

Battles joined time and again

The conclusion of "Odyssey of a Lesbian AIDS Activist"

"If politics is too ugly a word, then give me another word for it."

— Adrienne Rich

By Marea Murray

It's the spring of 1986 and I am waiting in the room where the Basic Services Team (BST) of Boston's AIDS Action Committee first met. It will be my second interview for a staff position with AAC and I am getting more anxious by the minute. A couple of people I know come into the waiting room and encourage me. One man on staff dismisses my dread: "You'll get it, who could be more qualified?" It's not that easy. I recall Tim's advice at dinner last night: "Just stay calm."

Finally, Stan, who is chair of the search committee, appears in the doorway. His face is tight and he seems angry. I exhort myself to avoid paranoia. There are seven people around the table.

**BATTLES JOINED
ODYSSEY
OF A
LESBIAN
AIDS
ACTIVIST
PART 5 OF 5**

Marcia, the director of social services at AAC, sits across from me as I take the only empty chair between Larry, AAC's executive director, and David, the director of client services. Dmitri starts off asking me about my pod, what we call subgroups within AAC of buddies to people with AIDS. I notice everyone has a typed sheet in front of them. He asks if there were any particular problems. I'm confused by this but recall an especially difficult situation Leo and I once dealt with in our pod. David takes up the questioning after I'm asked about my work as an intern at the hospital and speak honestly about a difficult year there. David asks me how I'd handle the job while completing my Master's in social work. I admit it would be difficult but point out how much I've managed while a volunteer at AAC, a student and working.

There is a noticeable shift when David begins asking — it feels like telling — me about my anger.

"You have a lot of anger, and I'm not the only one who thinks so." His eyes pan the group. There is silence. To me this borders on the unprofessional, but I resist the urge to ask who my accusers are. Instead I respond that I've been doing the work for a while now and it is hard not to be angry about it all, about the toll taken on people who are ill and in the communities. AIDS work is angry-making.

He recounts a phone conversation and my shortness with him. I begin to explain. "I'm glad you asked that," I start, removing my jacket. The others seem to tense and his interrogation (and that is what it feels like) intensifies. Stan interrupts my account and I begin to feel attacked, not just tested. Something has gone terribly wrong.

Alan asks about my politics and I give my answer: "I will not leave my politics on the sidewalk but I feel my commitment to AAC is a priority, otherwise I would not have done as much as I have over time." I notice Andrew and Larry ask nothing. The whole thing is very odd. "Time is running out," Stan says abruptly. They ask if I have any questions and I turn to Larry, asking if he has any for me.

"What's your worst fear?"

I don't hesitate. "That I'll take the job and two weeks later wish I hadn't." He nods and I try to gauge the group's response. Everyone seems very closed. Stan is to call me.

Slowly walking down Boylston Street I realize I am not going to get the job but something else, far worse, has also happened.

Several days later I've heard nothing. I call Stan. He seems irritated.

"I'm wondering if the Search Committee has made a decision."

"Yes, we have, and I'm afraid you're not going to like it."

I steel myself.

He tells me I will not be hired for this or any of the other positions coming up in the near future. Adopting his tone, I ask if there is a reason. He informs me that he and Marcia will meet with me Friday, two days from

now, at 5 p.m. if I want to discuss it further. His tone is cold and dismissive. I say I need to think about it and get off the phone.

In shock, I dial my friend Mary. She is home. "I didn't get the job," I start. "What?" She is surprised. My throat constricts and tears seep out as I tell her what else was said and how wary I am of this already-scheduled explanatory session. Next I call my therapist for an extra session though I can't afford to pay her. She tells me the hour is on her when I arrive. Deeply touched on top of the incredible pain, I feel humiliated and barely able to contain my feelings. But I want to know what explanation they will offer for the harshness. If any is offered.

Seating myself across from them in Marcia's small office, I know I'm feeling brittle on this overcast afternoon. Stan tells me my references were mixed. I ask what he means. He says one was exemplary, two conditional and one did not recommend me for the position. Refusing to give me any details when I dispute this accounting or when I ask why he lists four when I named Peter or Leo, he dismisses my objections. He lists "difficulty with interpersonal relationships," "with authority," "emotionalism" and "inappropriate anger" as well as my "maturity level" as "concerns" which led to the rejection. I am appalled and furious when he follows this summation with a "perhaps when you finish graduate school you can reapplly" patronization.

