

BOSTON DAUGHTERS of BILITIS

FOCUS

WOMEN'S Center
Copy - Do not
a journal *Review*
for gay women

mothers and daughters

JANUARY
1975



60¢

FOCUS: A JOURNAL FOR GAY WOMEN

JANUARY 1975

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To My Daughter

Daughter of a dyke
I watch you
zipping down the road
on your two-wheeler,
astounding with the volume
of your laughter
the narrow dimness
of suburban streets
and know the day will come
when you will shake
the limits of these houses
and crush the quiet
confirmation of these lawns.

Looking Back

Paula Bennett

It's hardly unusual for a woman to want sons—the majority, I'd guess, still do—that is, if they want anything at all. But looking back now, it's still hard for me to believe, much less admit, that throughout my adolescence I too wanted a son, more than anything in the world. To be exact, I wanted three, three tall, beautiful young men to accompany overweight and awkward me through life, to love me, to protect me, and above all, to satisfy me—and anyone else who might care to question—that I too was desirable as a mother and a woman. My wish was as irrational as it was deep. I was a true child of the fifties: my value, my whole worth as a woman, depended upon my ability to produce and nurture men. Surrounded by sons, I would be secure. Without them, I was nowhere.

I can't put all the responsibility for this teen-age dream upon the fifties, however. Some of it goes to my mother as well. I grew up in an upper-middle-class Jewish home where all the goodies by faith and by tradition went to the men. I remember my father sitting on the living room couch send her to fetch a glass of water and I remember her

pride and joy whenever my brother brought home "A"s—he was so like his dad. I felt angry and resentful at her submission and I viewed with increasing apprehension the prospect of having to submit in the same manner to a husband—or son—of my own. But I never questioned that this was the way things were meant to be, that is, if one were to be like everyone else. And so, underneath my surface rebellion, my dream grew, nourished like myself on the pap of movies, television and magazines. By the time I was eighteen, I knew to my horror that I was sexually attracted to women, not men, and terrified that I might go through life without children, without fulfilling myself as a "mother-woman." I entered therapy with a Freudian analyst. Together in that less-than-subtle paternalistic environment, the good doctor and I created a new personality: I was straight, white and twenty-eight. I lost weight, got married (to a Presbyterian physicist) and, not long after, I got pregnant. Then God played one of her little jokes. I had a girl.

It was an outcome I had never really considered. I remember lying on my hospital bed after delivery scared out of my wits, not knowing what to do. I had planned upon a doctor or a lawyer or even a Freudian analyst. Then the sacrifice of my own career would have been

LOOKING BACK — Continued

But, of course, it didn't work out that way. What I least expected happened instead. I grew to love my daughter more and more and as the intensity of my love for her flourished (after all, I was a Jewish mother)—with it came a renewed love of women. And so I found myself moving, almost inevitably, towards the most impossible of justified. I would live my life again through him. Through him I would accomplish all that I could not do myself as a woman. Through him, I would succeed. But a little girl! Who was I to iron dresses, to sew doll's clothes, to teach cooking! Now she lay there sweet and smug as milk, a bloom of pink in her white hospital nightie, but soon enough she would be crawling about, howling and squalling like any other child and how was I to socialize her, to make her into a good little girl, someone anyone would want to marry! All the ambivalence I had felt about myself and about being a woman that I had buried under years of diligent therapy came bubbling back to the surface, undiminished by time or situation—I had been cheated, cheated of my last opportunity to live my life as a man. My freedom was gone for good and all I got for it was a daughter who would probably end up grieving me to just the same degree (and in the same way) as I had grieved my mother. The justice was poetic. And I remember my mother pointing it out to me.

dilemmas: the more I fulfilled myself as a mother by loving and caring for my daughter, the more I succeeded in undermining the false basis upon which my desire for marriage was built. My daughter was a woman and I loved her. Her struggles were mine, mine hers. She too would be forced to live in a male-dominated, woman-hating environment. She too would be asked to sacrifice her personhood for male-privilege and the perpetuation of the species. My rationalizations for marriage dissolved and with them dissolved the marriage itself. The whole edifice I and my analyst had so carefully constructed came tumbling down: I was gay, white and thirty-three.

