

BAGMAL Newsletter

December 1987

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Staff for this Issue

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Opposite the Public Library

The BAGMAL Newsletter is published monthly except during the summer, when a bi-monthly schedule may be in effect. A subscription is \$5 per year. One free sample issue will be sent upon request, after which payment is expected. Subscriptions will be exchanged with other organizations. The Newsletter staff encourages submissions from its readers. Unused submissions will be returned if a self-addressed stamped envelope is provided.

Interview

Aly Kim and Christy Chung

by S. H. Chua

This interview took place on 8 November 1987. Aly Kim and Christy Chung were passing through Boston as part of their tour of northeastern cities after the March on Washington, promoting their book, Between the Lines, and meeting gay and lesbian Asians. Also participating were Jack Lo, co-chair of BAGMAL, and Tsui Yin Moy, a lesbian member of BAGMAL.

Editing *Between the Lines*

S.H.: Let's talk about your book. When did it all start? How did the idea come about?

Aly: It goes back for me maybe four years. I had been thinking for a long time that it would be good to get an anthology, because nothing existed. I had been doing research seeing stuff on Chicano lesbians, Black lesbians, Jewish lesbians, and then Asian women. Nothing on Asian lesbians.

A friend of mine had met Willie

[Wilkinson] about four years ago and she had come up to me and said, "There's another one!" because in Santa Cruz there were very few Asian lesbians. She grabbed my hand and said, "I want you to meet someone." So I met Willie. I met her two years later and she was really committed to her Asian lesbian identity. I had been thinking for a while so we got together and started talking about it. We decided that we were going to put together a national, international anthology. Then we all ended up in this class together.

Christy: It was an Asian women's class on campus. That's how we met at U. C. Santa Cruz. Aly and I had met before that but I don't think Willie and I had met. But that's when we started spending more time together and talking about issues.

Aly: In this class on issues that affect Asian American women we brought up lesbian issues - we always brought
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The year in review and looking forward to '88

by Jack Lo

The formation of BAGMAL in 1979 created a channel to link our community together. It is wonderful to see Asian lesbians and gay men come together, sharing our commonalities and our differences. It is great to see that the community is growing.

I must address my appreciation to our newsletter committee, steering committee and those who support BAGMAL. Without you, BAGMAL could not have seen the successes of this past year. In 1987 BAGMAL organized many successful social activities and discussion meetings. We had a wonderful time at Boston's Gay Pride March and the National March on Washington. Those who attended these events, I am sure shared the spirit of being part of a vigorous and growing Asian lesbian and gay community.

We are a community. We have our common grounds and our differences. Some prefer BAGMAL to be oriented towards social activities; some prefer us to be more task-oriented and politically active. We have women and men. We have members from different countries and cultural backgrounds. But then, we are, after all gay or lesbian and Asian. To enable the growth of our community we must allow the diversity and bring the commonalities together.

I urge you to get involved and participate in BAGMAL. It is through you that we can establish a viable community for Asian lesbians and gay

men. This is a group where we can meet our brothers and sisters regularly, where we can gain support, understanding and share our feelings. The steering committee is asking for more involvement to help make BAGMAL 1988 more exciting and successful. Without your help our goal can only be partially accomplished.

I invite all Asian members to come to our planning meeting on Sunday 16 January at 1:00 p.m. at Vickie Lew's, 11 Price Road, Apt 6, Allston. (787-4213) Directions: Take the Green Line (B branch), get off at Long Avenue, (one stop after Harvard Street), then two rights and a left. Landmark: Spanish market at the corner of Price Road. The planning meeting is primarily to seek your input for events in 1988. We would like to find out your interests and your thoughts on BAGMAL's direction. To make our social events more exciting and to attract new members we want your ideas. I am also looking to form a social committee. Other proposals include an East Coast gay Asian retreat, a cultural festival, Asian lesbian issues and others. We will be informal with the main emphasis on people airing their ideas, opinions and suggestions. We will have a potluck before the meeting so bring some food or drinks to share. Hope to see you there.

