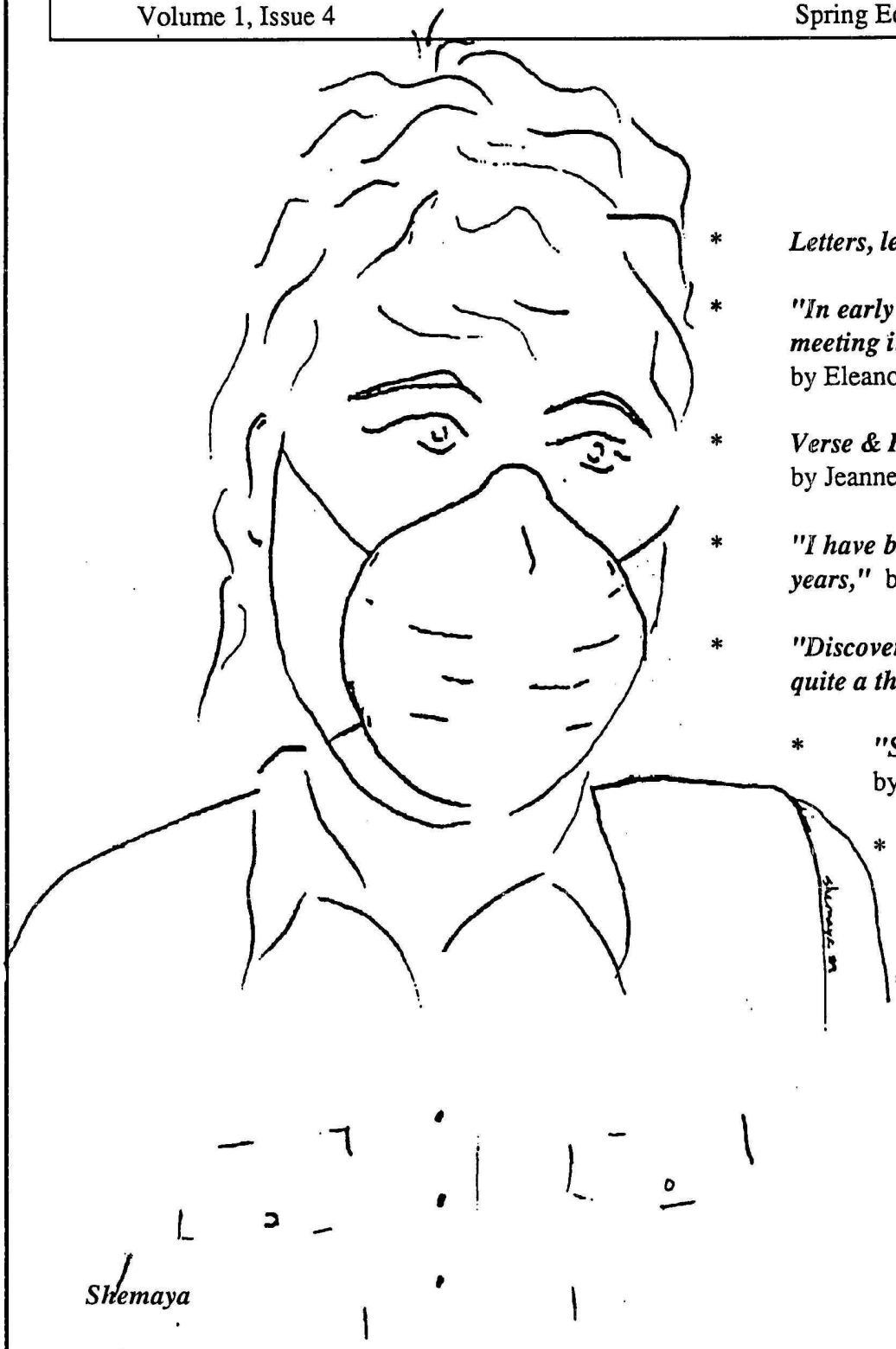
# Dykes, Disability & Stuff

*'cause we always have stuff to share*

*P.O. BOX 6194 ... BOSTON, MA 02114*

Volume 1, Issue 4 Spring Edition, 1989



*Shemaya*

# publishers ponderings

Dear *DD&S* Readers,

After a too long absence, *DD&S* is finally heading off to you again. We have had severe computer problems that left us without our machine for 2 months. For you techies out there, we've now had 4, count 'em 4, new hard drives and endless trips to the service store for both high and low formatting, and we can't tell you how many times we've reinstalled our software! Anyway, we seem now to be set for a while, and *DD&S4* is back making herstory again.

We have some new people to add to our list of *DD&S* helpers, women we affectionately call "stuffers". These women are invaluable to getting *DD&S* out in all the format forms needed so that no woman who wants her, need go without. We send our thanks to Ruth Lehrer, brailling maestro, Sara Attatimur, cassette editions of *DD&S* 2 and 3 and the braille editions of issue 4, to Jennifer Bensen for her cassette master and Barb Seegert for the multiple cassette copies, both of issue 4. Special thanks to each!

We have produced a sample issue that keeps whispering, "Summertime -the dykes are at festivals and conferences and out camping and on vacation. How about us?" Who could resist such a plea? If you can't resist, maybe you would consider taking *DD&S* away with you. If you're willing to help get the word out, simply write us at PO Box 6194, Boston, MA 02114, and we'll happily and gratefully send a small batch of *DD&S* samples on vacation with you.

This issue somehow became a theme issue. With Shemaya's cover art, we begin to get some insight into issues around environmental disability, EI, as it's called. We haven't made a decision about whether to try purposefully for 'themes' for each issue. In fact we haven't discussed it at all, just talked about talking about it. Whaddya think? Write us letters. Write articles. Remember, this *DD&S* stuff is for all of us to develop.

As long as we're boldfacedly asking your opinions, how about this? After a recent discussion with a friend in Chicago about disability slang, we thought we'd open up the subject and see what y'all think about it. What are your feelings about words like: crip, gimp, AB's (able-bodied peoples), etc.? Have you reclaimed these words? Do they make you cringe? How do you feel about expressions like "short-sighted", "limping along" "crippling the team"? Whaddya think? Put pen to paper or words to tape and send them along.

One final opinion requested--although we love getting your opinions on everything--is about how we can best respond to readers' suggestions. We would prefer not to hide behind anonymous editorship/publisherhood identities. We want to respond to all of you directly, and in public so that we can all get in on the discussion. In our last issue, we wrote a letter separate from our publishers' column, since we wanted our opinions to be put on the same footing as yours. We will consider ***all*** letters for publication, unless specifically told not to. See our contributor's guidlines, page 12.