"My personality is not going to change in a year, Stan" (nor would I be foolish enough to put myself through this again.) Marcia tries to soothe things, telling me my organizational skills are top notch and she's seen the work I do with people with AIDS (PWAs), staff and volunteers *but it was a consensus*. I want to ask before or after the second interview? She repeats "consensus." They have chosen a woman with no AIDS experience over a known quantity; in fact, it is *precisely* because I was so *known* that I feel so personally attacked. They would not have the luxury of such charges and conclusions had I been an "outsider." Yet, this experience brings home that I was *always* an outsider.

It is dawning on me that this meeting is damage control and I tell them the only thing I have rehearsed for this: "To stand Groucho Marx on his head, I need to consider why I would want to remain involved (to the degree I am) in a club which doesn't want me as a *compensated* member." I tell them I've no more to say and want to leave.

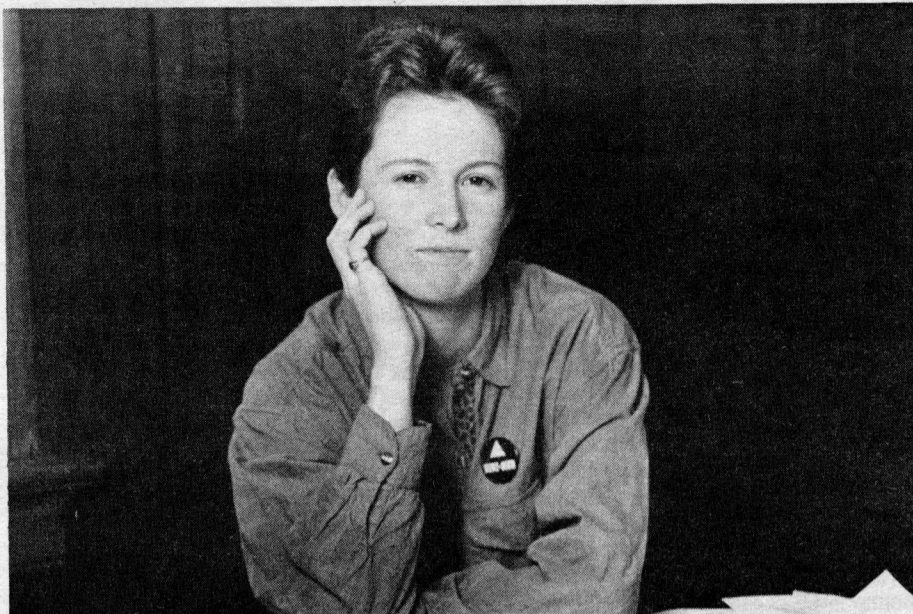
Later I come up with lots I could have said: Being critical is not necessarily being disloyal. Women have been accused of being too emotional for centuries. Angry women are not tolerated — we are "too much like men," i.e. pushy, loud-mouthed castrating dykes. There are worse things — like liars and cowards.

But at the time I just walked out of the building, down a back stairway to avoid running into anyone I knew, with effort and inconsolably sad. Sunglasses shielding my eyes, fighting waves of tears and fury, I walked for blocks, telling myself I will not allow this, I do not have to take this after applying in good faith, after all I did with AAC.

My mother calls for the verdict.

"You know those men hate women," she says conclusively. Warily, I take issue with her homophobia and heterosexist notions. She tells me I should leave, that I've taken on too much. After I hang up I consider the truth to her argument.

Gay pride, 1986, and once more I march with my friends who are buddies to PWAs — officially the Support Services Team (SST) at AAC. As we march up the hill to the State House, we begin to chant "Foster Equality" — demanding that Mass. Governor Michael Dukakis reverse his policy against gay foster parents. Sue Hyde and other foster policy organizers stand atop the street looking dubiously at the green-shirted AAC. We carry no signs marking the numbers of PWAs who died in Mass. this year — there would be too many. Pride 1986 features a "Stick it to the Duke" campaign. Marchers are exhorted to slap "foster"



Marea Murray, 1988



Marea's "pod" of buddies to PWAs, 1986



PWA Sharon Kelly plants one on her lover of five years, Kathy Orfield

stickers on the wall at the State House and cops stand ready to stop it. We break ranks (some of us) and stick 'em. Again AAC makes the papers, but it is a "Foster Equality" photo that makes page one.