Jack Lo is co-chair of BAGMAL

Calendar

Saturday 9 January
9 p.m. - 2 a.m.

BAGMAL New Year '88 party. Hosted by Hai and John, 13 Wellington Street, Boston (267-7638). \$6 donation requested to benefit BAGMAL's 1988 activities. BYOB. All Asian gay men, lesbians, and friends welcome. (See enclosed invitation for directions)

Sunday 16 January
1 p.m.

Potluck/planning meeting at Vickie Lew's, 11 Price Road, Allston (787-4213). Your input will decide what BAGMAL will be doing for 1988. See Jack Lo's article on this page for more details.

February

An event for Chinese New Year (17 February) is in the works. Watch out for details.

Classified

Professional Chinese gay male, 31, with nice looks and manners seeks similar Oriental gay women for business dates. Will reciprocate. If interested, please write to P. O. Box 1439, Cambridge, MA 02238.

Letter to the editor

Two recent BAGMAL articles by Andrew Li prompted me to pick up my seldom used pen and respond to what I perceived as a grossly unfair condemnation of our gay "white" community.

The nature of Mr Li's articles (especially, "March on Washington, Another Viewpoint," *BAGMAL Newsletter*, November 1987) deals with the issues of racism among the general gay community and Mr. Li's desire to exclude "non-Asians" from many of the gay Asian social functions. Having been out in the gay scene in the U.S. for over eleven years, let me add that I agree with Mr. Li's assessment that racism exists in the gay community. Racism against Blacks, Asians, Jews, Puerto Ricans, etc., exists in one form or another. This is precisely why I feel the existence of organizations such as BAGMAL is important in providing support of Asian gays AND in promoting understanding of Asian issues to the non-Asian gay community. Unless we reach out to the general population and remove the roots of the biases and misconceptions, we will never succeed in achieving equality. The only way this can happen is through a process of inclusion, not exclusion as suggested by Mr. Li.

I showed Mr. Li's articles to several of my non-Asian friends who accompanied me to the Washington march. They were astonished as well as angered. Mr Li stated: "It was exhilarating to be among the huge number of gay people and to meet gay Asians from around the country and to march together.... What happened is that we got mixed up with a bunch of white people.... After all, the point of having an Asian contingent is that Asians be together.... So I was an-

nnoyed that our Asian contingent should have so many non-Asians in it." Such dogmatic attitude is ultimately self-defeating. The lack of tolerance is the underlying root of racism. By saying, "we don't want you because you don't look like one of us, Mr. Li is guilty of perpetuating racist attitudes. It was upsetting to Mr. Li because these people did not appear (physically) to be Asians; it didn't matter whether they share any Asian cultures or values. I wondered if Mr. Li would have objected to having straight Asians march with us. Were there any positive contributions from the non-Asian participants, or was Mr. Li so busy searching for the negatives to support his preset notions that he simply ignored them?

Another interesting point was Mr. Li's experiences at the Asian party. He felt that "the party atmosphere was that of a meat market—a market of Asian meat for inspection by whites." I was at the party and had a wonderful time! I met many Asians and non-Asians and experienced very little sexual tensions. The only unpleasant moment occurred when a gay Asian followed me as I was leaving the party to join my friends at Dupont Circle. I didn't let the incident shadow the overall atmosphere of the evening; after all, what's the big deal? It also upset Mr. Li when a white person muttered, "Excuse me" (in Japanese). Would it be less upsetting had an Asian muttered the phrase? The poor white folks get put down when "they don't appear Asian" and also when "they try to be Asian"! Can Mr. Li provide any guidelines for my friends to follow? I personally thought the incident was funny while Mr. Li did not.