In this issue, we are responding right here and now, in this column, to Bev Jo's suggestion that we add anti-Separatist statements to our list of things we will not knowingly publish. As separatists, we are well aware of the ways in which separatists are criticized, and yes, even trashed. We are greatly disturbed by the kinds of criticisms which are used to silence each other, rather than to promote discussion, and the frequency with which these criticisms are levelled at Separatists. At this time, however, we are choosing not to include anti-Separatism in our list of issues. We believe that there are basic differences between the kinds of attacks levelled at a political belief system such as Separatism, and those targetted toward groups based on ethnicity, class, race, or physical ability. First of all, Separatism is a chosen system of beliefs. Although a person may choose to join or leave a particular religion or may identify more or less closely with a class origin, these are primarily identities which a person is born into, and are not easily discarded. Second, and more important, attacks based on race, religion, ethnicity, ability, etc. are rooted in institutionalized systems of power. Anti-separatist attacks by other lesbians do not carry this same sort of institutionalized power imbalance. We believe that anti-Separatist rhetoric is often intended to hurt and discredit separatists without moving lesbians forward in our thinking. Still, we will print such letters and leave it to our readers to argue the politics. Let us know what you think, about our decision, and about how we should share such decisions with you.

With issue 4, little *Dykes, Disability & Stuff* is 1 year old! Happy birthday to all of us! We're amazed but not surprized at her breadth and quality. We certainly get much back, even though the work is very demanding. We've made many friends and believe that women out there in *DD&S* reader-land are thinking hard and working hard to make new ways from the lessons our lives teach us. The successes we make, judged by our own yardsticks, are worthy of grand celebration. *DD&S* is an appropriate place to celebrate our lives even as we share and sometimes struggle, with the various roads we choose to travel toward those successes.

Last, but very far from least, *DD&S* staffers extend welcome to all our new and continuing subscribers. Cheers! to all our sisters in the United States, Canada, Australia, England, New Zealand, South Africa.

*DD&S* PRINCIPLES OF PUBLICATION: DD&S holds the following anti-racism policy: We will not knowingly publish ableist, racist, anti-semitic, looksist, ageist, classist, mysogynist, lesbophobic, pornographic or homophobic materials including but not limited to advertising. We are not publishing just a list of no-no's, but rather we are working to lay the foundation of our wish for a better world for lesbians. We encourage discussion on the subject of racism, especially in the disability civil rights movement and in the lesbian community.

*Dykes, Disability & Stuff* is published by a collective, not all of whom live in Boston. We are six lesbians, some with physical disabilities, some with emotional disabilities, some with both, some with neither. Some of us are Jewish, some not. Some are working-class, some class priviledged. We have among us: asthma, diabetes, psychiatric histories including lengthy forced hospitalizations, mobility impairments, environmental illnesses and allergies, phobias, foot neuropathy and phlegm. We feel as a group we've got lots of experience, and opinions, and although we continue to envision *DD&S* as a reader's forum, we have feelings, opinions, judgements, values so we'll make our presence known from time to time. But WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU! We all dislike the medical model and love women. 'Nuff said? We still think so.

# letters & stuff

Dear *DD&S,*

I'm writing to say that I agree with your statement in issue #3. I'm also a Dyke Separatist & I think that Carrie Dearborn is not only wrong, but oppressive in her criticisms of Separatists. By saying that Separatism is classist & racist she's actually being classist & racist. She's denying the existence of the majority of Dyke Separatists who are working-class & poor. (I'm working-class & have been a separatist for 17 years now), as well as Dyke Separatists of Color. It's bad enough to be lied about, but it's worse when you're said not to exist at all. Although there have been many Separatists writings in the past 17 years making it clear who we are (including some excellent analyses of classism & racism), still these oppressive, hurtful lies continue.

Separatists are so threatening because we dare to say we love Dykes enough to put Dykes first in our lives. Being a separatist is an oppressed position - not a privileged one - because Dykes are oppressed by heterosexual men, gay men, & heterosexual & bisexual women. Lesbians who have friendships with men & heterosexual women therefore get more privilege than Lesbians who don't. Your policy of not knowingly printing oppressive material is very important (& unfortunately, now rare in Lesbian publications). I would like you to consider not printing letters such as Carrie's, which is openly racist and classist. I know it can be hard to make such a decision about a letter that's criticizing you but it really is oppressive to many Dykes. And would you consider including anti-Separatist in your list of materials that you won't publish? Also, I agree with your saying that being against sado-masochism isn't oppressive. S&M is oppressive to us because it's part of the male heterosexist power structure (which is why "S/M" practitioners name themselves after men who openly tortured females - the Marquise de Sade & Sache-Masoch).

--Thank you so much for your wonderful work. In Dyke Separatist Solidarity, Bev Jo

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Dear *Catherine, Sara, Helen, Anon, Anon & Anon,*

Thank your for publishing my essay. Your thought & attention to layout made it much easier to follow. I thought it was a big improvement. And, I appreciate your effort.

There was one mistake, perhaps in my original manuscript. In the third paragraph of the 2nd column, the word "not" in sentence four should not have been there. Poor people *did* live in sanitariums according to Anne's account - at least some poor people. Could you mention this in the next issue?

Issue two of *DD&S* was excellent. I notice especially the progress in reader input which, I think, is essential for a wonderful newsletter. Congratulations.

--In sisterhood, Adrienne Lauby

*Our apologies to both Adrienne and the DD&S readership for the unfortunate typographical error.--pub*

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Dear *DD&S,*

I'm so glad I found you. I have been disabled for 10 years due to a bladder disease, Interstitial Cystitis (I.C.) In April of 88 my bladder was taken from me due to the disease. Over 500,000 womyn suffer with this debilitating bladder disease. It has been called the PMS of the eighties. Little is known about IC and there are no drugs or treatments to cure it. A lot of women go undiagnosed for years because doctors tell them it's in their heads. Special tests need to be done and are performed under general anesthesia. Some cases are worse than others, I had a chronic case for 10 years. My bladder would bleed after sex or sports, the tissue would sluff off and cause great pain. The pain and the need to piss up to 60 times a day made leaving the house or holding down a job impossible.

