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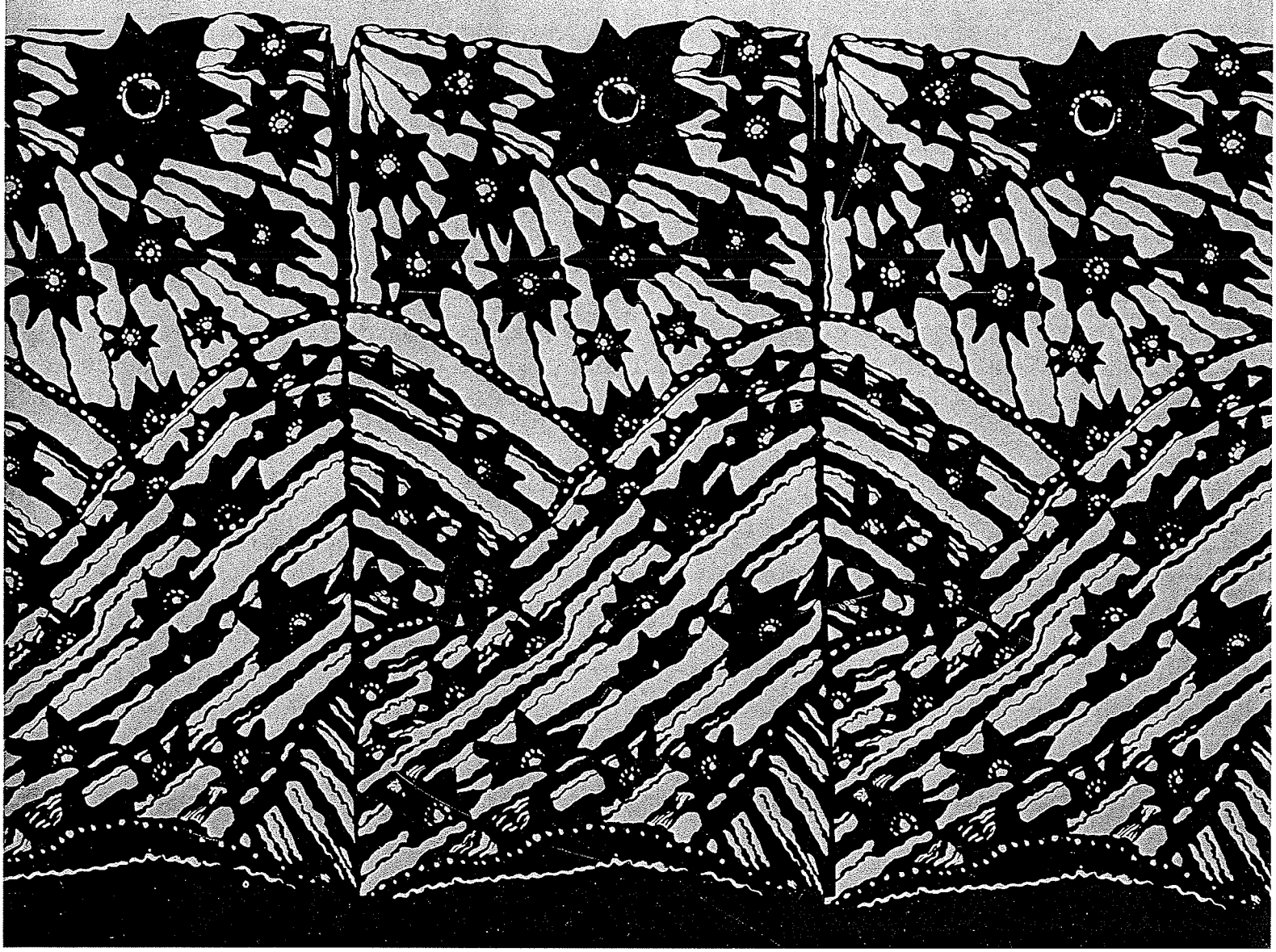
HERESIES 23

COMING OF AGE

A FEMINIST PUBLICATION
ON ART AND POLITICS



HERESIES

THIS ISSUE IS DEDICATED TO NORA ASTORGA (1948–1988), ACTIVIST, REVOLUTIONARY, LAWYER, MOTHER, AND FORMER NICARAGUAN AMBASSADOR TO THE UNITED NATIONS. SHE CAME OF AGE DURING THE SANDINISTA REVOLUTION AND WAS A LEADING PARTICIPANT IN THE CREATION OF A NEW NICARAGUAN SOCIETY.