I don't know what else is there to say except that everyone is different. There may be other members of

News Notes

The December 6-12 1987 issue of *Gay Community News* featured an interview with the Mayumi Tomihara about lesbian organizing in Japan.

Yu Kan Ping's *The Outcasts* based on the novel by Taiwanese author Pai Hsien Yung is now available on video tape. The movie lasts 102 minutes and is in Mandarin Chinese with English subtitles.

The Historic March on Washington - a video produced and directed by Carl David features several minutes of footage of the Asian contingent with many instantly recognizable local faces.

Oriental Guys a glossy soft-core travel mag from Australia features nudie pics of Singapore young men and travel chat. *Oriental Guys* will be reviewed in the next issue of this newsletter.

Thailand: Song of Life advertised as "an underground home-made video" features Thai boys getting in on. Review will appear in the next issue.

BAGMAL who identify with Mr. Li's view of exclusion. I went to Washington because I was gay, not so much because I was Chinese. At present, homophobia is much more of a pressing issue to me than labels of "rice queen" or "snow queen," etc. I hope we can overcome the prejudices of gay Asians experience by showing the gay community the positives in us and not by our anger and resentment of them. For god's (or Buddha's) sake, let's stop the bitching and enjoy ourselves!

Johnny Low
22 November 1987

Coming Soon

Name the person in the picture. An interview will appear soon.

A review of *Between the Lines: An Anthology* by Pacific/Asian Lesbians of Santa Cruz, California, edited by C. Chung, A. Kim, and A. K. Leme-shewsky will appear in our next issue.

Reviews and thoughts on gay Asian erotica. Coming up soon.

Glad Day Bookshop is moving Jan 1 to the Back Bay. See Page 1 for our new address.



ALY & CHRISTY *Continued from page 1*

it up. So us three started talking about doing a book together. Willie and I were doing an independent study with one professor saying that we were working on the book. We wrote up a prospectus, on what we wanted out of it. And I started working on a bibliography. And from then all of us started trying to work together but it wasn't happening at all. So this year Christy and I said: we just want to do it. We don't want to keep on putting it out there, way out in the future - worrying whether we can do an international scope or whether we can do a national scope. We just wanted to get something together now because we're so invisible.

Christy: We just wanted the book to

be out there. Because it takes so long. It's such a long process - getting other people to write. Sending it in. Getting word out that it exists - and that it's even happening. And when Aly and I started talking about it we decided let's just get something out there. We had been writing for a while and sharing our writing. And really feeling that we just needed to put our work out there. Because there's nothing, you know. Even if you're looking for something just to read yourself. And we just said forget it. Let's just put our stuff out.

S. H.: How did you get the contributors, the writers.

Aly: Just from people we knew or hear about. There aren't many Asian lesbians in Santa Cruz. Any time we would hear. And our friends would

always be on the lookout for other Asian lesbians or who we think was. Our friend Laine did a massage benefit for us. We got a flyer that said it was for an anthology that was coming out. And then the school affirmative Action/equal opportunity paper - I had put in a little thing saying that we wanted submissions. And just by word-of-mouth. It was not until April when things got really rolling.

Christy: And even before we got all the contributors, Aly and I wanted to get people meeting together just to get a group going. That's when Kaweah - started getting involved; she's the third editor of the book. So we were meeting weekly just to talk and share our writing and to critique to help each other get to say what we wanted to say. Just constantly working on getting our writing together. That's when it started to really turn into a serious effort. When it really started looking like we actually had the energy and we actually had the people to do it. It was actually going to happen. That's when we started really working on the funding.

S. H.: At which point did it look like you actually had enough material to put together a book?

Christy: It didn't matter. We were putting it out anyways. It was just like we're doing it and even if it was just the three of us and that's all our writing it's going out anyway. It'll just be a book by us. But that's when we started pulling people in, saying will you please write this.