There's no way of knowing, of course, if things really would have gone differently in the long run if I had had that "son." Certainly, coming out would have been a lot harder. There would have been a lot more guilt and a lot more questions. But it's more than that. Willy-nilly, my daughter brought me back to the world of women—something no son by himself could have done. She helped me to love women and therefore to love myself. She made me part of the matriarchal chain. I look at her now and I see a line of women, a generation of women, stretching from grandmother to mother to child and I am proud—because I am part of that line and because it is something we have done for ourselves, something that can never be taken from us.



"I've had priests talk to me about a seminal mass, where the priest, as the living representative of Christ, engages in a sex act with the 'bride of Christ,' the church. A woman can't provide the semen; she commits a lesbian act instead. That's what Rutler is talking about and what some priests worried about during the last convention—'cosmis lesbianism.' It's the most absurd thing I ever heard. I resent it as a put-down of women and of gays, and as sick, foundationless theology. Wherever did they get the idea that there's a sex act of *any* kind going on...?"

Carter Heyward, *Ms.* December, 1974

Recollections

Gerry Azzata

In writing about my relationship with my mother, I have to do a lot of speculating about her responses to the most important parts of my present life. She died five years ago, when I was 19, after being ill for over a year. I often wonder (while silently sitting through "telling mother" discussions) how she would have reacted to my lesbianism, and I find very few clues in my life. First, all of the popular stereotypes come to mind—Am I gay because of losing her influence? Am I looking for a mother figure in my lovers? Do I seek "motherly affection", rather than a mature sexual relationship? I spent years struggling with these questions. Finally, I realized that I should stop fighting these fears, and instead accept any truth that might exist in them.

So I begin there. The only way to describe my relationship to my mother is—total ambiguity. In my very early years, I remember a lot of touching and holding, and a lot of positive feelings toward her. But, on the other hand, many other early memories are of an immense pressure to be *perfect*. Every friend and relative was constantly reminded that I was reading books (real books!) when I was four. I remember being absolutely panicky at the mere prospect of doing something "bad" enough to deserve a spanking. My parents both developed a completely paradoxical attitude toward me: indulgence, coupled with extreme protectiveness and a real distancing from me. I can only guess that this came out of a serious illness I had when I was three. For fear of losing me, they gave me everything, watched me constantly, and stayed at a distance emotionally and physically.

My mother grew up in the Depression, and led a totally unfulfilled life by modern standards of liberation. She wanted to be a nurse, but had no money, so she became a secretary instead. At 32, she married a man who was neither as intelligent nor as sensitive as she was. She had one child (withdrawn and stubborn), and poured

herself into the housewife role. I suppose that I pretty neatly fit the stereotype of the lesbian who had a poor heterosexual model. I can't really describe my parents' relationship as being very positive. They gave a totally asexual impression. They rarely touched each other, and they argued constantly. And yet they stayed together. I often wondered (but never asked) why she had married him. Did she panic when she reached 30? Did she want children? Did her family pressure her? It was hard for me to believe that maybe they loved each other.

Meanwhile, I reached the age when mothers traditionally begin to put on the heterosexual pressure. I waited for it, but it never came. There were never any talks about boys I liked in seventh grade history class. Throughout high school, I spent most of my time with a small group of friends (male and female), who all related in a highly affectionate but totally asexual way. My mother would comment about how much time we spent together, but she never asked what we did (perhaps fearing—needlessly—the answer). If it hadn't been for my own existence, I would have sworn that she and my father were perpetual virgins, and that they assumed that I had inherited the trait. I ended up occasionally dating very dull boys (for physical contact), and spending my best moments with my friends. Then I went to college, and lived in a dorm, surrounded by women. I began to realize that maybe my feelings about women were somehow "different." And a friend down the hall had the same woman visitor every weekend.