At the Boston Common, Ken Fish from Rhode Island Project AIDS (RIPAIDS) seeks me out. I had referred my Providence-based girlfriend Veneita to them because they are in search of an Executive Director.

"I have good news," he says with a smile. "I could use some."

"It looks good for your friend." He kisses me, tells me to let her know.

I decide to resign as chair of the Basic Services Team (BST), and thus from AAC's Steering Committee by July 1. Careful to arrange a chair for BST and a Steering rep, I want to avoid any more trauma. Demoralized, I resolve to return to SST work. I tell my pod that I was turned down for the position and I'm depressed. Leo, a pod member, says he thought I had the job.

Meanwhile, I go to my four references individually, by phone and letter, and ask them to tell me what reservations they'd expressed to the committee. Peter, Director of Support Services at AAC, seems hardpressed, and Leo mentions a bit about how my political convictions might make being on staff difficult for me. My hospital supervisor reiterates concerns about my large caseload. No one owns any of the other fac-

tors Stan delineated. My old boss, Fred, noting he'd been asked directly by the interviewer about how I managed political questions, states he'd given detailed examples illustrating how well I balanced my personal convictions in light of the job/priority at hand. I became more convinced the Search Committee's decision was personally and politically motivated. Still I feel safe in SST, where I began.

Then, in July, a friend in a position to know tells me it was Leo who made the damaging charges to the Search committee. She urges me not to use him as a reference again and to do another training so I can work with someone else. Miserable and stung, I write Leo a letter asking him if what my (unnamed) source tells me is true. He denies disparaging my maturity in a letter back.

Later I see a copy of the typed explication of Leo's remarks. I was even purported to view AAC as a "fucked up" organization. The news of his double betrayal — saying such negative things about me without so much as hinting at them in the two years we'd worked together *nor* when I asked him point blank after the rejection — is the final straw. I know I can no longer work with or respect him.

My choices are to spend two weekends in a new training, meeting new volunteers and starting with a new pod and co-facilitator,

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Battles joined

Continued from page 7.

or to throw in the towel altogether. This last option is the one I've defended against throughout this whole surreal affair.

Remembering my father, I decide to leave. The story is complicated, but suffice it to say he was something of a whistleblower. I found out some of what happened when Seymour Hersch's *Price of Power* came out. My father did not leave his organization. He felt he had no place else to go. He continued to pay for his resistance, as did his family. This, too, is my legacy. In August of 1986, I decide life is too short. Marcia and Peter try to change my mind but, the political daughter of political parents, I decide to walk on and protect myself.

I tell everyone, except those I trust absolutely in SST, that I am taking a leave of absence and I do not publicly denounce my principal detractor or The Committee. Emotionally exhausted and beaten, I feel this would only damage SST and destroy the pod. I also do not feel like opening my wounds to salt.

My last pod meeting, a potluck with old members invited to dinner, is already scheduled for Leo's house. It takes everything I have to go there. They give me a cake and good luck wishes. Peter stands by during the second half, after the other veterans leave, when I say my good-byes. I wind up sobbing during my spiel, glad for Peter's presence as I feel unsupported by Leo in his space.

The final farewell is to the facilitators many of whom have been friends for years now. There is discussion about bringing the matter of my job denial up by some who know the story, but it doesn't happen. Most have no idea what has transpired. Jason, whom I worked with on Steering, gives me an Adrienne Rich book after I've calmly explained I'm taking leave. I know I will not return. Peter asks me to stay on for the rest of the meeting. I demure, saying it would be inappropriate. It is almost over. I get up to leave. Just then, Lee, who was in SST training with me, comes through the door with a bouquet of flowers. It is a funny gesture but it puts me over the edge. Certain the others are wondering why I'm upset, I walk out tall as I can stretch.

My friend Richard quits SST, protesting the treatment I've been accorded. Others manufacture rumors I hear of later. Some of them: I left because I didn't get the job; because I was "at political odds" with the Committee; and, undoubtedly the most creative, that Leo's references were given with some sort of understanding that I already had the job and his remarks were for "supervisory purposes" only.

Who knows? I don't know what to believe anymore.

Months later, I run into one of the men from my pod and ask him how things are anyway. "We miss you," he says. There is a pregnant pause.

"Why do you think I left?" I ask.