Aly: A lot of women were not really excited or enthused. They felt like it was necessary. But everyone was saying, "I don't have the time. I can't really write. I haven't done this. I haven't done this for a long time. I
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have this paper to write." So we kept extending the deadline. We kept saying, "Just give us something in 2 weeks" or "We'll help you write it." "Just call us anytime we'll help you do it". A lot of things came together - just fell in place. We set up deadlines. We said this is when it's going to be. This woman Anu who contributed a piece. She just gave it to me one day - very casually, saying, "If you want to use some of it, that's fine, if you don't." So it was that loose.

S. H.: These were all original works. You did not go looking for things that had already been published.

Aly: Some of the pieces are reprints because by the time the book came up some of the pieces had been printed in a women's paper.

S. H.: How did you decide what got printed.

Christy: Most everything got printed. Except for one or two things that we knew had been repeated somewhere else that people could get already. And only in terms of space did we cut out one or two poems.

S. H.: So these were local people and original works. Another approach I was thinking might have been to contact lesbians and lesbian groups in other localities and find stuff that had been published before but you decided not to take that route?

Aly: Because of time restrictions. We wanted to get something together and we were really working under pressure as far as getting money. A lot of the money we got was from the university and we had to use it within a certain time period. And so we set up that we would get that money and knowing that we would have those deadlines to meet. Also because things were available in other places. Part of my research and one of the things I put in here is a partial bibliography. Because

S. H.: What about the funding? Was that difficult to obtain?

Christy: The bulk of it came from the university. The rest we solicited. The funding sort of happened. It was so amazing when we think about the book and the idea and how long we had wanted it to happen. When we finally put our minds to it, when we finally started talking about and seeing it happen, it kinda just carried itself.

We turned in our grant proposal - the first one - the day it was due and it had been written the night before. And we got all the money we asked for. And the second grant was a similar one. We did not have to do as much work because we had already written one. But when we originally started we hadn't really thought it was going to be this big a production. We had thought it would be a lot smaller. So



I had been working on this bibliography for a while. So one of my next ideas and ventures is that we should publish a book of reprints of articles and pieces that had been written in other places. Because I think a lot of us don't know that anything exists and that's also where the book came from originally. In 1983 I had thought that there was 6 things that existed - an article by Willie [Wilkinson], a book by Kitty [Tsui] and that's it. And then the work - especially on this trip - that we have been doing we have been getting 300, 400 articles and books, letters, everything we know exists that I'm sure nobody else knows. Unless you spend the time to dig for it. So I think that's another step.

we were saying it was going to cost a lot less. So our second grant - we asked for five or six hundred dollars more than we had originally asked for in terms of the total. Because we started thinking if we can do this small one we can do a bigger one. We can make it slick 'cos that's what we want.

Aly: Originally we were just going to do xerox instead of printing. I had put together a small book of poetry before - just nice xerox on good paper. And a friend of mine had offered to do free xeroxing for us. We could do how ever many copies we wanted to do. And then we thought, "No". We want to really do something. We would go for it and see if we got the money we

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can do it and if we didn't we would settle for something less.

Christy: And so the rest of the money just came in. Like my mom contributed \$100 because she was so supportive of it and other people like *Her Books* - the two women who are our distributors - they gave us money because they just wanted to see it happen. And that's just what everyone kept telling us. This is so fantastic. We just want to see it happen. So here's the money.

S. H.: So altogether how much did it cost?

Aly: It was about \$1800 - between \$1800 and \$1900.

S. H.: Who was your printer?

Aly: We got printed on campus. They were competitive because they were the community press. We printed a thousand copies.

S. H.: And you are doing the distribution yourself?

Aly: We are doing the local distribution. *Her Books* is handling the national. Which means putting it in catalogues for the East Coast and the West Coast.

S. H.: What have you done now in the way of publicity and promotion?

Christy: On this trip we have been trying to get it out there to the bookstores. A lot of time I think the bookstores - the book does not necessarily catch their eye. Also they don't know what it looks like and it's local and people think well it's just of local interest. So when we bring in it - the fact that we are actually out there doing this distributing on our own has really helped make an impact.