Every six weeks I would spend a few days in the hospital having a Clorpactin treatment which was sterile water and chlorine. The mixture was placed in my bladder forcing it to stretch the bladder and to singe the nerves as a way of controlling pain and frequency. It seemed to be more painful than the disease for a few days after the treatment. I had this done over 200 times, as well as a number of other experimental drugs and treatments. After ten years of this hell, the IC ate a 1/4 inch hole in the wall that was left of my bladder. I am happy to say that I am now 33 and bladder free. I'm hoping to find other dyke ostomates to gather support and learn a few tricks about the bag. I would welcome letters from you and also if you think you may have IC, or you do, I would be happy to lend support or send you info.

--Debra Rovera, 116 Handley St., Santa Cruz, CA 95060

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Dear *DD&S*

A friend gave me a copy of your newsletter and I think its wonderful!

I'm sending a check for a subscription. I didn't want to cut the form out, since the poetry was on the other side. I didn't have access to a copy machine. So I'll include all pertinent information. I would also like to say thanks to Loralee for her description of loving a person in a wheelchair. Sometimes I have wondered how an able-bodied lover feels about caressing so much chrome & rubber. I feel much better now.

--Joni

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Dear *DD&S,*

My check is enclosed for a 1 year subscription. I have just finished the sample issue and I'm very enthusiastic about the newsletter. As a currently able-bodied woman, I am happy to be learning more about the issues of disabled women. I think its really all the same issues's, isn't it? I mean, whatever reason THEY give for keeping us out all boils down to the same problem for those of us outside. Anyway, thanks!

--GT

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Dear *Womyn,*

Hiya! Enjoyed *DD&S* lots, and your request for submissions inspired not only an article, which I'd kind of intended to do anyhow, but a drawing! Hope you like it...

I worked and fussed for quite a while on a contribution to the discussion of your s/m statement - as you see, it's not here - maybe next time.

On a different topic, I'm wondering if your choice of printer's ink is something you'd be willing to change. It is intensely scented, and like Lesbian Connection, DD&S doesn't get better with time or air. I am told by a friend that this is probably due to its being a type of "quick drying" ink - a misnomer, because unlike 'regular' ink (which can also be used by quick-print places) it never really does dry completely. It's devastating stuff if one has EI - comes right through a clear plastic bag, and makes reading DD&S a pretty toxic event.

The ink used for MAIZE/A LESBIAN COUNTRY MAGAZINE, for example, is a lot easier to deal with. It's bad when fresh, but it airs out well. That's done by Presto Print, a lesbian run print

shop in Grand Rapids, MI. Though I get the impression that is's the categories of 'quick-drying' or not that makes the difference, so it should be easy enough to do something with locally. There's also the ink used for Hikane, which is even better and is not petroleum-based, though it seems meaning loosing an awful lot of quality.

I think there's a slight possibility that the strange scent has something to do with using colored paper. The three publications that I get that are so difficult - LC, DD&S, and the Southern Seeds Catalogue - all have that in common. Though it's not always the same with flyers, so I don't know for sure. If this is a topic you're interested in doing something about, I can pass on whatever more I discover- and would really like to hear about whatever you turn up on it so that when a good solution finally appears I can pass on that info to places like LC. Thanks a lot!

--Take care, Shemaya. PS - the address for Presto Print: 3409 Plainfield NE, Grand Rapids, MI 49503, Carrol & Pam.

*DD&S's current quick-printer was chosen because it offers an unmatched bargain to our fledgling project. We simply can't afford to change printers right now. We will try to find an acceptable printer for those with that need and will make special copies if requested. Alternatively, we are available on cassette, also by request, although if print is a useable medium, it is significantly less expensive for us. --pub*

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*(The following remarks were delivered by Stephanie Borns, on the day DD&S was presented with our outreach grant. We felt the readers would appreciate her remarks. - pub)*

***Hello, I'm Stephanie Borns, executive director*** of the Boston Women's Fund. I would like to welcome you and thank you all for coming this morning.

You may be asking yourself, why the Boston Women's Fund, a grants foundation, is having a press conference to talk about women's issues? After all, women's issues are hardly news anymore. And indeed there are few of us now who are not aware of the crisis facing women in our community. The meanspirited movement to deprive women, and people of color of their basic rights is apparent in the Supreme Court's recent decisions to revoke civil rights legislation and to reconsider Roe vs. Wade. It is also apparent in the cutbacks of federal funding, the consistent refusal of the government to extend civil rights protection to gay men and lesbians, and the foot dragging pace of effective legislation against domestic violence.

In 1989, there are few of us anymore who don't know that

* Welfare payments in Massachusetts are 40% below the poverty level and 80% of welfare recipients are women.
* or that white women earn an average of $.64 for every $1.00 a white male makes, while black women earn $.55 and Latin women earn $.45. (and women with disabilities earn $.12! -pub)
* or that a woman is murdered by her husband or boyfriend every 22 days in Massachusetts.
* or that 1 out of every 10 lesbians will be physically assaulted in her lifetime because of her sexual orientation.

In fact, there are few of us in 1989 that are not by now totally numbed into despair by that information.

The reason we are having this press conference today to introduce you to these 23 community groups who are the most recent of the 105 Boston's Women's Fund grant recipients since 1984, is not to reinforce that despair. It is to let you know not just the challenges we face from a hyperactive right wing, but to let you know the struggles for social justice that are being fought and won. The reason we are here today is to let you know that there is positive change happening here in Boston, that despite the magnitude of the crisis we face, there is a strong and diverse movement of women who are taking the future in their hands. By developing vital projects and programs, women are effectively fighting the violence and poverty that pervade their lives, our lives and the lives of their children. We invited you here today because we felt that it's about time someone called a press conference to give the good news about women in Boston.

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## PUBLICATIONS

**Hag Rag,** PO Box 93243 Milwaukee, WI 53203
**off our backs,** 2423 18th Street, N.W. Washington, DC 20009
**The Womanist,** PO Box 93243, Stn B, Ottawa, Ontario, K1P 6C3, Canada.
**Black/Out,** C/O NCBLG, 19641 W. 7 Mile, Detroit, MI 48219
**Practicing Anti-Racism,** 923 Virginia SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49506.
**Disability Studies Quarterly,** Brandeis University Dept. of Sociology, POB 9110, Pearlman 208, Waltham, MA 02254
**Womyn's Braille Press,** PO Box 8475, Minneapolis, MN 55405
**Hikane,** PO Box C-9, Hillsdale, NY 12529
**Lesbian Information Service,** PO Box 194, Leicester, LE1 9HP, England
**Separatists Eroding Patriarchy,** C/O Sweeping Axe, PO Box 242, Greensboro, VT 05841
**Lesbian News,** PO Box 241, Daylesford, Vic. 3460, Australia

# eleanor's stuff

***In early March, at a planning meeting in Durham, NC, a couple of hundred lesbians from many different states met to work out priorities and give shape to a proposed National Lesbian conference scheduled to take place in March, 1991 in Atlanta, GA.***

At least fifteen lesbians there self-identified as being disabled. We took ourselves seriously - and were taken seriously - in ways that many of us considered a heartening advance in disability awareness in the lesbian community.