"I heard you and Leo had some sort of power struggle and you lost."

I laugh sharply. "Well, that's one way of looking at it...." He doesn't want to know and I don't press it. The grapevine isn't as informative as it used to be, I muse as I walk away.

I am interviewing with the Clinical Director at Gay and Lesbian Counseling Services in Boston (GLCS) where I will spend my second year internship. We discuss my AIDS experience.

"Your resume is very impressive," he says.

I smile and say thank you. If he only knew the cost; I'm back to keeping secrets again.

My roommates ask why I am not doing the "Walk for Life" AAC fundraiser. There will be lots of lesbians there. I nod and say I've done enough this year. AAC's Liz Paige tells the crowd "We love the Governor." Gay and Lesbian Defense Committee (GLDC) demonstrators, who are fighting the foster policy, scream "Foster Equality." I write a letter to GCN saying not all of AAC's 700 volunteers feel like Liz.

A postcard arrives from *Radical America*. They're planning a special issue on AIDS and will be in touch. I write a "Lesbians and Safe Sex" article for *Bay Windows* including guidelines from *On Our Backs*. As there is no AAC brochure for women, I offer to help Annie Silvia, the Health Education Director, with the text. We do it by

phone and mail; I no longer feel safe going into the AAC offices. The SST Express and the "Do-er's Profile" on me comes in an August AAC mailing. Larry, in California on vacation, sends me a card noting my
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Panel

Continued from page 6

Steven Beck of the National Coalition of PWAs credited "street agitators" with keeping treatments for PWAs "high on the agenda" of the commission. He said the constant presence of protesters forced commission members to pay attention to their demands.

The political landscape of AIDS has been radically altered as a result of the report, several activists told GCN. They argued that since the report came out of a commission appointed by the right-wing Reagan administration, presidential candidates will feel compelled to propose funding levels which at least match the report. Boneberg said "We must shove it (the report) down the throat of every presidential candidate. We must let them know that it is not acceptable for a candidate to be to the right of a murderer's commission."
□ filed from Boston

Martelli

Continued from page 3

person with AIDS, willing to bear the inevitable stress and pain — knowing that, with a little care, we are not in danger, knowing that we are needed."

Leonard Martelli knew his energy and talents as a writer and editor were needed to help the gay community and he did not turn away, but stayed to help others. No other memorial could be more fitting.
□ filed from Boston

Radio

Continued from page 3

5:10 — 5:15 p.m. CAN WE TALK? A profile of Palestinian and Jewish women in Southern California committed to ongoing dialogue as a bridge between two disparate communities. Produced by Helene Rosenbluth.

5:15 — 5:30 p.m. ASIAN WOMEN AND COMMUNITY ACTIVISM: An interview with activists Kam Lee and Har Yee Wong.

5:30 — 5:45 p.m. CHANGING INDUSTRY/CHANGING WORKFORCE: Boston's immigrant Chinese women garment workers still fighting for their rights as they move into new jobs. Produced by Tatiana Schreiber.

5:45 — 6:00 p.m. LAUGH LINES: Songs by the British comedy trio Spare Tyre and an interview with the group. Produced by Annie Silverman and Abby Zimberg.

6:00 — 7:00 p.m. MOTHERLAND: An hour of music from the women of Africa. Hosted by Linda Thurston and Sharan Strange.

7:00 — 8:00 p.m. WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES SPEAK OUT: Poignant and sometimes humorous interviews and vignettes reflecting the experiences of women with disabilities. Produced by Jo Bower and Cindy Kunz.

8:00 — 9:00 p.m. SPREADING THE WORD THROUGH THE GOSPEL THEATER: Produced by "Good News" host Sharon Clayborne.

9:00 — 9:30 p.m. SUGAR MAMA: Sweet soul music and a conversation with Bay Area vocalist Gwen Avery. Produced by Melanie Berzon.

9:30 — 10:30 p.m. VISIONS AND REVISIONS: Los Angeles women writers read their original short stories and talk about the process of creative written work. Produced by Catherine Stifter and Terry Wolverton.

10:30 — 11:30 p.m. HEY GIRL: Susan Wilson pays tribute to women musicians who have died in our lifetime. Part III (all new women, all new show). Co-produced by Lynda Stephens.