Aly: We haven't done a lot of advertising but we have been reviewed in the *New Phoenix Rising*, (an Asian/Pacific Lesbian Newsletter that comes out of the San Francisco Bay Area) and *ALOEC* (Asian Lesbians of the East Coast) they're doing a review for *Conditions* magazine.

S. H.: Another group to hit are the straight Asian American publications. A lot of them are published from California. It would be good to get them to deal with it - the book and Asian lesbianism.

Aly: We met with the head librarian at the Asian American library at U.C. Berkeley. She was very encouraging, supportive and also stimulating because she also said: don't keep it within your own community. The whole Asian community needs to deal with this and not pretend that it does not exist. Or that it has never existed in the home countries because it has forever - it's just been silenced. In L.A. a woman has taken it to the Asian bookstores. It hasn't been that long since the book came out. It came off the press end of July.

Community and Organizing

S. H.: Let's talk about the Asian lesbian community in Santa Cruz. What is it like?

Aly: Well half of us are here. Santa Cruz is an hour and a half south of San Francisco. There is a big gay and lesbian community. It is a university town so there's lots of students.

Christy: There's a big women's community. But a very small local Asian community even by West Coast standards. Among the students- there's quite a big population and they're pretty active. And its even broken down into smaller groups - Chinese, Japanese, Vietnamese.

S. H.: Are you connected with any of the Asian groups on campus?

Christy: Not really. The Asian groups just put out a book and they really wanted Asian lesbian contributors.

Aly: Most of the Asian organizations on campus are very social. That's why lots of people have problems with them too. Not doing political work, discussion, things like that. I'm not very active in any organization.

S. H.: How do you define then the community you hang out with? Just a small group of friends or is there something more rooted in a larger lesbian community or student community?

Christy: We started our own. A lot of our energy really went into that group (*that worked on the anthology, S.H.*) and that the three of us were really there for each other - we were our community and our survival. Especially in the last seven months.

Aly: At the end of the school year we had heard about more Asian lesbians. Like this woman, Akemi, we had met her the day we were doing the photo spread. I had talked to her over the phone once because my ex-lover had seen her and had gotten her number for me but she had also been very busy. So it wasn't until the day we were doing photos when I said "just come down and hang out with us"
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we've been hearing about. There's a woman - right after the book came out - she saw the book, she remembered having met me before and she called me up and said, "It's so good to see this book" because now she felt she could have a community to draw on. So we've been hearing ... we get names around and we're just trying to get hold of them, almost pull them out because it's so foreign in a way since nothing like an Asian lesbian group has existed. Like what's this going to be, who's this going to be.

Christy: What's it even going to look like. People are so isolated almost to the point where you don't even consciously think of it as an issue even though it is and you're constantly dealing with it on a daily level. You don't think of it in terms of needing a group of Asian lesbians just to be around.

Aly: Well also in terms of saying whether it is just a group of friends that we meet and stuff. I think, yes, us three really became very good friends but we really came close around working together. And tighter that way. And part of the reason we began meeting every week - even if it was just going to be us three - we'd call other people to let them know we're going to be there so that we have this continuing presence so that if someone is ready or someone knows and they want to come join us they'll know where we'll be and know how to find us. It's part of our work - we gotta go back and forth - get the community back together. All these women we know who really need a community too, a visible Asian lesbian community that they want to belong to but no

one has the energy to really keep it going. And it's much easier - Christy and I work so well together that we don't have to say you do this and I'll do this. It's like I'll do this and she'll just do something else and it works, it happens.