In the midst of a first day that felt fragmented to me as a lesbian with a disability, having come to the conference with two non-disabled women and not being well acquainted with any of the other disabled lesbians there, I and several others felt very relieved when we were able to get our caucus together, sitting and just being together, then going around a circle to check in with our frustrations at this event, which was far from ideal in terms of accessibility. One thing that came out of our brief time together as a caucus was that we wanted to be heard in some way by the whole assemblage of women. The women of color caucus had pressed for their own time to be heard the day before and their model was part of what gave us a means to do the same. But we wondered if we could carve out a clear request to present to the organizers and could get what we wanted so late in the day that did not have us on the agenda. Several women from the disabled caucus made it happen. The fact that by that time a few women were too exhausted physically to participate attests to a unique problem that we need to work out together: as a disabled friend once said years ago, decisions at women's gatherings are often made after hours of discussion by "the last ones standing," and disabled women are rarely among them. But--it happened. Self-identified disabled lesbians, with the cooperation of the conference organizers, gathered in a group at the front of the room and passed the microphone from one to another, speaking to a roomful of lesbians. Each spoke in her own style, un-preplanned, her own concern or varying politics coming through. One woman said her disability has come on recently and she feels strange identifying as a disabled lesbian, and isn't sure to what degree she in fact wants to so identify. Another woman, who has a speech impairment, said that she is called NON VERBAL--though she has a master's degree in linguistics..and that she has never been able to get hired for "a job", but she in fact works: for the lesbian and disabled community. Another woman: That she sometimes heard people become impatient with a group's discussion of problems of accessibility and want to "get on with the work".

"What IS the work", she asked, "if not dealing with the problems that present themselves in front of us?" Another woman: That what she wants to see is non-disabled women gathering in consciousness-raising groups, without disabled women present, to unbury and change their ableism. As we were speaking , a woman came up from the speaking crowd and sat down with us. When the microphone came to her, she told about her years-long struggle as a person with agoraphobia, about how hard it was for her to be at the conference, but that she is not going to give up the battle. One of us who had previously passed on the mike (because of being too nervous to speak) then said that this woman's contribution had given her courage to make her own statement, and she told how a lifetime of psychiatric diagnosis and treatment had just been changed a few months before, re-diagnosed as a neurological problem.

What was new about all this for me, as a person who has used a wheelchair for forty-three years, is simply that non-disabled women were listening. In my experience at many conferences and meetings, whenever a "workshop" is given that relates to disability, the people present are the disabled people, their close friends, and one or two others. Time after time. This time we demanded to be heard at a time when all were present. It felt new, and good. And, I will admit, frightening.

At the end of our speak-out, one of our members said that we were not going to leave until twenty non-disabled women came forward who wanted to work in coalition with us in a long term way, as planning continues for the national conference over the next months. The women readily came forward. No long silence while a blanket of guilt settled over and a few people straggled forward. These were women excited about the prospect of working out new ways together. The next morning at 8:00 demonstrated carry-through. Equal numbers of disabled and non disabled lesbians got themselves up to breakfast together at the first coalition meeting of what we hope will be a trend.

The conference organizers made major efforts to get women with disabilities to the Durham meeting. At the meeting, disabled women got together and made things happen. A piece of significant history was made. As a condensed metaphor of positive change, we might think of one ramp that was built, by a few North Carolina women, quietly and in a few hours. After hearing our speakout and "getting it," a local woman realized that the Adrienne Rich poetry reading occurring that night was taking place in an inaccessible building. Without public-to-do, a small group of women gathered forces and in a few hours built a strong ramp to the needed specifications of 12:1 rise, using old doors and providing a non-skid surface with throw-rugs joined by electrical tape. In its way it was a peculiarly attractive ramp.
**--Eleanor Smith.**

## BOOKS RECEIVED:

DON'T: A WOMAN'S WORD, author Elly Danica. Cleis Press.
SHRINK RESISTANT: THE STRUGGLE AGAINST PSYCHIATRY IN CANADA, by Bonnie Burstow & DonWeitz
RACIAL HYGIENE: MEDICINE UNDER THE NAZIS, author Robert Proctor . Harvard University Press.

**P. Murphy of Vocational Counselors, Inc** - Where are you? Our computer ate your city, state and zip code, so we can't mail your subscription. Write us asap to catch up! Friends of P. Murphy, please call her and let her know what happened.

## Durham Ditty Stuff

### 'TWAS A SATURDAY IN DURHAM

'Twas a Saturday in Durham,
And all through the grounds,
The lesbians were dancing,
In 'snowballs' and rounds.

The music was blasting,
All amps cranked to max,
With salsa and disco,
And hot licks of wax.

And Kate on her crutches,
And I in my chair,
Had just settled back,
For the evening to stare,

At the sight of those women,
All sizes and shapes,
All dancing in couples,
Eye to eye, nape to nape.

When what to my wonderous
Heart should appear, but
A hand outstretched,
And a nod, "come here".

Come dancer, come wheelie,
Let's show this room how!
A little creativity ...
And we're dancin' now!

In three's and in four's,
To a grand number 9,
All dancing together,
All having a time.

The chrome and the steel,
Flashing time like a beacon,
Braces and canes,
And women all reeling.

We were the group,
All the dancers would envy,
We were clapping and roudy,
With room for the many.

No dyke there in Durham,
Should be left on the side,
All shapes, all devices,
All dancing with pride!

So, late in the evening,
We headed towards bed,
While images of the party,
Still danced in our heads.

Come pride, come power,
Come taking up space!
Come women from hiding,
Come find your own pace!
Come dancer, come artist,
Come writer, come feel,
How some dykes in Durham
Reinvented the wheel!

--Catherine Odette Lohr

## jeanne's poetry stuff

### FAMILY OF WOMEN

*we are family*
of a soul
born to one another
in the richness of our being
in our aging, from days
of our birth
girl loving girl
woman loving woman
together comfort
bound by ties of loving
strengths and styles, untraditional
path seekers, path finders
in the eye of storms
centuries old
rainbow spirits, unicorns all
children of the universe
women loving women...