11:30 — Midnight WRAP-UP: It's your turn to talk. Call us at 494-8810. With Fahamisha Shariat and "the girls." □

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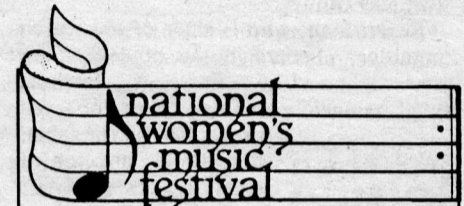
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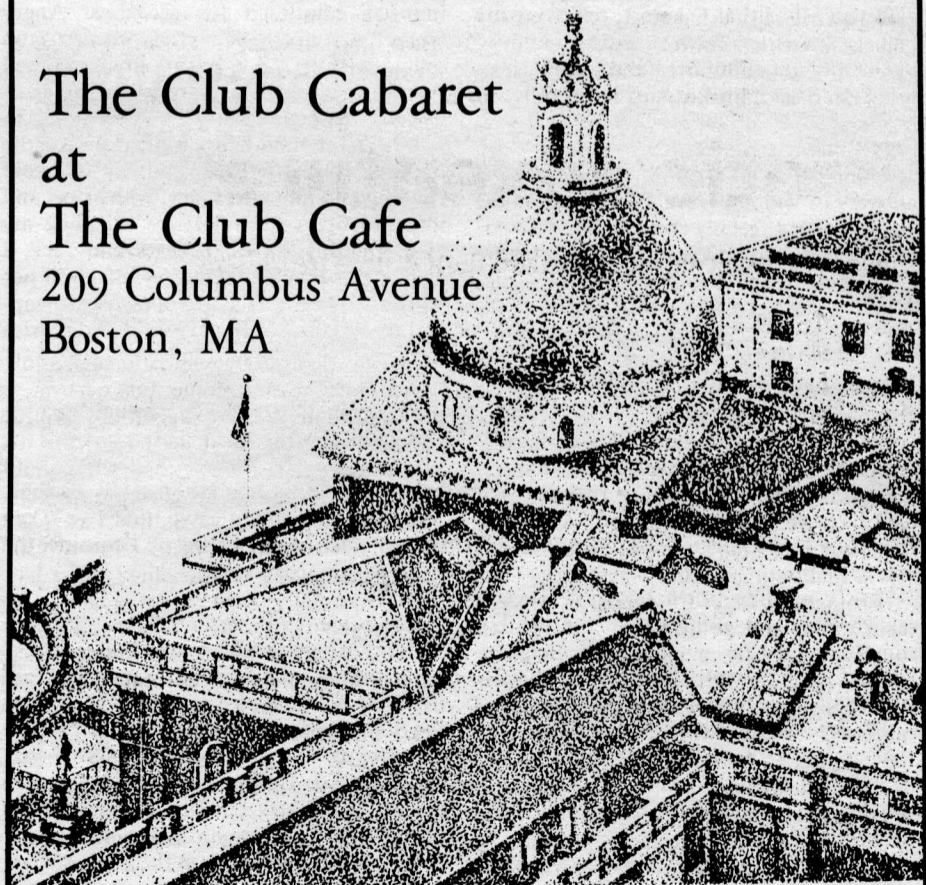


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Battles joined

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writings in the gay press and saying he's heard I'm leaving. Though suspicious, I'm rather touched by the gesture.

I walk away for more than a year, though I continue to do AIDS-related work. I see men with AIDS and AIDS anxiety at GLCS. I see others, too. After the hospital internship, this experience, the staff, clients and gay-affirming environment are revitalizing.

Grief I don't realize I'm harboring comes to the surface once I'm running myself ragged. I actually learn to enjoy some "free" time and eventually feel more myself again; a sense of healing and a circumspection born of fire perhaps. Being the s/other of an AIDS Project Director allows yet another perspective on the very human toll extracted on all levels.

GCN runs a group of articles under the cover "Lesbians Face the AIDS Epidemic" in October, including one I've penned with safer sex guidelines specific to lesbians from San Francisco's AIDS Foundation. Veneita and I present on safer sex at the Women and AIDS conference held in Boston that month. Running through available information on safe sex for all women, several workshop participants object to anti-fisting and prohibitive language included in brochures as well as the underlying presumption that what goes for men goes for women.