HERESIES is an idea-oriented journal devoted to the examination of art and politics from a feminist perspective. We believe that what is commonly called art can have a political impact and that in the making of art and all cultural artifacts our identities as women play a distinct role. We hope that HERESIES will stimulate dialogue around radical political and aesthetic theory, as well as generate new creative energies among women. It will be a place where diversity can be articulated. We are committed to broadening the definition and function of art.

HERESIES is published by a collective of feminists, some of whom are also socialists, marxists, lesbian feminists, or anarchists; our fields include painting, sculpture, writing, anthropology, literature, performance, art history, architecture, filmmaking, photography, and video. While the themes of the individual issues will be determined by the collective, each issue will have a different editorial staff, composed of members of the mother collective and other women interested in that theme. HERESIES provides experience for women who work editorially, in design, and in production. An open evaluation meeting will be held after the appearance of each issue. HERESIES will try to be accountable to and in touch with the international feminist community.

As women, we are aware that historically the connections between our lives, our arts, and our ideas have been suppressed. Once these connections are clarified, they can function as a means to dissolve the alienation between artist and audience, and to understand the relationship between art and politics, work and workers. As a step toward the demystification of art, we reject the standard relationship of criticism to art within the present system, which has often become the relationship of advertiser to product. We will not advertise a new set of genius-products just because they are made by women. We are not committed to any particular style or aesthetic, nor to the competitive mentality that pervades the art world. Our view of feminism is one of process and change, and we feel that in the process of this dialogue we can foster a change in the meaning of art.

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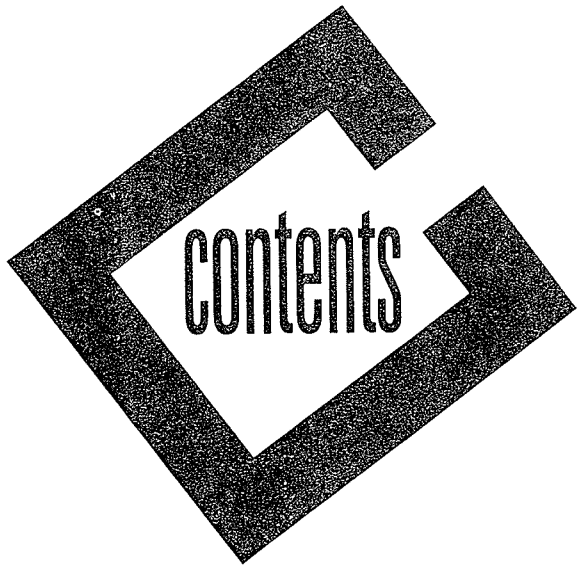
COVER IMAGE AFTER HILDEGARD VON BINGEN, 1165 A.D.

Our deepest thanks to the generous folks at *The Guardian*.



WRITTEN CONTRIBUTIONS

VISUAL CONTRIBUTIONS

EDITORIALS

PRISCILLA BARTON

It seems to me that coming of age is a coming to consciousness of one's own history and one's place in history (the future, as well as the present and the past)—a difficult kind of consciousness to come by in a society that would erase history; in which we, especially women, have to unearth our history before we can go on to understand it.

What our editorial project has been about in this issue is the notion that this coming to consciousness happens in particularly ripe and loaded moments, where the diverse experience of our everyday lives seems capable of being connected—where a larger understanding becomes visible, even imperative.

Art is an additional arena where this kind of connection can be attempted. And the process of making art, it seems to me, is a form of excavation and notation, of bringing to light the rich material of daily life and then reordering it—placing it in a different frame in order to see more clearly what's really happening there (where it came from and where it may lead), and then going on to realize something new.

In this issue we've had the good fortune to be able to gather art that speaks directly to those moments of consciousness that could be called coming of age, and thus we have been doing our own form of archeology, of recording, and for us this issue's publication might itself be considered one of those ripe moments.

HELEN DUBERSTEIN

It was snowing as I walked up the hill for the first time to hold the first session of the poetry workshop I had contracted to do in a nursing home. I could feel the snowflakes melt on my cheeks. When I came into the large room several pale figures swaying in wheelchairs awaited me. Some dribbled. Many seemed asleep. I began to speak of the snowflakes and of how, in my childhood, it seemed to me that the first snowflakes of the season came on Thanksgiving. I began talking this way out of nervousness. What was I doing in this place, with these people who seemed so alike and unresponsive?