### MORNING OF A LAVENDER LOVER

*Perfumed kisses, soft*
against the morning
of desire and flesh
comfort melting into embrace
touching, tenderly tongues
entwined, bodies entwined
vines and glories of morning
entwined, love fires responding
to the rising sun within
awakening eyes still dreamy
with sleep and woman silk
sculptured in smiling repose
of beauty rounded
within my arms...

### MEMORIES

*of nights shared, nights of love and nights of grieving... snuggling in the comforts of together love*

i watched you every night
as you attempted sleep
in your exhaustion
of pain and despair
working as demon thorns
piercing your time
of tranquil dreams
holding you against me
caressing the gentle rise
and fall of curves
breathing in the darkness
heart pounding
as waves upon a beach
crashing upon my soul
a single soul, together one
days and nights
sleepless, eyes open in the dark
watching you with love eyes
smiling in your warmth...

jeanne ferg

# OPPRESSION IS SICKENING, by Bev Jo

*I have been disabled for eight years. It took me a while to realize that I am disabled, because my chronic sickness isn't visible. Also, most able-bodied Lesbians seem to try very hard to believe that I'm no different from them. Sometimes it's hard even for me to take my sickness seriously, because I'm fairly mobile and when under pressure, I'm capable of being very functional, although I feel much worse for a long time after. But I know the difference between how I am now and how I was previously, and I'm lucky to have friends who also know that difference. Most importantly, my closest friend, Linda , is similarly disabled. We give each other valuable support and recognize that each other's illness is real. What we have is called CFS (Chronic Fatigue Syndrome), which means that no one knows the real cause.*

I've been to eight doctors,including two specialists, and I have been to one physician's assistant, three acupuncturists, two naturopaths, and four homeopaths. I haven't yet gotten a definite diagnosis, and was told by several of the doctors that I wasn't sick, because they couldn't find anything wrong. Of course, they would never admit that didn't know all the answers. I've since found that this is common with CFS. Its been called "the Yuppie Disease," because statistics show that it usually affects mostly middle or upper classes. The fact is that these are usually the only people who can afford to see the average of eight doctors that it takes to finally get some sort of diagnosis for this illness. Those who are too poor to afford doctors aren't generally listed in the statistics.

Two of the doctors I saw were sympathetic,but the rest were offensive and incompetent. I was concerned that I might possibly have a contagious disease, but the infectious disease specialist I saw assured me that a person couldn't remain contagious after a couple of months of being sick. I know my illness isn't contagious now, but I also know that "specialist" was wrong since there *are* many long-term contagious diseases.

The lesbian doctor couldn't diagnosis me either, so she told me that there was nothing wrong with me and that I should just loose weight. This doctor not only took money from me, she could literally have killed me. The extent of her incompetence became clearer to me years later when I discovered that my symptoms almost match those for the early stages of leukemia and some other kinds of cancer: recurrent low-grade fever, general malaise, weakness, constant exhaustion that interferes with daily activities, and sporadic joint and internal pain. Another "healer" was so Lesbian-hating that she suggested I take female hormones.

One form of healing that has helped others with CFS is homeopathy. If is's done well, it can have almost magical-seeming effects, and an important advantage is that no diagnosis is needed for homeopathy to work.

Some doctors now think that CFS is caused by a new or mutated virus. It's also very likely that the presence of so many toxic substances in our environment is resulting in more widespread illness of this type than ever before, and the men who grow powerful and rich selling poisonous products certainly don't want that widely known. The U.S. government mutated many viruses and bacteria, and released them in parts of the U.S. such as San Francisco Bay Area, in order to "study their effects". Presumably they and other governments released them in other parts of the world, too. Who knows what the long-term results will be? It's not usually discussed in the U.S., but some scientists in other countries think AIDS is such a creation.

I'm not surprised by the treatment I've gotten from doctors. I'm more upset by how I'm treated by other Dykes. Since my constant fever causes my face to look flushed, I"m often told I look "healthy". Their attitude seems to be that if I don't look a sick stereotype, I must be well. They imply that since life is hard for everyone, I should just try harder. *They're* terrified of getting sick so they want to pretend I'm not. It's not that all Dykes don't have difficulties, but we're all in different states of health. Some can works all day, go to meetings every night, drink speed for energy (tea, coffee, and colas), eat and sleep relatively little, and still seem well--although I doubt they'll stay well long, living like that. Those of us who are sick are made sicker by stress. I might be able to get well someday if I can completely rest. Everything that happens to me which is physically or emotionally stressful makes me that much sicker.

One of the most horrible, offensive responses Lesbians have give me is "we cause ourselves to be sick, so if you wanted to get well, you would." I can't imagine a more male-minded idea. "You create your own reality " is a useful philosophy to keep the oppressed down. Unfortunately, it not only benefits the patriarchy, it also helps oppressive Lesbians to maintain their privilege and their illusion of superiority over the rest of us. It's incredibly cruel and untrue. The victim is blamed, whether its someone who's been raped and is told it's her own fault, or whether it's a lesbian who's held responsible for being treated badly by others. Lesbians who say such offensive things are trying desperately to think they can control their own lives and prevent disaster from happening to them, which is somewhat understandable, but the rest of us pay the price for their peace of mind. If positive thinking works so well, why don't these Lesbians visualize themselves into being less oppressive?

I'm writing this partly because I want to help prevent other Dykes from going through the same abuse from both the medical establishment and from our own kind. Your own body tells you when you're sick. If you feel sick, you *are* . No one has the right to tell you you're not, whether they're a doctor or a "friend." On the other hand, Lesbians who are basically well but may be suffering from the minor health problems most of us have don't have the right to claim to be as ill as Dykes who suffer chronic severe symptoms.

## A CLEAN ENVIRONMENT DOESN'T STINK

In the years since I first became sick, I've grown much more sensitive to the man-made chemicals which surround us daily. I don't know if I'm sick *because* of them, but I do know that they aggravate the sickness I have, making me feel much worse. And these chemicals make some Lesbians severely ill.