And then my mother became ill. For a year I knew she would die soon, but I never knew when. The ambiguity grew. We became physically closer, touching more often, but the intensity of knowing it would be brought to an abrupt halt also made me want to pull away. We never talked about her fears, or mine. I stayed in school and shared what was happening with only two friends. The absolute frustration of having no power, nothing valuable to give her, and no way to stop time, is not

RECOLLECTIONS — Continued

describable in words. Finally, she died at home, the day after Christmas in 1969. No one ever knew if her will power just gave out, or if she intentionally overdosed on pain-killers. It was only years afterward that I realized that, either way, she wanted to spend her last days in her own home, with her family, and that maybe her feelings for me (or mine for her) weren't so ambiguous, after all.

The importance of our relationship came into focus much more clearly after her death. I became less concerned with the absences I felt throughout childhood, and more aware of the positive needs of our relationship had fulfilled. My sexual-identity search was postponed for over a year, while I went through a vacuum-state of grief. When I finally emerged, I found that I still had to cope with the feelings I had for women, now compounded by the loss of my mother. Eventually, almost two years after her death, a very close friend and I fell in love. Somehow, after months of emotional struggle, we managed to admit it to each other, and we came out together. The fears of loss and closeness all came rushing back, and yet I knew that I had to take the risk. Fortunately, my first lover was an incredibly patient and gentle woman, and we talked over the fears every step of the way. I worried about whether I was seeking a new mother. I needed constant verbal reassurance and touch-

ing; tangibility became all-important. Still, I had never been so happy, and I was confident that we were sharing in a total way. I felt sexually healthy and never the least bit guilty about my lesbianism. But our relationship also had all of the big problems of any first lesbian relationship. Her family absolutely rejected both of us. We over-extended ourselves in gay activism, etc. After a year and a half, I left her, partly to prove to myself that I wasn't a "dependent" person.

Since then, I've realized that it was the old legacy of fear of loss that was much of our problem. In certain relationships since then, I've encountered the same fear in other women. By experiencing a total, irremediable loss — my mother — I think that I've overcome much of that fear. The lesson I learned about lost time is one that I won't forget: If you give in to the fear of being close, you have let time go that won't come back. It really does no good to speculate on how you *might* have shared with someone, if you hadn't been afraid to try. If my mother could see me now, she would see that, in her absence, she helped me to commit myself to total sharing, to touching without holding back, to establishing some continuity in my life. These lessons may be far more important than any she tried to teach me when she was alive.

XVII

the only awe we know is fear
 we strip ourselves down dive
 into darkest wells rip
 through walls to let in light
 drinking tears and orgasms to
 celebrate the salt of our labor
 you a mother and I an odd punk
 but we left our roles up with our clothes
 we have been hurt and homeless
 and we build tenderly

—Kathy Hruby

Having Edged Herself Out

She is twenty-six today. Called in sick from work ignoring the annoyance in the boss's voice. Too bad, too bad, her head hurts. Three beers - one past her sliding under the table level - and it still hurts. To get stoned now would make it sane. Sane enough to watch herself watching herself watching. To see herself three hours earlier rolling out of a friend's bed, having tried to edge out the loneliness with holding - as if holding exists by itself and is not delegated by someone for something. To know that it has failed again. That she came with the beer to deaden the feeling that it would. To be there now wishing the feeling was so far removed it would no longer matter.

Twenty-six today. She had been out five years already and still feeling the loneliness. Still unsuccessful in finding again the holding for its own sake. And worse, recognizing in the last five years that she too is incapable. That she can no more give than the next without the overtures of "I can't just hold you." - "Want to be your lover." - "Am not free to." - "Would hurt my lover." - "Against my personal perspectives of sexuality/sensuality." - "Against my 'politics'."

Her mother could - had always been able. She used to hold her three daughters until they shared the warmth of each other in late afternoons, struggling together to come up from the blanket of each dusk. Her mother had never questioned. Had never needed a reason for what had become no longer natural, no longer easy. Her children had never bruised themselves on the corners of her existence. She had no lines with which to edge them out.