The workshop produced poems such as:

WE DON'T HAVE ANY COLD TODAY LIKE WE USED TO HAVE
We don't have any cold today like we used to have
We always had a coal stove
The diningroom was warm
I've seen a man spit on the sidewalk
and it froze that way

Though they had this "dread disease" of being aged, I realized that these people were me, you, everyone. They had led varied existences, travelled to faraway places, been teachers, fashion designers, parents, lovers, you name it. They wrote of all these experiences, and derived pleasure in the present from attention to their individual pasts. Being so different, how had they ended up lumped into a conglomerate present?

In any nursing home you will find people who, insofar as they could, kept to the social contract. Nevertheless, their lives have come to this bleakness. Are we moved to redeem the aged, or to punish them?

Since we see that we live through so many transitions, have so many rites of passage, can we not learn to rethink each stage so that the successive times in the "lives of women" can be viewed as so many new lives that incorporate but are not necessarily limited by preceding ones? Can we not recall, if we do not necessarily repeat, the joys and learn from the frustrations of our own previous selves?

In this issue on Coming of Age, we see women healing themselves. Women value themselves as they appear both to themselves and in the eyes of the other. Mingled with the excitement for pieces we have gathered in this issue is regret for those we have had to let go of because of space limitations. Those that we held on to we came to see as "bearing witness" to the complexity of the meaning of women's lives.

WOPO HOLUP'S EDITORIAL STATEMENT APPEARS ON PAGES 42–47.

FROM ROLE MODELS AND REALITY SERIES, 1982 PENNELOPE GOODFRIEND

JAN EVANS

Everyone's reaction to aging is unique. I never thought about aging until I realized that this year was going to be my sixtieth birthday. Having always thought of myself as somewhere around forty I wondered how it all sneaked up on me. And if I am sixty then my children are almost forty and... Good God, how did that happen??

Suddenly I felt compelled to look back, review the past, appraise the present and think about the future, which for the first time does not seem to be forever. What were the traps and pitfalls, the successes and failures, the unexpected events both good and bad? What have I learned and where am I now?

It has been revealing and rather like watching an old film. I think that, in my case, the film-like feeling is the result of a wrenching break in my life after thirty years as an artist, wife and mother. I had spent that life with single-minded passion as an artist while grappling with the logistics of holding a career and family obligations together, and suddenly I was plunged into the life of an older single woman living alone in a new environment, New York City, without any preparation for what I discovered was a very particular way of life. I was married at twenty and went from my father's house to my husband's house. I didn't live alone until I was fifty years old. I discovered that superwoman has no clothes. I had to learn to live alone. Now I have some distance, more perspective. It has taken time to achieve this.

Changes have taken place within the family in the last few years. I have become a grandmother and my children have become my friends. My parents, in their eighties, still lead a full and active life. But they have, by their own admission, reached another plateau, become more fragile. While I am coming to grips with the awareness that they will not be here forever, my children are looking toward their own children, their education and upbringing. And I, without the traditional partner that fits into the traditional family pattern, am somewhere in the middle. I may never again be as free as at this moment.

A game of musical chairs is going on. When my parents die, I will move into their place and my children will move into mine. The buffer of denial will have been removed. It is something to think about.

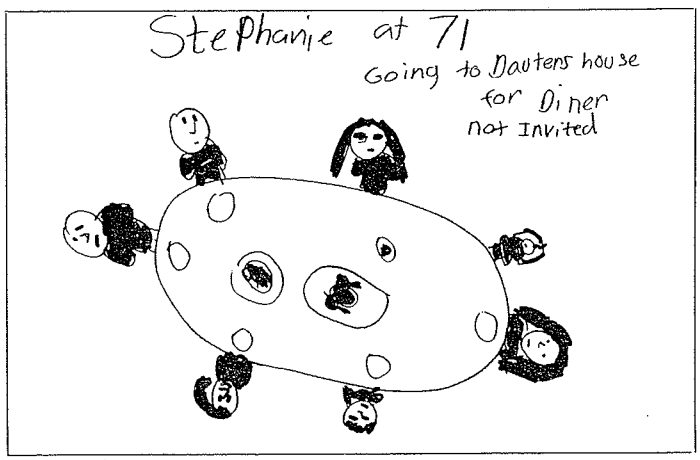
Aging is full of paradoxes. I look out upon the world through young eyes, unaware of the physical changes which I do not see. At the same time, while feeling ageless, I find myself regarding those much younger than myself as from a great distance. I feel surprised that when I go to the bank, to the doctor, to a lawyer, that most of them are the age of my children. It all seems so sudden, although of course it is not.