In the Lesbians and AIDS workshop I hear activists talk about the isms and invisibility in other cities and organizations. Heidi, a woman I know from my earliest days of AIDS Action, speaks up about her experience as the voluntary hotline coordinator. She found out after-the-fact that a man had been hired for the paid staff position. GCN prints some of her comments and she catches hell. Aware of the costs of speaking out, I remain quiet during the discussion. I still have to get a job in this town.

In January, three years after I joined SST, I officially resign. I ask Larry for a letter confirming the work I've done and request letters of reference from Peter and Jason. *Radical America* finally begins work on their special issue on AIDS. I bring John and Paul-David with me to a meeting. The official call goes out for buddies of color, people who are bilingual and women. More PWAs fit these descriptions in 1987.

At the National Lesbian and Gay Health Foundation Conference in Los Angeles there is a special plenary: "What AIDS Service Providers and Gay Men Can Learn from the Women's Health Movement." Veneita and the other panelists confront the numbers of men who leave when the program begins. Recalling what a friend told us was David Aronstein's response to the request of AAC's Women's Task Force for Steering representation, Veneita quotes him without attribution: "Women have yet to prove themselves on this issue."

The audience hisses its dismay.

In April, Ms. runs an article entitled "AIDS," it is written by their out lesbian editor and is entirely hetero-sexual in focus. In Boston, six of us, all AIDS-conscious in various capacities, gather on a Saturday to do an interview for *Sojourner*. I've been pushing them to run safer sex information to no avail. (I'm told they've "done AIDS," having printed an article in 1985 and another in 1986.) Veneita has spoken that morning to a Minority Conference on AIDS called at the eleventh hour. It is another "AIDS weekend." After three hours of discussion, Jennifer Walters, an HIV counselor at Fenway's Alternative Test Site (ATS), goes off to put an article together for the Monday deadline.

Soj tells her it is "too muddy and cliquish" to be readily understood by the readership, besides, we're five lesbians and one bisexual thus low risk," we're not women with AIDS. Veneita is invited to write about minorities and IV-drug use. She feels tokenized and tells them so. We are fed up. Jennifer writes another piece which is published, as are guidelines under her and my name, and Cindy Patton's latest thoughts on testing. After a tense exchange of letters and phone calls, some of us meet with *Soj* in September about their future AIDS coverage. It is soon after that the long-awaited *Radical America* special issue, "Facing AIDS," hits the newsstands.

I go with a gay man I know to get his test results at a local ATS. Trying to be strong

and calm for his benefit, I begin to get tearful the longer he is in with the counselor. We know the HIV test is not an AIDS test, is not even diagnostic, but it is still frightening. Just as I'm considering what to do if he is indeed positive, he appears.

"I'm negative," he whispers with a grin. I hug him, more relieved than I can say. "I decided I wanted to know," he says. It is a reprieve, in a sense, because we both know that testing negative for the HIV antibody is no guarantee of anything.

So we celebrate.

Stuffing GCN's before Pride, I see AAC's new Board of Directors has sent us green copies of their letter to the Governor opposing his foster care policy and delineating homophobic ramifications for their client population. It will be my first Pride marching apart from AAC and it is two years after the foster decision was announced.

In June the cops use gloves arresting AIDS protesters in front of the White House. Washington-born and (mostly) bred, I'm still incensed by the front page photos of PWAs and others manacled and kneeling as yellow-gloved policemen and women hold them down.

Experience stands me in good stead obtaining a job working with IV-drug using families — principally women — with children under six. So much for not being a "kid person." Again, I am working with a disenfranchised population: children, women and men struggling with poverty, addiction, at risk for or diagnosed with AIDS-related illness and coping with isms and ignorance. Addiction may kill them before the rest, maybe not.

While the governor and the legislators haggle about what is "tasteful" safer sex material, I drive off to meet a family with a child who has ARC, a mother who is positive and a father who has tested both ways. The parents continue to share works, are not connected with any AIDS organization, are homeless and refuse Narcotics Anonymous. There is no methadone within one hundred miles if they would enter treatment, and the child must go into Boston for AIDS-related treatments monthly. Though 12 providers are involved with the family, no one has talked to them about needle/works cleansing or safer sex or infection control. In 1988 Michael Dukakis, who allows HIV testing for life insurance, will flatly refuse to consider Boston Mayor Flynn's needle-exchange program as a way to curb the spread of AIDS. Waxing moralistic, he tells "those people" to go into treatment, it's available.