They had done that themselves. She had first, the oldest, thinking now of the eight-year-old she had been. Seeing herself sitting at the kitchen table,

swinging her legs, she had kicked her mother - who cried - and the child had said, "Such a baby." She and her sisters laughed as they did now at the mother who is some fifty-odd years of existence still failed to recognize the twentieth century price tags for human services rendered. Who because she still could not see was incapable of quoting them a figure.

They demanded a figure. Her legal sisters legally married, and she in a community of others demanding what she herself could not give. Her head hurts now with the image - watching herself as the eight year old, she also sees her mother with more clarity than she can handle. The thirty year old woman playing paper dolls with her children. She had never understood why her mother had kept her own paper dolls, a gift of her own parents when she was in the second grade. Her mother kept everything at the same time giving it, and she and her sisters played 'I will give you this for this.'

This for this - she is such a baby - twenty-six, finally recognizing that her mother is the only individual capable of holding for its own sake. That she has spent five years trying to recapture what was once given freely - before she became the eight year old adult rejecting.

Her head hurts. She did not go to work today - wishes she were stoned - did not have to feel this. Would be so far removed she would only be twenty-six watching herself watching an eight year old. An eight year old drowning a mother in laughter - as if it were grown up to edge herself away from the only human being she had ever known. As if it were cricket to negate those who will not play the game. She is twenty-six and has finally discovered her politics.

"Jim"

The Cosmetician (*after Plath*)

So, you feel the need for something different,
you feel uncomfortable the way you are,
and you've come to us for our assistance,
don't cry,
you'd be surprised how many girls we do.
First, take this rouge, two dabs to brighten up
each hollow cheek
and then this powder to hide those little lines,
lifelines, you say,
of course, my dear, but now its time
to rub them all away.
Ah, very good. Now put these lashes on,
here, with this glue, they're guaranteed
to last a year—open your eyes.
You say you cannot see, hand me the scissors,
I'll cut them down to size.
Next, your lips, they're bloodless, pale
This cream should help revive them,
there, ripe enough to kiss.
Now raise your hands. My child, this will not do,
your nails are broken off
and some of them are chewed. In this box
we have ten plastic cones,
attach one to each cuticle, allow to set
then smooth and polish.
See, you cannot tell them from your own.
Well, we're nearly finished: new eyes, new nails,
new lips, new skin—your hair!

Pardon me, I've no wish to be rude, but what on earth possessed you to chop it off that way? Depressed. I see.
 Well this should pick you up.
 Its made from strictly virgin hair,
 imported straight from Italy and dyed blond
 over here.
 There, now you're done, a miracle of modern science
 or almost one.
 What was that? You're tired.
 You'd like to rest awhile.
 Well, come with me, your bed is ready,
 its the very latest style.
 What? it looks too stuffy, you don't like the way
 its lined. It reminds you of a coffin. My dear
 how very funny.
 Why else would you be here?

Paula Bennett



"In conclusion, human sexuality involves the ability to love a person of the opposite sex and also to perform satisfactorily the sexual act with the loved partner. This usually leads to a desire for reproduction and subsequent care for the offspring as a consequence of the mutual sexual bond and love."

Silas L. Warner M.D.

in response to the question "What is meant by 'mature sexuality' from a psychological-emotional standpoint"?

Medical Aspects of Human Sexuality: A Journal For Physicians
 June, 1974

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"Overeducated women without children are often found working as waitresses or saleswomen in boutiques."

Kate Coleman, *MS*. December 1974

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Readers are urged to submit material for the !!!!!! page. Please include relevant details about sources.

D.O.B. January Calendar

419 Boylston St., Rm 323, Boston, Mass. 02116 ——— 617 262-1592

All events are open to all women regardless of their membership in D.O.B.

All raps are 50¢ for non-members, and 25¢ for members.

MONDAYS 7:30 pm Rap session and phone-in for lesbian mothers (including mothers with grown children.) At DOB office.

TUESDAYS 7:30 pm Rap session on being gay: for all women. Share feelings about being gay; everyone welcome. There are always many new people every week. At the DOB office, near the Arlington MBTA stop, between Arlington and Berkeley Streets.