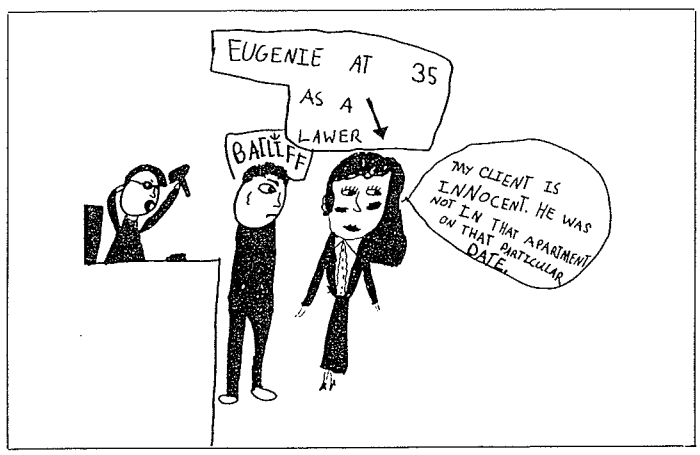
Life is continuously surprising and I try to be realistic but not cynical, to rely on my inner strengths and sense of purpose and not become distressed with cultural stereotyping and cultural cruelty. I have to keep my eye on the inner design of my being, to know when to hang on and when to let go so that I don't miss the unexpected and wonderful. I have become a "woman of a certain age," a woman with a little more clarity about life, no conclusions reached as though conclusions are possible. All in all, I like where I am. I had better. It is very much another beginning.

AVIS LANG

To my mind, "coming of age" suggests passage, transformation, emergence... acquisition and renunciation, arrival and departure... a process repeatedly undergone by communities and generations as well as by individuals... birth, puberty, motherhood or no, menopause, death... coming to consciousness, coming into one's/our own, coming out, coming to terms, coming to the end. Watersheds and landmarks. The escalation of possibilities and limitations. Learning to recognize how liberty is eroded and to exercise whatever portion of it remains.

My own most recent passage into a redefined, more sombre and angry self started first with facing my companion's cancer; then spending nine months almost constantly caring for him, away from everyone and everything familiar, as he was slowly brought back to life by an innovative physician in Houston; and soon thereafter watching a U.S. government goon squad invade the doctor's clinic and truck away 200,000 business documents and patient medical records. Why? Because Dr. Burzynski provides patients with a viable alternative to the treatments offered by America's highly toxic, highly profitable cancer industry. Both doctor and patients took the government to court, where nearly





STEPHANIE LA MOTTA AND EUGENIE ASHER LANG ARE BOTH NINE YEARS OLD AND BELONG TO THE HEATHCOTE SCHOOL GIRL SCOUTS IN SCARSDALE, N Y

three years later we're still fighting for the most basic of democratic rights: life, privacy, choice, due process. The experience has produced some very deep tracks in my psyche in the regions of taking responsibility, fighting back, terror, fury, and burnout.

This issue of *Heresies*, variegated as it is, can nevertheless do with a few more works by children, whose own comings of age are mostly yet to happen. Here, then, are Eugenie Asher Lang's and Stephanie La Motta's projections of their future selves, twenty-four and sixty-two years hence—Eugenie (my niece) hitting her professional stride and Stephanie becoming superfluous. I'd like to think that by the time Stephanie reaches seventy-one, no one will have to face that fate.