The problem isn't that we're "allergic" or "chemically sensitive," but that these chemicals are toxic. Many Lesbians know that factory chemical fumes, gasoline, pesticides, herbicides, natural gas, carbon monoxide, and tobacco smoke (among others) are carcinogenic, and that some can kill you outright if you're exposed to high enough concentrations. but they often don't realize that the chemi-

## Bev Jo's stuff, continued

cals they choose to wear or use in their homes also have poisonous effects: disinfectants, "air fresheners." hair spray, chemicals to straighten or curl hair, deodorants, detergents, fabric softeners, perfumes, cosmetics, and even lightly scented soap, shampoo, hand lotion, and toothpaste. These products aren't needed by anyone. Plain unscented soap, baking soda, and white vinegar are as effective in cleaning our homes, and unscented body-care products are better for us than scented ones. But the manufacture and sale of chemical scents make some men a lot of money. Through aggressive advertising, we're taught that we, our clothes, and our homes aren't really clean without a strong perfumed odor. Living in a polluted world have meant that many people, particularly smokers, don't have much sense of smell left, so the stronger a product smells, the more people are likely to buy it . In the last several years laundry products, especially fabric softeners and anti-static strips, have become so strongly scented that people have become sick from living near laundromats or even in neighborhoods where people use a lot of these products. The perfumes used in these products are complete and made so strong that they spread and cling much more than the milder scents in use a few years ago. In the U.S. they're added to printers ink, so we're made sick by many magazines, newspapers, mailed advertisements, and even imprinted grocery bags.

No matter how the manufacturers advertise their products as having a "fresh," "natural" "flowery," or even "herbal" scent, these are toxic chemicals and don't smell natural at all. Many people find their odor nauseating, even if they don't get overtly sick. Why these chemicals have become so popular that it's almost impossible to go anywhere public without being surrounded by people wearing them.

I expect men and het women to smell bad, but what's the most upsetting is when Lesbians use these products, making it impossible for me or other ill Lesbians to be around them or visit with them. These smelly products actually aren't good for anyone. Symptoms of a toxic reaction range from fatigue, confused thinking, and irritability to severe nausea, headaches, and joint aches. Many ailments which are misdiagnosed as arthritis or migraine headaches are actually environmentally caused. As many "environmentally ill" people have said, we're like the canaries that miners took into the mines.; If the canaries died, the miners knew there were poisonous gases that they couldn't smell and they knew to leave the mines. We may be the first to suffer the effects of these toxins, but they're poisonous to you too--it'll just take a while longer for your body to use up its tolerance to them and become sick. So for our health and yours, please take us seriously. If we say something you're using is sickening to us, please stop using it. And consider not using *any* chemicals in your home or on your body, including scented soaps, shampoo, lotions, or detergents. (It can be hard to find unscented products, but it *is* possible, and the more consumers demand them, the more there'll be.) Our own Lesbian aromas are far more attractive than man-made chemicals.

Also, there shouldn't be "no-smoking sections" in Lesbian places (which really doesn't help those of us who are made sick by smoke) --there should be *no* smoking. Even smoking outside can severely sicken Lesbians who are near by. Why should one Lesbian's drug addiction be given priority another Lesbian's health?

And for those of us who *do* have allergies, be aware that choosing to own an animal may mean that some Lesbians won't be able to come to your home. Please make Lesbian homes safe and welcome for Lesbians—we have nowhere else in the world to go.

I don't ask that anyone look after me, although I and my well Separatist friends believe ill and disabled Lesbians deserve committed physical help from our communities, and it's very upsetting that so many Lesbians care for family, sons and gay men while ill and disabled Lesbians' needs are ignored. I just ask that if I say I can't physically do something, my limits be respected and I not be pressured to do it, and also that Lesbians not subject me to cigarette smoke and strong scents or chemicals. Patriarchy is destroying our planet with pollution and over-population. More and more Dykes will get sick. If we can't care for each other, we should at least believe each other.

In addition, I want all Dykes to know that oppressing other Dykes, lying about them, and verbally and emotionally attacking them causes and increases sickness and even causes death. We may never get well, but we'll have a better chance to heal if we're treated with equality and respect.

**--Bev Jo**

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# Mary's Stuff

***Discovering lesbian sex was quite a thrill. You're probably all saying "amen sister. I know what you mean". As a woman with a disability sex has had some unusual anxieties and pleasures.***

Before I met my first woman lover I had slept with several men. Each one had a different approach to my disability. I'm a para but more like a quad in the loss of sensation department. Most of my male lovers did the typical male thing to do which is make love to me without ever asking any questions. This is probably what they did with their non-disabled lovers as well. This of course results in little understanding and probably little desire on their part to truly please a woman. Therefore little pleasure on my part.

Some men were awkward, others outright uncomfortable and a couple who made a few lucky guesses and hit a nice spot or two. In ten years of being sexual no one ever asked me what I could or couldn't feel. The sad but honest part of all is that I considered myself lucky each time I made it through a sexual encounter without having to explain anything or should I say admit anything. For example, that I couldn't feel him inside me or his hands on my thighs. If her knew wouldn't he think "why bother"? Sometimes I thought that myself.

For years I had close emotional relationships with women. Perhaps best described as "Romantic Friendships." When I finally met a woman who wanted to take it a step further, I was simultaneously delighted and panicked. It was like the moment of truth had come. Somehow I knew that she would "know" even if she didn't ask. She would know what I felt or didn't feel. After all, she was a woman too.

Well, I stalled for a couple of months but every time we were together the attraction grew stronger. I wanted so much to feel her touch. When the moment arrived I was filled with fear and excitement. She kissed my lips, my neck, and shoulders. Slowly we kissed and caressed my breasts with gentle yet intentional strokes. She reached between my legs and touched me with the same slow yet powerful motion, moving her fingers inside and out. Finally she reached inside and I felt her touch the deepest part of me. In a few moments I had a beautiful orgasm. I laid there in a pleasurable state of shock.

After a while we talked about what had happened. I told her that I had never felt anything like that before and that I had always assumed that I just couldn't feel anything. I cried a little for the years spent feeling nothing and then we laughed as she smugly reminded me that she'd promised it would be better with a woman!

As lovers go, she came and went rather quickly, excuse the expression. My next lover was very special. It was in this relationship that I was able to really discover my sexual self and learn what pleases me. We loved each other very much. She had the kindest eyes and a sort of gentle power that touched my heart, my soul, and my body more deeply than I could ever explain. With her I began to feel things I never thought I could. Just watching her make love to me was wonderfully exciting. Seeing the soft curves of her body, her lips kissing mine or our breasts touching was exquisite. Pressed against each other I felt a rush with each breath we took. Sometimes it seemed that there was no space between us - the feelings we shared were very intense. She showed me that when you love someone, any touch, anywhere could be exciting and loving. It was with her that I finally became whole or maybe just learned that I always was!