WEDNESDAYS, 1st and 3rd GAYBREAK radio program, AMHERST, WMUA-FM 91.9

THURSDAYS 8:00 pm Rap session for older gay women. No ages are defined: come if it sounds right for you.

THURSDAYS 9-10 pm GAY WAY RADIO PROGRAM WBUR 90.9 FM

FRIDAYS, Women's Basketball, 7:00 sharp at Cambridge YWCA for rides to Harvard U.

SUNDAYS, 10:30-11 am CLOSET SPACE radio program, WCAS-AM 740.

Sat., January 4, 2:30pm Financial Planning Meeting at the office — setting up fund-raising projects, etc.

Wed., January 8 FOCUS MEETING. 7:30pm at the office. New People Welcome. Refreshments.

Sat. January 11 Office Clean-up Party 10:00am. Bring cleaning supplies: mops, sponges, pails, carpet-sweepers, paper towels. We also need furniture, drapes, etc. **2:00pm Business Meeting** at the office.

Sun. January 19, 4—9:30pm, St. Johns Church, Bowdoin St., Boston. Gay Speakers' Potluck & Training session. See story page 9.

Mon. January 20, FOCUS MEETING, 7:30pm at the office. New people welcome. Refreshments.

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CLASSIFIED:

Wanted — Lesbian-Feminist Women to share one West Newton house (fireplaces, garden, washer-dryer, dishwasher). **Not looking for boarders, but women to share congenial household life; \$125 & util. (less if 2 women).**

Susan Brown
17 Prince St.

GAY SPEAKERS' BUREAU PLANS MINI-CONFERENCE

In coordination with its drive for new speakers and new speaking engagements, the Boston Gay Speakers' Bureau will sponsor a mini-conference on Sunday, January 19th at St. John's Church, Bowdoin Street, Boston. Designed primarily as an intensive training program for new speakers and for organized groups wishing to train their own speakers, the conference will run from 4:00 P.M. to 9:30 P.M. and will include workshops, films, and a practical training session. The conference will include a pot-luck supper.

The workshops will be led by knowledgeable members of the gay community and workshop topics were chosen to present participants with in-depth up to date material which they can use as background for most speaking engagements. Jim Weinrich

will lead the workshop on "Gays and Statistics" (Kinsey, et al.); Paula Bennet and John S. will handle "Problems of Parents and Gays"; and "The Homosexual in History" workshop will be led by Judy S.

After supper two films will be shown: "Holding", which deals with female sensuality/sexuality; and "Vir Amat", which deals with the same subject as it applied to men. Both films were provided through the generosity of George Monsour. The conference will conclude with a practical training session run by experienced speakers, during which new speakers will be able to experience what it's like to speak, the questions that arise, and ways of dealing with problem questions and audiences.

For information call Gay Speakers' Bureau at 547-1451.



MINORITY REPORT:

A FOCUS Interview by J.S. and G.A.



*Blanche Bland
spokesperson
for DL*

Following is an exclusive FOCUS interview with Blanche Bland, spokesperson for the notorious Dull Liberationists, a group which emerged recently as an anti-movement against what she calls the "flamboyant Gays."

FOCUS: When did you first realize you were dull?

Blanche Bland: All my life I had the feeling that I was different from other people, you know, but I wasn't sure why or how. When I was a child, I withdrew from the world and lost myself in dull fantasies. It was such a relief for me when I finally acknowledged to myself that I was dull, entered into the dull community, and really accepted my dullness for what it is—a very important part of my identity.

FOCUS: How did your parents react when you told them you were dull?

BB: They said they had suspected it for years!

FOCUS: Tell us about some of your dull activities, Ms. Bland.

BB: Well, I'm a member of the Dull Passivists Alliance, the Daughters of Dullitis (some people pronounce it Delete-us). I'm on the staff of "*Out-of-Focus: A Journal for Dull Women*." We also have weekly rap sessions on being dull, raps for older Dulls, and dull mothers' raps. Tomorrow I'm giving a 4-hour talk at the Dull Academic Union, where some really crucial dull scholarship is going on right now.