As I know from the families I work with, treatment slots are few and far between and that's not the only problem. The situation is further complicated when there are HIV-infected children to think about. For example, daycare centers in Mass. will not take any children under two years, nine months who are positive for HIV or have been diagnosed with ARC or AIDS. It is most often the women, sick themselves, who care for their ill children.

I also learn that alternative treatments such as AZT are not readily available to women, due in part to fears about birth defects for those of childbearing age. But AZT was never even tested on women — the fact that it is prescribed for women at all is as frightening as the lack of access. Trials for many new drugs are closed to women, including those for Ampligen, Imuthiol and Isoprinosine. It is assumed that women PWAs are all addicts and thus, can't be counted on to do what they're told in the drug trials. I've also heard the argument that men with AIDS are more homogeneous than women with AIDS so it's easier to try drugs on men.

Other problems for women include their vulnerability to coercive testing and abortion, as well as sterilization.

At the October 1987 March on Washington I watch the PWAs lead the parade. Not all are gay and lesbian but they are there, walking, by wheelchair, and in the buses. It is the most moving part of the day for me, particularly in my home city where some of my roommates and I are guests of my mother.

Remembering the Eagle bar zap in 1984 and the short-lived AIDS Political Front, I note New York's AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) is a very visible presence. Many sport their trademark black shirts emblazoned with a pink triangle and the equation "Silence = Death." To me there is no more apt symbol of the militancy and

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Battles joined

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outrage we feel entering the final year of Reagan rule. Hundreds taunted the gloved cops at the Supreme Court civil disobedience action the following Tuesday. The *Hardwick* anti-sodomy decision, LaRouche coming up again in California, thousands sobbing over the NAMES quilt on the Mall...these are images I carry with me. *Time* and *Newsweek*, which have featured AIDS babies and bisexual-blaming covers in 1987, carry nothing of this, the largest demonstration in Washington since the Vietnam memorial and Dr. King.

Veneita is honored at the New England Human Rights Campaign Fund dinner a couple of weeks hence. Though we're no longer lovers, she's invited me as her date and I proudly snap photos and mingle with the RIPAIDS and AAC-affiliated attendees. Larry and I shake hands and make small talk. Bruce and Steve, they were friends of Thom and Charlie, lovers who died of AIDS, tease me about going from the frying pan and into the fire with my IV-drug work. Peter Hiam, the insurance commissioner who resigned in protest over Gov. Dukakis' allowance of HIV testing, and Harry Collings, AAC's superb fundraiser, are among the others awarded. Mathilda Krim of the American Federation for AIDS Research (AMFAR) gives a low energy speech — the Helms amendment has passed. Kennedy, Kerry, Cranston and assorted "liberals" were among those 98 U.S. Senators voting in favor of barring federal monies for materials "promoting homosexuality."

As the gay rights bill looks ripe for passage in Massachusetts, the Catholic Church and politicians continue to play upon the explicitness of AAC's gay male safer sex brochure giving voice to the tired mythology that "homosexuals" are perverse, disease-bearing child molesters. Twenty-five percent of AAC's funding hangs in the balance and presidential contender Dukakis says the brochure is "far too explicit."

Meanwhile, in Boston, there is talk about viewing AIDS in a political context as somehow new by participants at *Radical America's* forum and other post-March activist meetings. Energy to form an ACT UP organization within a lesbian and gay context produces MASS ACT OUT, a grassroots group which organizes vigils, protests and rallies around the State House battles for gay rights, safer sex education and reproductive rights. A couple of months later ACT UP-Boston is formed.

But there are some who accuse those of us who want AIDS groups to include all PWA/PWARCS, regardless of sexual orientation, as suffering from some sort of "internalized homophobia." There is also the familiar criticism of "service organizations," like AAC. I and others tend to agree such groups rarely deal with the broader context of their work and are slow to recognize their institutional racism, sexism, etc. But it still seems easy to rap "them" without the benefit of experience serving in the AIDS trenches. I am particularly upset when I hear these criticisms from lesbians who didn't consider AIDS their issue until it was politically expedient. Others continue to deny that AIDS affects lesbians or that we need concern ourselves about safer sex. Yet I personally know two dykes who are ill and the debate seems almost an abstraction. Education is still our only weapon against the disease and lesbians and bisexual women are among the least likely to be "prioritized" by anyone.