S. H.: Have either of you had experiences with a large Asian lesbian community?

Aly: I have. In San Francisco. I never lived up there. I was commuting from Santa Cruz every weekend. This was right when *Phoenix Rising* was

I walked into this bar and there were all these Asian faces. And all I could do.... I go gasp.

starting. It was then called *Asian Women*. They tried to be an organization rather than now where they are just a newsletter. They would try to bring women together. This was a lesbian group but they called themselves *Asian Women* because they didn't want to alienate Asian women who could not say lesbian or felt uncomfortable with that word. That was about four years ago in San Francisco. The time when I was involved with them they were just trying to pull together and they were having a hard time focusing. There was a lot of dissension in the group because some people wanted more politics, others more social, some more discussion. As always there is a core group and unless that core group has the energy to start all these things, it doesn't happen. So although people

were interested it didn't come together. There was a lot of in-house fighting and personality clashes at the time that splintered everybody off. But at the time when I was first starting they were just getting the newsletter going. And I was so glad to be in a room with six other, ten other Asian lesbians who were talking about politics, talking about putting together a newsletter, talking about putting together a dance. It was the first Asian lesbian dance I had gone to and I walked into this bar and there were all these Asian faces. And all I could do.... I go gasp. I went there with some non-Asian friends and I literally stood there with my mouth open for fifteen minutes. I love to dance and they said "come on and dance" but I said I can't. I just stood there looking at everybody and then I just started screaming right on the dance floor because it was just so exciting. I had never been in that kind of atmosphere.

S. H.: The group published *Phoenix Rising* but it has stopped?

Aly: It started out as *Asian Women's Newsletter* about four years ago. It might have been longer than that when it was going on. It was going on before I got involved or tried to before everything sort of dissolved. The publication continues. It was a very local paper. Baseball games, literary events that are going on, not getting into issues so much or discussion like what's trying to happen now with *Phoenix Rising*.

S. H.: You were living in Santa Cruz at that time. Now you've tried to start something in Santa Cruz.

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Aly: I had also tried 4 years ago in Santa Cruz. I had put in an ad on the radio and put a notice up in the bookstore calling for Asian lesbians. And the only woman who responded was Kaweah who happened to be living hours away. She had heard the message and she was the only woman who responded to me. Willie by that time had moved away and Daphna, she's Jewish-Chinese, born in Brazil - she's always identified as Jewish. You look at her and you see Chinese. And I said Daphna we should get together and start this group and she looked at me. She didn't know what to do. I didn't realize then until recently when she said that it was because of me when she started coming into her lesbian Asian identity. So from that point on I just kept on trying. When I hear of people, you know doing it that way. But it just never came together so this year is the first year.

S. H.: You were active in the student gay groups. What was that like?

Christy: Very frustrating. Really frustrating for me. When I started coming out I was more involved with the women's community and trying to get stuff out there in the women's community and making them aware of women of color issues. And being the only Asian woman and being all the time the only woman of color in the whole group, it was really frustrating. I got so much shit from them and always having to do double work. And never having anyone listen to my issues. Like for International Women's Week they never did anything international. It was all local and it was all white. And they never dealt with any lesbian issues. And so I

moved into the gay and lesbian community, where it had, before I entered, been very male and of course very white. But after I started getting really involved there were more women starting to come in at that time. And it was so frustrating working with men who didn't want to work with women. And we were working with a very white community that wouldn't listen to my issues and I kept pushing them - you have to deal with racism, we have to get events that

BETWEEN THE LINES

editors
C. Chung, A. Kim, A. K. Lemeshewsky



An Anthology by Pacific/Asian Lesbians
of Santa Cruz, California

are people of color events. It was frustrating because there was also a lot of in-fighting. That's when I said, forget it. I don't have the energy for this. That's when Aly and I began to really work together. And I knew this is where my energy belongs. Where stuff is really going to happen. We did an event for Gay Awareness Week where we got Kitty [Tsui] to do a reading. I had wanted her to come down for a year to do something. And it just never worked. There was never the money and people never gave me enough support to have it happen. And so when Aly and I were working

together things started to happen. That's when I said forget this group. I don't need to deal with them. And we will bring our issues to them and make them look at the issues.