FOCUS: Is it true that many famous authors were dull?

BB: Oh yes, definitely. Some of the most notable dull writers are Theodore Dreiser, Fenimore Cooper, and Fulk Greville. There are people who consider Emerson dull, but I myself feel the evidence is inconclusive.

FOCUS: What dull books would you recommend to the young person just coming to terms with this aspect of herself?

BB: As far as fiction goes, I'd recommend *Valley of the Dulls*. And for a truly poignant story of identity crisis and eventual self-acceptance, there's the old classis, *Born Boring*.

FOCUS: And now, some more personal questions. Is dull sex any different from what we would regard as "normal" sex?

BB: Yes indeed! There is a qualitative difference in the dull experience which other people simply cannot appreciate.

FOCUS: What about role-playing in dull relationships?

BB: That really isn't a major issue. Dull lovers never have to worry about who should be passive. It is a little difficult getting things started, though.

MINORITY REPORT: (Continued)

FOCUS: But what can two dull people *do* in bed?

BB: That *is* a personal question! I'm sure that if you don't use your imagination you can figure it out for yourself!

FOCUS: How do you remember your first dull relationship?

BB: With great difficulty.

FOCUS: You're dull, but are you happy?

BB: Yes! My new lover fills me with confidence because she is so sure of her own identity. I have to say that she's the dullest person I've ever met!

FOCUS: Can dull relationships last?

BB: They can last *forever*.

FOCUS: What about dull multiple relationships?

BB: I think most multiple relationships are dull.

FOCUS: What is it like in the dull bars?

BB: Dull.

FOCUS: Can you tell dull people by the way they dress?

BB: *We* usually can, though the average person might not notice. You know how it goes, it takes one to know one.

FOCUS: Do you think most people have some potential for being dull?

BB: Yes, that's definitely so. Our goal is for the time to come when prejudices and taboos will be overcome, so that all people will feel free to act on the dull part of themselves.

FOCUS: Is dullness genetic?

BB: No, most experts think it is learned behavior.

FOCUS: Can dullness be cured?

BB: Well, we don't like to think in those terms. Dullness is a deep-rooted part of the character. It is not merely a sexual function, but also has emotional and spiritual aspects. It is a proven fact that most dull people have no desire to change, and in fact it is almost impossible to change their basic orientation.

FOCUS: What about the old saying, "All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy"?

BB: That is a myth and a stereotype. This constant search for *causes* is very insulting, because it implies that dullness is not a viable way of being.

FOCUS: How do you feel about the recent APA decision that dullness is no longer considered a character disorder?

BB: We think dull people can accept themselves and lead relatively normal lives. Only if a person is in conflict about her dullness should she seek psychiatric help.

FOCUS: But what does the Bible have to say about dull people?

BB: We know that God accepts the dull for what they are. In fact, many of us believe God is dull.

MINORITY REPORT: (Continued)

FOCUS: Don't you worry that the influence of dull teachers on students might be adverse?

BB: Not necessarily. It's simply not true that all dull people are interested in seducing young people. In fact, most dull people find it hard to get interested in anything at all. And besides, think of the future dull people in every classroom who need a stable role model which only a teacher or parent can provide.

FOCUS: Ah, yes, that's another important issue. Should dull parents be allowed to raise their own children, or is it in the best interest of the child that he or she be removed to a more, ah, normal environment?

BB: It is deplorable that so many mothers lose custody of their children simply because of a basic character orientation which they cannot change and which does no one any harm. There is absolutely no evidence that dull people don't make just as good parents as anybody else.

FOCUS: Well, I guess that's about all the questions we have for you, Ms. Bland. Is there anything you'd like to tell us about yourself and your way of life by way of conclusion?

BB: I only want to say that I'm very happy. I mean, being dull is just a very natural thing.

DOB MONTHLY BUSINESS MEETING – December 11, 1974
Members Present – 9

Since we did not have the quorum of 10 members necessary to conduct a business meeting as designated in the DOB by-laws, the following are simply suggestions made December 11th which are to be taken up at the next meeting scheduled for 2:00 p.m., Saturday, January 11, 1975.