REACHING
(THE PROCESS OF AGING II)

I just became fifty years old, which is looked upon as advanced middle-age by our youth-glorifying Western society, but was considered to be at the peak of life (at least for men) by many ancient cultures that respected age and associated it with wisdom. There is good reason for this difference in attitude: when changes occurred at a slow pace, the young could only profit from the experience of their elders, and tradition was venerated; in a fast-changing, technology-dominated culture, old knowledge soon becomes obsolete, and young minds can master fresh information quicker—and move on faster. Personally, I tend to agree with the Ancients, and am quite impressed that I have managed to live half a century. Although the decline is fully in sight, I feel almost as youthful as when I was twenty-five. I can climb up steps with no more loss of breath; I can make love as well (although less frequently, for being too busy and constantly exhausted); I can swim and dive considerably better. The few clear handicaps are fully compensated for by a wonderful maturity of thinking, a confidence in personal direction in my work, and above all a tremendous increase in sensitivity—in being able to absorb and enjoy sensations with much greater depth and complexity, in all areas, from visual beauty, to music, to tasting wine or food. The forties has been a glorious decade for me, and the only one I would love to relive.

ATHENA TACHA

Naturally, many changes have occurred gradually since my late thirties. Already, before reaching forty, more white hairs appeared (soon too many to pluck out), and in the past few years they have spread from around the ears to over the forehead and even to the top of my head. But while they are quite visible on the temples, they still have not affected at all the general brown tonality. At age forty-two, I noticed the first white hair in my pubic area (and still the single one). At the end of my thirty-ninth year, I broke a large part of an upper molar and needed a golden half-crown (I have had one more since). But the really traumatic experience, two years later, was breaking off a front upper tooth (by biting inadvertently into a dry prune pit). The helpless fragility of my teeth and the first "toothless" smile gave me a glimpse of what it will feel like to lose all my teeth and have to cope with dentures.

A part of my body that has aged most noticeably is my hands. Already, when I was in my late thirties, they had started having a few brown spots that turned gradually darker. At age forty-two, a painful little lump appeared on the second joint of my left middle finger, the first sign of arthritis, I thought. A year later it was gone, but in the following six or seven years most of my finger joints became swollen and painful, and I could hardly put on any of my rings. Similar pains appeared, on and off, in a hip joint, a knee or a shoulder, usually on the left side; an ache has become almost permanent in both of my bunions the last couple of years, even though I wear comfortable huaraches most of the time. Strangely enough, my finger joints don't hurt anymore during the past year, the knuckle swelling has subsided, and X-rays show only traces of past cysts. So it seems that this was occupational (due to heavy work with a portable jigsaw) rather than permanent arthritis, and it

50

may be likewise with my bunions (because I stand too much in my work). Nevertheless, my fingers have gotten more shrivelled, the skin of my hands much drier looking, and their veins stick out a lot, almost permanently.

Altogether, the skin of my body looks saggier and wrinklier, and the flesh flabbier. This really started in the late thirties, with my knees and the skin over my bellybutton (the elbows, of course, had become crinkly much earlier). In the very early forties, my thighs got a little flaccid on their inner side, my lower arms skinnier, and my chest sparer. While my breasts still do not really hang (there is hardly a wrinkle under them, even at my thinnest), the bones of the sternum and adjoining ribs begin to stick out a bit under the skin. Also, my entire flesh and skin respond to gravity considerably, which is most visible when I am doing yoga in upside-down positions. All this may be partly the result of having lost weight: since my mid-forties, I have tried to stick to 106-108 lbs., to keep the belly down, instead of my earlier 110-112 lbs. One has to look more dried-up if one wants to avoid the matronly figure. However, on the whole, keeping trim has further advantages. I feel more agile, more comfortable in my clothes, and I have much less cellulite and "culottes de cheval" on the hips.

"I seem to be aging by the day this year," I recorded in my journal when I was forty-two. That was perhaps exaggerated then, but has certainly been true the past couple of years. Special disaster areas are my neck, eyes, and lately the lower parts of my cheeks. Since the early forties, my underchin has permanently acquired two thin wedges of loose shin hanging from the chin to the top of the neck; and in the last few years the front of my neck looks faded and saggy almost in all positions. Already in my late thirties, the delicate skin under my eyes at their inner corners had become more faded and puckered, and the compound horizontal wrinkles have gradually gotten much deeper (but I have no bags yet). In my early forties, the middle area of the eye-socket over the upper lid started getting more baggy, especially when I am tired. Most noticeable of all, the radiating wrinkles at the outer corners of my eyes ("crow's feet") are now much more numerous, longer and deeper, especially when I smile or laugh; and, since the early forties, several thinner wrinkles have developed vertically across them, as well as diagonally downward from under the outer corners of the eyes—all much more intensely there when I wake up in the morning.

