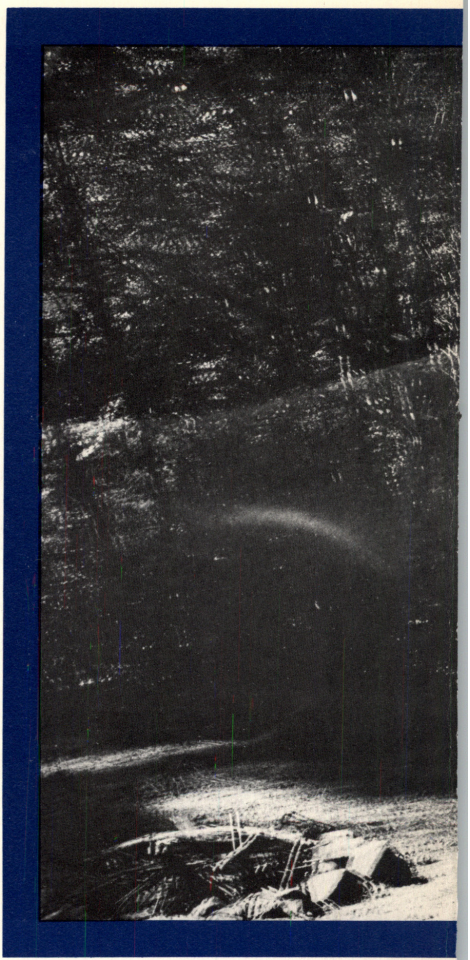

Lesbian Words II Photographs and Writings is a Santa Cruz anthology. Writings edited by Sue McCabe and Irene Reti. Visual Arts edited by Terese Armstrong.