1. Changing business meetings to an evening when more members could attend.
2. The need to keep money from raps, the sale of coke/coffee and the sale of *FOCUS* separate.
3. The possibility of members who frequently drop by the office picking up their copy of *FOCUS* to save mailing costs.
4. The possibility of running courses in the office with the beginning of the new year.
5. The financial committee - activities - and long-range goals centering around office space and facilities.

We did decide (for purely functional reasons) that "Operation Face-Lift" as advertised in the December issue of *FOCUS* scheduled to begin at 10:00 a.m., Saturday, January 11th and would be followed by a business meeting. Women are encouraged to come, bring cleaning materials, and help spruce up the office. See calendar for notice.

Since we could not officially adjourn, we simply split at 10:15 p.m.

Janine
Recording Secretary

GAY Speaker Looks At The I.Q. Question

by J.S.

Thanksgiving weekend the Gay Academic Union held its second annual conference at the Loeb Center in New York. Approximately 200 women and 400 men were present—nearly twice as many as participated in 1973. The New England chapter was well represented, and returned with mixed reactions to the rather politically and polemically charged atmosphere generated at the conference by the New York group.

One of the most thoughtful and provocative talks of the weekend was given by Sidney Abbott, co-author of *Sappho Was a Right-On Woman*. In keeping with the theme of the conference—"Toward Community"—Ms. Abbott addressed the problems faced by gay organizations when personal needs come into conflict with political activities. Most heterosexual groups which form in order to effect social or legal reform, to publish magazines or newspapers, or to run coffee houses and community centers, are not plagued with the problem of continual pairings and re-pairings within their membership. At least half the group will be of the wrong sex for pairing; some will be already paired off, and so on. With gay groups, however, it is a different story. In any given group of gay women or men, nearly every member at some point becomes a possible partner for every other member, except in the case of exclusive, long-term pairings. Add to this the fact that most people come to gay organizations from a background of extreme isolation, loneliness, and deprivation, and the potential for disruptive problems increases even more. The personal loneliness and needs of the people in any gay organization are apt to be so great that they will take priority over the stated aims and purposes of the group. Much of the internal disorganization and in-fighting which have always to some extent weakened the Gay Liberation Movement can be traced to the high I.Q. (Incest Quotient) commonly found in them.

Ms. Abbott followed her articulate description of the problem with some suggestions for possible remedies. She

first counselled that we recognize the fact that we *are* needy—recognize the tendency in the gay community to want to make up for lost years and old deprivations. Knowing that we are apt to feel this urgency and pressure, we can try to separate what is necessary for us on the personal and individual level from what is necessary on the political and organizational level. We will not *get things done* unless we learn to distinguish the private from the public. Working on a group project, working for a common cause, demands a certain setting aside of personal desires and fulfillment. If an individual's overriding concerns at a given moment are personal, social, and sexual, then perhaps it is a mistake for that individual to try to participate in action-oriented group projects. Ms. Abbott further suggested that many of our needs for affection and affiliation can best be filled outside of organizations, in more informal and loosely formed ties which she calls Friendship Groups. She notes that many gay people get support and love from small circles of friends, which are often long lasting and eventually serve most of the functions of a nuclear family.

Where Sidney Abbott's talk and my own speculations have led me is to the conclusion that here again, as in so many areas of life, gay people have a particularly rough time of it. Sexual, romantic feelings are always potentially threatening to a group situation, and it falls upon us to find some way of coping with this reality: the problem is to continue the group effort without ignoring the personal needs. Clearly we are caught in a vicious circle: were we not so needy and deprived, our organizations would function more impersonally and efficiently. *But* our need and our deprivation are the direct result and consequence of our oppression, and they are in fact the *reason why* we must undertake organized action.

(GAU New England meets on the second Sunday of each month at 2:00pm at MIT. All interested women should write GAUNE, c/o DOB, 419 Boylston St., Rm 323, Boston, Ma.)

REVIEW:

Riverfinger Women by Elana Nachman

(Daughters, Inc., Plainfield, UT, 1974).