Plagued by blocks when writing about AIDS and trying to meet a deadline for a Women and AIDS anthology, it strikes me. *What about all of us who've been doing this work?* It's time someone wrote about the lesbian AIDS activists who keep going with minimal support from "our communities." I've heard other women's stories of disappointment, silencing and misogyny. I don't think my experience is that unusual.

Around Thanksgiving, 1987, when I begin to wake up in the early mornings with paragraphs streaming fully-formed from my mind, I know I have to scribble them down and string them together. I consider the risks of publication carefully. Gazing at the poster on my wall that reads, "You have not converted a man (sic) because you have silenced him," I decide *that goes for me, too.*

I'm being asked frequently these days what it *was* like for me, *is* like for me — often by lesbians who are beginning to consider AIDS part of their lives. It is a story that bears telling.

As of March 1, 1988, I count 15 friends and acquaintances who have died of AIDS and ten others who are ill. They are gay, lesbian, straight, bi and transsexual, all different ethnicities and ages. I write in their memory and honor, for all those who've fought the battles, large and small around AIDS.

Yes, I am still an AIDS activist in March 1988, more than four years later, and I am still angry, political, emotional and questioning authority. I continue to love gay men, lesbians and others so affected by this crisis. Maybe I pick my battles differently these days — there are so many more as this war rages on. We're still on the frontlines, fighting for our lives, battles joined time and again. I hope we will continue to act up and out, waging battles against our common foes. Not each other.

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The author thanks all those friends who "tide me by." I'm grateful also to GCN for publishing this series, and providing a forum for further exploration of what AIDS means to the entire community. □

Third sex

Continued from page 12

been heard up and down Broadway on Oct. 19, 1938 when the play *Oscar Wilde* opened with the accomplished actor Robert Morley in the title role. At last a well-written, well-produced presentation of the life of a talented, famous gay man.

Waltz in Goose Step, inspired by the purge of homosexuals from Hitler's SS was brought to the stage that same year. Unfortunately, it was anti-gay as well as anti-Nazi. It was also a flop. Curtin asserts that "never before nor since had Broadway audiences seen a more despicable depraved gay male characterization than that of Count Von Laidi," a character based on one of Hitler's earliest financial backers.

The 1945 opening of *Trio* in a sense signalled the end of the era of night stick censorship. The play was the same old triangle: older, sophisticated woman, the younger woman, and the young man who breaks up the two — nothing particularly provocative. Yet theater owner Lee Shubert didn't want to take any chances, so he called upon the Licensing Commissioner to approve the play in advance. Back in 1937, critics, theater people and politicians had rallied together to oppose a bill which would have given the Commissioner the same authority Shubert was now asking him to assume. The Duggan bill was vetoed by the then governor. As a result of Shubert's controversial request in 1945, theater censorship again became a hotly debated topic. Mayor LaGuardia was eventually convinced that a play shouldn't be closed down until after the producer was found guilty in court of violating the Penal Code.

The following year Jean Paul Sartre's *No Exit*, which contains an identifiable lesbian character, was brought to the American stage in an adaptation by Paul Bowles. In 1954, the book *The Immoralist*, by Andre Gide, became a Broadway play. It opened with a cast of Louis Jordan, Geraldine Page and an unknown James Dean as the gay Arab houseboy. Augustus and Ruth Goetz, who brought the play to the stage, intended it to be "the first sympathetic dramatic consideration of the homosexual's predicament" — how to live in the world as gay with dignity.

Where were the gay and lesbian playwrights all these years? Tennessee Williams, Thornton Wilder, Terence Rattigan and others were struggling to establish themselves as writers. Even after Williams had been successfully established for years, he admitted he was terrified of being "tarred and feathered and ridden out of the New York theater."

In the book's last chapter, Curtin looks at the strange backlash against playwrights such as Williams and Edward Albee. Critics, unnerved by something "subversive" in Albee's work, may have heard the rumor that he and a few other prominent playwrights were gay. They began to examine plays for underlying homosexual attitudes and also for subversive characterizations of heterosexual relationships. In a 1961 *Sunday Times* feature article, reviewer

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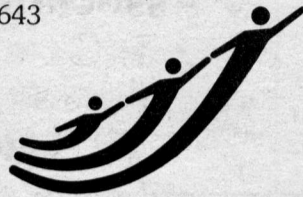
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