Most disturbing to me, both because they worsened recently and I find them more disfiguring, are the changes that occurred around my mouth. The lips are still substantially unaltered (although usually dry from exhaustion), and I have no radiating little wrinkles around their perimeter yet; but two rather deep grooves have formed from nose to chin along the mouth (in a different way on each side!). These lines, quite visible since my forty-first year, are greatly due to pillow pressure during sleep, I am sure, because they are much more present every morning. Tiny vertical crinkles between nose and cheeks, also most visible when I wake up, prove that, too. Worse still, starting at the same age but intensifying over the last year, the flesh of the cheeks on either side of my chin has sagged, creating two distinctly baggy areas that spoil the formerly smooth oval shape of my face. I almost feel the weight of the flesh when I talk, as if my mouth has lost its earlier mobility and flexibility, and the effort it takes to move the lips, in order to articulate or eat, causes them to form unwanted grooves on the surrounding skin. Indeed, as far as I can see myself in the mirror during daily activities, I think that grimaces which used to look cute, such as pouting, now look unpleasant because of skin coarsening; and even my smile has lost its sweetness due to the increased wrinkles under and around the eyes. When I laugh with genuine amusement, however, my face seems to look as pleasant as before.

All my described changes have been more or less gradual, yet I feel that I have aged in the last year or two more than in an entire decade: my forty-eighth and -ninth years have been the hardest of my life. Aside from heavier-than-ever work, which was rewarding but extremely demanding, a number of personal catastrophes occurred within about a year and a half. My mother became totally paralyzed for months and finally died; my father-in-law died after a sad period of near decrepitude; my best friend (having survived cancer of the uterus and, at the age of 72, two operations for artificial hips) fell down twice, in the autumn and the following spring, and broke her right hand each time; my second best friend died after prolonged cancer; our country house almost got burned in a forest fire; and I damaged both of my wrists in a taxi accident and, after months of pain, had to have two consecutive operations. It is not that one's body gets older and weaker as one approaches fifty. More to the point, one's relatives and close friends start dying or getting incapacitated, and one faces for the first time seriously (because it feels nearer) real old age and death. In fact, much of the fear of aging is due to fear of future suffering, decrepitude, loss of one's normal capacities and resulting uselessness and loneliness. One cannot know how much control of self one will have, and how much dependence on others, if there *are* any others who will care enough, let alone the threat of economic insecurity that most people feel about their old age. I certainly am terrified of the possibility of becoming totally incapable of tending to my basic physical needs; I consider such existence below human dignity and unworthy of prolonging. Yet nobody seems to want to die at that stage. It looks as if when one becomes almost a vegetable, one's expectations from and perception of life change accordingly.

Anyway, at the age of fifty, I feel in pretty good command of my capacities and, so far as I know, in decent physical condition, except for not being able to sleep well and having gotten somewhat far-sighted. For the moment, the latter is my only tangible handicap, having appeared at the age of forty-five. It has become more serious this past year (I cannot read with pleasure any longer, even typewritten pages, without glasses, except in bright sunlight), but it still is more of a nuisance than a problem. It is quite irritating to have to hunt for your glasses to look up a telephone number

or a street name on the map, let alone to need them for reading the menu in subdued restaurant lighting. My sleeping problem may be due to the extraordinarily stressful conditions of my life in the last years. However, it may also be due to menopause. As I had my uterus (though not my ovaries) removed at age forty-four, I do not know when I entered menopause. I started having occasional periods of hot flashes at night (never severe) when I was forty-seven, the summer a favorite uncle died unexpectedly from cancer—and they since have recurred at times of strain. I have not perceived any other effects of menopause, unless poor sleeping is one (because it has often accompanied my anxiety when I wake up at night), and a slight depression or general bad mood during the past year (which I had never experienced before, but which could also be the result of the recent emotional strains). In any case, my sexual drive has not changed much, other than being affected, as always, by hard work and worry.