—Gerry Azzata

Two years ago, it was hard to find more than a handful of novels that dealt with lesbianism. And "dealt with" is the ideal term; they were either tales of everlasting despair, like *The Well of Loneliness*, or stereotype-ridden "documentaries" by Ann Aldrich, or pure (?) pornography. Recently, though, a rash of absolutely positive lesbian novels has appeared — *Patience and Sarah*, *Rubyfruit Jungle*, *The Cook and the Carpenter*. Daughters Press has just printed what I think will be *The Catcher in the Rye* of lesbian novels, *Riverfinger Women*. When I was about fifteen, *Catcher* was the book to read — partly because it so well described the spontaneity and confusion of adolescence, and partly because Holden, for all of his goddams, spoke an honest language.

Riverfinger Women captures these same feelings in the experiences of Inez, who is writing the "pornographic novel" of her coming-out years in the late sixties. Inez is in love with women in general, and with Abby in particular. And so she shares the story of Inez, Abby, Peggy, Eulalee, and many others, a beautiful tapestry of innocence, paranoia, and those wonderful quiet moments when everything seems so certain. Inez is all emotions and intensity at seventeen, and she is the same several years later, when the book ends. She captures moments slowly and superbly, as when she and her friend Abby discover that they love each other. Inez shifts with ease from one person's thoughts to the other's:

Inez had her head on Abby's lap.
That pleased Abby.... Friends

together, totally absorbed in play, openly liking how close they were. She wished Inez had kept her head down long enough for her to begin to touch it.... [To Inez] Now she is sure I'm awake, and I'm sure it's not merely her kindness. Our hands reached and met in the fire-smoke... Is this what sex is? This nod and play and rub of pinky to thumb and index to ring finger, this dance in the cold, by the fire, making shadows of animals in the darkness? This gentle friction that is more sexual than anything I have ever known? Where in god's name did you learn this?

Riverfinger Woman moves through most of the moods of the last few years, including the brief reign of the drug subculture and the "Committee," which follows Inez everywhere (Who are they—CIA agents? Detectives sent by her parents? The worst of her paranoid fantasies? Or a little of each?). These parts of the novel are interesting, but not nearly as much as the descriptions of the relationships of Inez and Abby, and then of Inez and Peggy. Blatant sentimentalist that I am, I'm fascinated by the hundred different ways that Elena Nachman describes the joys of discovering other women. Inez is an innocent, no matter how "experienced" she becomes. Every encounter is mysterious for her, and every touch is meaningful. Inez is the romantic who always feels too much, whose lovers never quite understand her depth:

...Everything is for you, Abby.
Years of single beds, nights of

Riverfinger Women (Continued)

fists clenched against the moon—for you....That first night rolling with each other, kissing, small-paw first expeditions to the breast (the breast!) finally to touch them after years of wanting....The sun comes up and miracle—she is here still, not vanished or turned to heap of wheat in the dawn. That, anyway, is how Inez would describe it. Abby, did you feel the same?

'I felt the same, but I wouldn't

have described it. You know, when you first sucked my breasts, that surprised me—it turned me off a little, because I didn't expect it. But then I liked it. I liked it a lot.'

I identified so strongly with *Riverfinger Woman* that at times it was almost embarrassing to read. Very few books have that kind of power, and it's really refreshing to be reminded of my own innocence.



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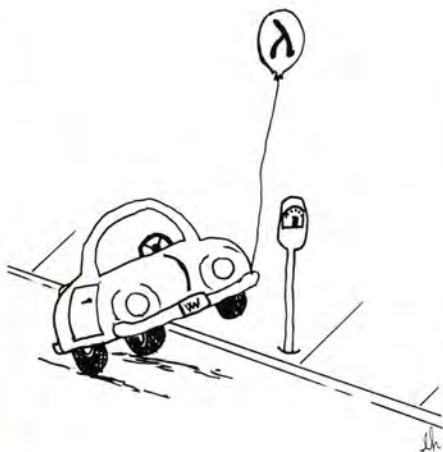
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