**--Mary, Chicago**

# Shemaya's Eider Stuff

***So what's an eider? For one thing, it's a bird that lives in out-of-the-way places, for the most part. As in isolated. And it's an acronym for a piece of dyke land that is also in the middle of nowhere: Environmentally Ill Dykes Earth Retreat. For both birds and dykes, home is a place where the air is clean, and overcrowding is not a problem. The similarity breaks down after a bit --there are no eiders in Utah except us.***

Mainly I'm writing this because I want lesbians with environmental illness (EI) to know we're here and open to being joined by others, so long as womyn only, EI safe space is comfortable. The eventual goal is a womyn's community, on the separate living spaces "village" pattern, that is EI accessible. So far, we are two EI lesbians committed to the place, one womon considering it, and a number of visitors, some who stay for several months. Being in the middle of the 'canyon' helps; its a gorgeous tourist route, and touring lesbians drop in.

This project is being done on a shoestring budget, so it's taking a while to get very comfortable. We bought the land (as in, started making payments) in February 1988, with no 'developments'. First priority has been shelters for those of us here; so far there's one metal storage shed/cabin, a kitchen ramada, and a half-built cinder block cabin. When that's done, we'll be up to two dykes, and two 10' x 10' EI safe 'homes'. Hooray! Next step– concrete pathways to connect everything we've go so far, and the land will not only be somewhat developed, but wheelchair accessible.

Things are still rustic, but they're coming along. Water is hauled: bottled spring water for drinking, and pond water for the garden and washing. Electric cooking is a current focus; a battery system is in the works, that will eventually be charged completely by solar cells. The photovoltaic (electrically producing) panels are expensive, so the idea is to start with one or two, and also use the car battery for a while. Ironically, the main electric wires are not all far away, but the process for getting a permit is outrageously difficult. It feels good to be independent anyway.

Non-toxic heat is the other big challenge. This is a great area for solar, so it's "just " a matter of setting it up. Mainly that means building houses that do most of their heating by passive solar methods. Insulation is tough in metal houses, so the big test will be seeing if the cinder block house stays cozy. An electric back-up is the other part of the plan.

Another agenda item is a guest house, so that women who can't do camping will have a place to stay, and cabins for womyn who want to move here. Right now it feel a bit like a lot of visions far, far removed from what we have, but it's coming.

Although EIDER is at the moment two of us, plus womyn who pass through, we'd like to see that change. We came to this project in desperation, two womyn unable to find anyplace to rent that didn't make us sick, having lived on non-EI womyn's land in tents for six months and still feeling terrible. Nothing else worked, so we opted for this: cheap land with clear air, in the middle of nowhere. In many ways it's better than being surrounded by a community of dykes in which one can't participate, but the ideal is to get to have it all, so this is an invitation, Both to womyn passing through, and to womyn looking for a place to live in a non-toxic lesbian space. If you'd like more information, in print or on cassette, please send an SASE to EIDER, c/o Shemaya Laurel, POB 213, Kenab, UT 84741.

**--Shemaya Mountain Laurel**

# Q. When is a door really a bridge?
# A. When the door is made into a ramp!

*I've waited all my life to tell this story. What's kinda funny is that I didn't know that I would ever have this story to tell. It all started when I was a kid and I had fantasies about how people were wonderful and how hungry people got fed, how poor people got medical attention, how everyday people got what they needed and how goodness would abound on the earth. I was young when I learned the terrible truth that people could be cruel, both by intent and by negligence. That lesson has been reinforced daily, with some notable exceptions along the way. This story is not just a notable exception, however. This story is a fairy tale-come-true. I saw it happen. I rode its tailspin.*

At the Lesbian Agenda Planning Conference's Saturday dance party, Riki and Galia told my lover and I about the Adrienne Rich reading scheduled for Sunday night in the hall adjoining their synagogue. We were very excited. Then, when we heard that Riki's Klezmer band would be performing, we were "psyched" for a great evening out. I guess the sight of me sitting in the motorized scooter gave rise to the afterthought that, "oh, yes, there is no ramp...but it only has 3 or 4 stairs," they hastened to add. We all looked at one other in the discomfort and guilty haze of unspoken disappointment.

Well, somewhere behind the scenes, Durham's own Mab Segrest was thinking, planning and plotting. It was 1:00 on a Sunday afternoon in Durham, North Carolina. Mab, a lesbian whose consciousness had been coaxed awake in one more arena, roused herself to thunderous heights. She and another lesbian were going to try to make that night's concert and reading an accessible event for people using wheelchairs. The event was scheduled for 7:30 Sunday night, six and a half scant hours away.

Well, I was chatting with Woody, when Mab and her friend approached me to ask if I knew the specifications for building a ramp. I began to give her the length, width and rise of ramp specifications, taken from my state, Massachusetts', accessibility code. Woody volunteered that she had been part of a crew that had built a ramp last summer for a women's event. I suggested to Mab that she might be better able to find a place that would rent one, and expressed doubt that the project could be successful under such odds. I nonetheless spread the word among other women using wheelchairs, canes or who might otherwise benefit from the possibility of accessibility. I asked Angela to announce to all the conference attendees that the project had been undertaken by Mab, Woody and a 3rd woman (whose name continues to elude me.)

We headed back to the hotel so I could lie down for a bit. At 6:10, just over five hours from concept, the telephone rang and Mab announced, her 'mother's' pride vivid, "Well, it's a ramp! Are you ready to go?" Struck with amazement, and a heady dose of doubter's guilt, we began calling other members of the disability contingent, trying to find people interested in attending. We discovered that not only had people made other plans, (the steps might have been a factor) but the conference's accessible shuttle van was nowhere to be found! Not to worry, Mab says, she'll just have that ole' lift equipped accessible taxi pick us up at 7:00 (You know that taxi. The one they have in every town, right?).

Well, it was 7:40 when we drove up. I looked out between the windshield wipers, aware of the light misting of the evening. I was glad to be attending a Jewish event; my first Klezmer band performance, my first time in the midst of a New Jewish Agenda crowd, here in suburban Raleigh-Durham, North Carolina. I also had many concerns about this ramp; wheelchairs, especially motorized chairs, can be very heavy. I was heavy, my partner was heavy. The whole business was heavy. If the ramp did fail, I would be in deep trouble; the truth is that I could be hurt, maybe badly hurt.

As the taxi lift lowered me to the ground, I hardly saw the man sent to welcome us. I couldn't take my eyes off the 36 feet of graceful blonde wood gleaming and stretching out in the early evening's light rain. Proud, happy women came rushing out of the hall, seven, maybe eight or nine women smiling their welcome and introducing themselves to these out-of towners, these lesbians arriving late to their event. They couldn't build handrails, it was explained. These women would act as spotters, should catch me, I guess, if the ramp failed or if I maybe drove off the edge somehow. My doubts also ran forward to greet me.