Aly: It just reminded me of the meeting we went to where they were going to give us some money. And it helped that there was a community because three of us went into the meeting together requesting money from the gay and lesbian group to bring Kitty because they had said they were going to give us some money. But even at that meeting we were getting shit for it, like how important are Asian issues, who is going to be there. What sort of crowd are you going to draw.

S. H.: We out here have this perception that Asian communities on the West Coast tend to be more grounded, more long-standing. People here think all Asians are immigrants. It appears that people out West understand that Asians have lived there for generations. Hence it would seem that issues of race and racism may manifest themselves somewhat differently than over on the East Coast. Have you observed this?

Aly: It is very true. There are more established communities on the West Coast. Especially after having been in New York.

Christy: Most of the time out West everyone you meet has been here for a few generations. That's what struck us here. It's amazing how new people are here to America.

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Christy: I don't know if our issues are different - you still get the same shit. "Oh you speak such good English". "How long have you been in this country". There's so much racism. People calling us foreigners. I'm fourth generation, give me a break.

Jack Lo: How do you feel about working with Asian gay men? Do you have any difficulties working with Asian men? Have you worked with Asian gay men in San Francisco or Santa Cruz?

Aly: I haven't. In Santa Cruz forget it. There's just one or two. In San Francisco I was just commuting and just getting involved with the women's group. And because I think the problem is there like here - there are very few women involved in the group. Also the group in San Francisco is a very social group. There's a lot of white men in the group. And so the women didn't want anything to do with that. The politics they wanted to talk about and that they wanted to work on were very different. Their attitude about procedure was different. And so there weren't women involved and having to drive up I wasn't going to go get involved with them.

Christy: I had more in L. A. I went to the conference in L. A. [The First Asian/Pacific Lesbian & Gay Conference, July 18.] It was really excellent. It was sad in that I don't think the turnout was as big as it might have been. I thought it was an incredible experience because I had never worked with men. We were really wanting to talk and to talk about what our issues were, really wanting to deal with it and really wanting to work together. It was still difficult because in the workshops women would speak up less or men would still dominate

the conversations - there were still some issues that were different and they didn't necessarily get brought up and people still had a hard time dealing with conflict. And there's gonna be, there's different issues. It wasn't really set up well in terms of bringing those conflicts out and dealing with them. But for me it was great because I really got to spend some time talking to men and I think over all in terms of the whole thing people really walked away feeling like we had some grounds for really working together. We really wanted to. And there were some issues that we just had all to deal with together and be there for each other. Most of us walked away really excited and really wanting people to start working on the next conference to make it happen.

Aly: For me to have met with you [Jack Lo] in D.C. was exciting. Because I hadn't got to meet with gay men - Asian men before. And having heard of the San Francisco group I had felt I don't even want to deal. But to hear you talk and sounding so sincere and really putting yourself out there I was so excited. Just to meet you and to talk. Even like today talking about putting the book out and so on it's like I don't have to explain to you - not like working with white lesbians, for example - always having to explain. You just get tired. You don't want to have to do that. But there's some sort of understanding, that in some way that we're both willing to work together.

S. H.: You had mentioned a lesbian retreat that had drawn eighty people.

Aly: This was the Asian/Pacific

Lesbian Retreat in California last May. First of its kind on the West Coast.

Christy: It was organized by a couple of lesbians who actually developed the idea. There was a whole core group who then organized it.

S. H.: Both of you were there. What sort of issues were discussed?

Aly: Mixed heritage. Political organizing. Creativity - there's Dance, Art.

S. H.: Are there any plans to follow that up?

Aly: Everybody wants it and says it will be at least three times as big as the first one but because I think it took so much work and energy for this core group to pull it together that to think about doing other things... Which is kind of sad.

S. H.: We always think that there are lots and lots of Asian gay people out on the West Coast. What is your impression? Are there lots of people who don't go to organizations and you see them in bars and that's it.