Most of the problems of middle-age are, in fact, related to sexuality and the fear of loss of it. Men are afraid of losing their virility, which is not only a source of pleasure, but also of power and prestige. In past societies, when reproduction of the species was a matter of survival and more sons were needed for more warriors (defenders of home, as well as conquerors of goods), a male needed to preserve as long as possible the ability to inseminate. For the same reason females were outcast after fifty, as worthless reproductive machines. Women do not fear the loss of sexual drive, since they do not need a crucial mechanical event (such as erection) for sex to occur; but they are afraid of losing their power of attraction, and, indirectly, the pleasure of sex and any control over males that they can have through it. Indeed, it is my belief that standards of female beauty and attractiveness have been ingrained in humankind through the naturally reproductive function of sex and the importance of female youthfulness in it. The proof of this is that we do not use the same criteria for aging and beauty regarding men and women (even though women live longer): radiating wrinkles at the corners of the eyes in a man are "humor lines," in a woman, "tell-tale age marks." Grey temples in a man are often an addition to "mature attractiveness"; in a woman, they are usually signs of "past the prime." In general, wrinkles or sagging cheeks are hardly noticed in men—helped by the coarseness of their skin due to the beard (baldness is *their* principal specter at middle-age).

I am not trying to reverse standards of beauty related to youthfulness in order to comfort myself. I am trying to examine the matter objectively, because I (and others) have often perceived beauty in middle-aged and even very old faces. A mature elephant or lion is the prime specimen of its species; a mature elk or bull is more imposing than its equivalent youngster; and old plane trees or olive trees, with their convoluted branches and gnarled barks, are more satisfying formally to the human eye than immature trees of the same kind. So if I manage to remove the stigma of age, then perhaps I can look at the present changes on my face as structural alterations (the rearranging of features to an extent) which have produced a different face. One can try to look at one's new face as if one were a stranger who had never met the earlier self. Then perhaps one would not perceive it as "ravaged by time."

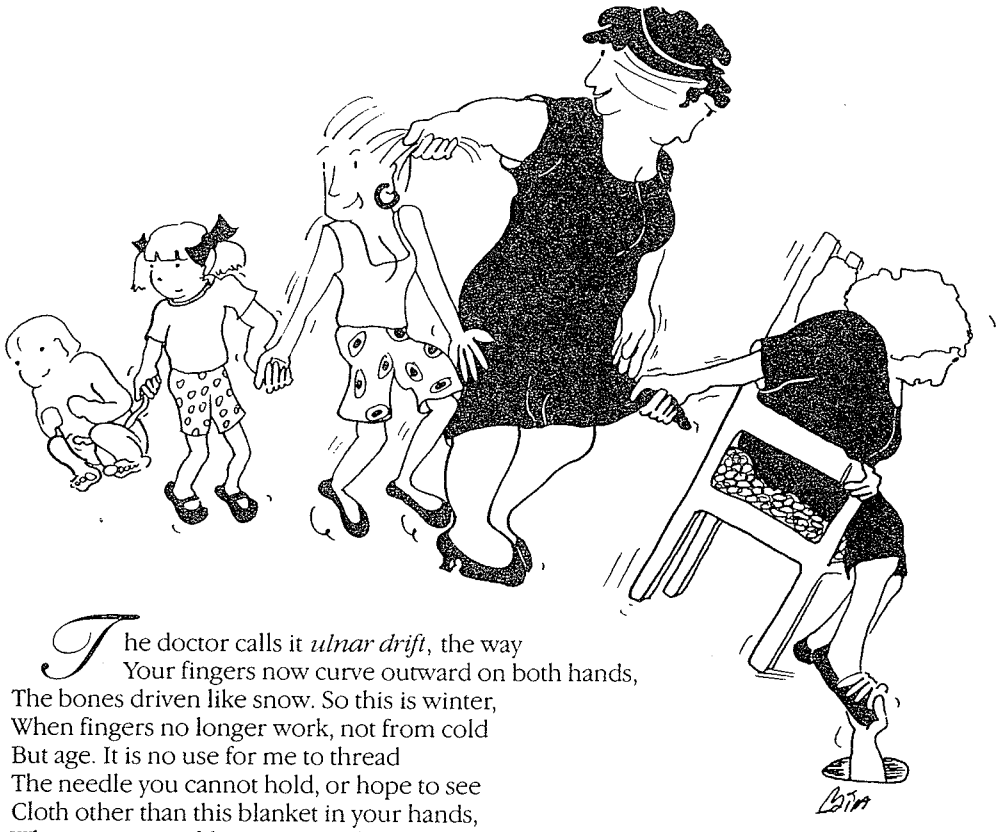
However, even if accepted standards of beauty and youthfulness or fear of future aging are set aside, the new face that looks at me from the mirror is still very unsettling. Not only because it keeps changing quite fast, but mainly because I am not really aware of the changes (they are barely felt through touch). If I did not have a mirror, I probably would not know my new physiognomy. I noticed recently that I was wrinkling my forehead much more often than I had observed in the past, either raising the eyebrows (parallel horizontal wrinkles), thus appearing to question or wonder (which in fact I wasn't), or frowning when thinking or reading (vertical wrinkles between the brows)—both giving me either a worried or forbidding expression, way beyond my actual feelings. I also noticed my mouth "grimly" turning downward at the ends when I work tensely, exaggerating the pouches on either side of it (although I cannot feel it). Are my muscles acting beyond my control and without my knowledge of the face they present to the world? This is an upsetting idea that increases the insecurity one may feel anyway at this age.