A line of women waiting to catch me. Oh, I was sorely tempted by all those waiting women, I admit it. But I understood the seriousness and high drama of the moment. I pushed the speed knob forward all the way, and in a flash I was racing over the patches of oriental rug held down by electrical tape and interspersed with roofing shingle to provide traction. The beautiful gleam I had admired was the varnish applied by some previous owner wishing the wood to shine. The rugs, tape and shingles were added for traction, but gave both an exotic and homey effect to my ramp. Mab had elicited help from members of the congregation and a local woman, an skilled, experienced carpenter joined the project and helped find the spare doors which became the bridge into the hall. We shook hands with the carpenter after the concert.

We entered the hall as the Klezmer band was performing. Riki played the clarinet and Galia danced and sang. In the middle of their performance, they offered a special wave of welcome, and an unspoken promise was met. We felt warmed and hugged by the entire congregation.

We later found out that when Adrienne entered the building, she choose to walk up the ramp, rather than use the stairs. We also found out that the synagogue had previously contracted for a permanent ramp to be installed in about two weeks. This is a true story. A few women cared that members of their community were going to be left out and did the extra work to bring us in. Many communities were together that night; we looked each other in the eye and found welcome.

**--Catherine Odette Lohr**

# Past, Present & Future Passions

***Past, Present & Future Passions: Poems by Barbara Ruth 1986, distributed by HerBooks, P.O. Box 7467, Santa Cruz, CA 94061. $8.00, 212 pages paperback. "To be sold and shared with women only."***
*Reviewed by Sara Karon*

I was first introduced to Barbara Ruth's poetry in the fall of 1986 when I attended a reading of the Disabled Women Writers Group in Oakland, CA. My friends and I were greeted at the entrance to the wheelchair accessible room by a woman who asked if she could give us a welcoming hug. It took a minute to realize that this was more than California friendliness--we were being *sniffed* to ensure that we were scent-free! The room we entered contained a half dozen air purifiers which had been running several hours prior to the reading, a pure spring water dispenser, and couches designated for fat women who would otherwise be pained by the small, metal, folding chairs. The sign language interpreter left after 20 minutes when it was clear that she was serving only as visual entertainment for a hearing audience.

The care and respect for each other's accessibility needs that I saw that night were beyond anything I have experienced before or since. The enjoyment that I found in the poetry was the bonus for what was already a wonderful night out. Some specific pieces of poetry from that night have stayed with me, and I have been pleased to find them published in *Sinister Wisdom, Common Lives/ Lesbian Lives*, and similar journals. The publication of ***Past, Present & Future Passions*: Poems by Barbara Ruth** brings together poems by one of that evening's participants. (Other participants included Emily Levy, Patty Overland, and others whose names I regretfully cannot remember.)

Barbara Ruth's book builds in some very special ways on the welcome that was extended at that poetry reading. She makes it clear throughout that this book is one half of a dialogue with its readers. Comments are invited, and an address given--none of the hassle of looking up the publisher's address. The first two sections of the book (there are 16 short sections, arranged thematically) introduce the poet to the reader. The first section introduces Barbara as a writer, while the second describes her other identities: Jew, Native American, fat, dark-skinned, U.S. born, disabled, lesbian, foreign in so many ways.

Throughout the book Barbara shares herself and her process. The lengthy afternotes, my favorite part of the book, are included "to demystify my writing process, explain words which might be unfamiliar, give credit to sources for ideas, and generally entertain my readers.... I also want to show how I have changed lines or words as my consciousness about different issues developed." While these notes already fill 16 pages of the book, I wanted more. There were words which I felt were deserving of definition, and poems which I simply did not understand. Several times I felt certain that the lack of notes meant that the poem was too painful to Barbara for her to be willing to talk about what it meant to her. After awhile, I began to look for the poems without afternotes just to see if I could understand what they meant to the poet.

The strength of the book, however, is in its overwhelming clarity. The language is usually precise, and most of the poems are direct and clear in the message. As a person who shares many identities with the poet, several poems touched me deeply. One of my favorite poems, however, named for me an identity I had never thought to claim.

*Sometimes*
*a witch's eyebrows*
*meet*
*above the nose*
*making an*
*unbroken line*
*fainter in the middle, true*
*but still there*

*such are the markings*
*of the womon*
*born to sorcery*

This poem addressed my ambivalence about my own connecting eyebrows, and encouraged me in my wavering refusal to pluck.

The book does, of course, have its weaknesses. I've already discussed the lack of afternotes where I thought they would have been helpful. I also found some of her uses of language surprising, coming from someone with her disability awareness. I puzzled over why some poems were edited for ableist imagery while others were not. For example, the afternotes inform us that a line which originally read "you go a little crazy" was rewritten to read "you get a little weird," in keeping with her growing awareness of psychiatric oppression. Regardless of whether one considers this an improvement, it is at least an attempt at improvement. I was more surprised by her use of walking as a positive activity. In her poem "Show me the pictures again", written in 1985, she says

*And speaking of walking...*
*I'm so worried I'll make a mistake*
*I've used "walking" and "numb"*
*As easy metaphors*
*As though everyone walked, really*
*As though no one was numb, really*
*I deepen my knowing*
*Of what's true, what's real*
*In the process I make mistakes.*

This is in contrast with her earlier (1984) poem, "This girl likes them butch," which appears two pages later in the book.

*This girl appreciates*
*The certain jaw*
*The eyes, questioning*
*The quick, shy smile --*
*The stance, the walk*
*The softness at the nape of the neck*
*The hardness in the hips*

Since Barbara Ruth has admitted re-working poems to reflect changing consciousness, it is surprising to find this image intact. Still, it is perhaps the greatest strength of this book that the poet engages her readers in the sort of dialogue which raises these questions for discussion. This book is an easy, enjoyable read; it is also thought-provoking. It is one I will return to again and again.

***Past, Present & Future Passions*: Poems by Barbara Ruth** is available from HerBooks distributorship, and is for women only.

## CONTRIBUTOR'S GUIDELINES

* We welcome the contributions of women who are writing out of concern with disability issues.

* Contributions should be very legible, and can be submitted on 5 1/4 floppy disks in IBM compatible ACSII format, type,- or handwritten. Please write for other acceptable computer formats.

* Contributions may be published anonymously but must be accompanied by the author's name, address and telephone number.

* Suggested maximum length is 3 double-spaced typewritten pages.

* All letters will be considered for publication, except those expressely marked "do not print".

* Other feminist principles guidelines, as described under our principles of publications, also apply.

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