Aly: Oh yeah. Even at the retreat, eighty is such a tiny number of Asian lesbians. There's a bar in San Francisco where there is a majority - Filipina women. And that is considered the Filipina bar and it's packed. If any - a few were at the retreat. It's like a whole other community. There is a Japanese lesbian group in San Francisco who put out a newsletter in Japanese. First generation. Couple of the women were at the retreat. So many more. Just even from the group - Asian Women from before - I know there is a whole other network that does not belong to any sort of group.
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Especially now that the paper - *Phoenix Rising* - is just a newspaper, not a group. Different groups are springing up after the Retreat. There was this big workshop on Mixed Heritage and they're dealing with issues of being of mixed heritage. And several women started meeting after that and wanted to put together a video.

Traveling through the northeast

S. H.: Why don't you tell us a little bit of your travels through the East Coast. Some of your observations.

Aly: We were in Chicago first. The way that it has happened is that we know one person in different places. With Lola in Chicago, we had met her at the Retreat and she's been really isolated. So we went with her to a conference on Third World Women in the U.S. - not advertised as a lesbian conference but the majority were black lesbians. So we met some Asian lesbians there. And we tried to all meet together because we were only going to be there for a few days. This is basically how our trip has been. Where we found people and tried to pull them together. Especially like in Chicago and here we feel like the Asian lesbians were not in touch with one another. People were splintered and everyone's feeling like they're the only one. And Lola has been trying for about five years to get a group together in Chicago. They got one issue of a newsletter out and everybody's kinda dissolved. They're getting another group together now.

Christy: In D. C. there was a whole house full but most of us were from the West Coast. There were 24 house guests for the March.

Aly: We met about four different women who lived locally and others who lived on the outskirts of D. C. What we've been doing is we've been collecting names and addresses. And then we'll say - we'll give you the list of your local group so that you can get in touch with one another.

S. H.: That's great. So you are helping to get local people together.

Aly: We're trying. A lot of time we've spent trying to call people. In New York we spent time with all the *ALOEC* [Asian Lesbians of the East Coast] members.

Christy: But they are really split apart. There are three of them who are still trying to keep the group going. They have meetings every first Tuesday of the month at the community center - they're open meetings - so a core is still trying to continue. They still publish their newsletter but it's always been sporadic.

S. H.: In Boston there's been attempts to form a separate Asian lesbian group but I don't think they have been successful. We used to have more lesbians in the group.

Christy: We've met some women and we're supposed to meet some at the *Campus* tonight. We'll definitely put them in touch with you. I think I've noticed that all through the trip that in terms of the West Coast we have this priority and focus - people seeing

Asian lesbians, Asian gay men as a primary focus in their lives. Not even necessarily any issues but just being together and around Asian lesbians. I think since the Retreat that's just started to come out in peoples' lives - seeing that that's our focus, that's our work. And that's where a lot of our energy is coming from. The retreat was good because we were focussing in on ourselves. We weren't focussing on any opposing outside force. It was us, we together, our issues. The effect is that the rest of the community see us as a visible, viable force.

Aly: You gotta tell the story.

Christy: We were in D. C. We went to the Women of Color Dance after the Asian gay and lesbian party out at this women's bar. And there was this big band of us - fourteen people in the group.

Aly: How many people when you go out see a group of 14 Asian lesbians? So we went to this bar and all of us - we just take over this bar because it's pretty small. And we're all dancing and we have all this energy and we're just being out there. And then we're ready to go, we're altogether right so we all leave the bar together. Well we didn't think anything of it because we were all so excited and partying. When we got here a friend of ours who wasn't at the March told us that she had been hearing about these Asian lesbians in D.C. from everyone. And the great energy and just that there was this huge group that came into the bar and when they left the party was over. For us to hear that we made a presence and that people saw us. That we made an impact.