Upon nearing fifty we have to confront our familiar environment with a new facade—a traumatic experience that requires a period of adjustment. I liken middle-age, with its changes and anxieties, to adolescence, which is equally accompanied by a chemical and physical evolution with psychological repercussions. The difference is that an adolescent can look forward to young adulthood (be it with naivete and impatience), whereas at middle-age you need much equanimity and maturity of spirit to face without despair the prospect of approaching old age and death.

athena tacha is a sculptor and conceptual artist most active in environmental design for public spaces. she teaches at oberlin college in ohio.

EXTRE MITIES

SUZANNE NOGUERE



UNTITLED – MIRA FALARDEAU

The doctor calls it *ulnar drift*, the way
Your fingers now curve outward on both hands,
The bones driven like snow. So this is winter,
When fingers no longer work, not from cold
But age. It is no use for me to thread
The needle you cannot hold, or hope to see
Cloth other than this blanket in your hands,
Where veins rise like tree roots from eroded soil.

Day after day you lie on your back in bed
As if testing the feel of eternity.
Two years not touching earth, your toes
Have curled under like a bird's around a branch
And won't let go of something invisible.
And I have read how already the bones
Of your legs, as still as in a grave,
Must be turning to dust from disuse.

My bones make the same blood as yours; and in
Their hollows the same echoes tell me how
That lowering day's at hand when I must
See six feet between us, if I can stand it.

suzanne noguere is a poet who lives in new york city. her children's books, little koala *and* little raccoon, *were published by holt, rinehart and winston.*

mira falardeau has been published since 1974. she is president of a group of cartoonists in quebec called the "s.c.a.b.d."

Rented Ro

JOAN NICHOLSON

1

It was not until the seventieth room that I began to feel a bit tired of moving and aware of needing my own home. Until then, it was a pattern I had always known and never questioned.

By the time I was fifteen, Mother and I had lived in eighteen different houses. The ritual was established, the chaos begun.

What was unavoidable from family circumstances in my youth, after the twenty-second or twenty-third move, became a gypsy pattern that I came to expect, anticipate and frequently orchestrate.

Unwittingly, I became an anthropologist of living conditions and the mechanics of moving in America by taxicab, U-Haul or Greyhound bus.

Though friends in their suburban torpor often teased me, I assumed that my habit of uprooting myself simply came from an adventurous spirit, inspired by my history, which inspired the frequent desire for a greater reality.

Recent maneuvers, however, have not been executed with my customary ease. The cavalier logic I have so often relied on is no longer serving me. I have begun to tease myself.

Do I suffer from a fear of landing or the lack of knowing how? To blame restlessness or simply instability would not suffice to explain why I moved to Okinawa in the sixties or why nine trips across America were so inspired and urgent each time.

CHANGE OF ADDRESS – CAREL MOISEIWITSCH

2

The first rooms I knew with any regularity were in my grandparents' house in Spokane, where I often spent summers from age three to ten. But Grandma's death put an end to bus trips from California, an end to those cherished times.

It was a plain one-story wooden house, set back from the street, with a wood stove in the kitchen, an icebox on the open back porch, a dirt cellar where canned fruit and potatoes were stored and a shallow attic.

I slept with Grandma in her bed whenever Grandpa was traveling for the co-op, or in my uncle's room after he joined the army. There were flower boxes in the dining room windows and giant sunflowers out back along the woodshed.

On warm summer evenings, Grandma and I lay on a quilt in the back yard under a cherry tree as tall as the house, looked at the stars and felt the day cooling down.

She told me all about the beautiful old red-haired widow who lived next door and kept too many cats, or we listened to the big family in the corner house fighting.

Sometimes their yelling woke us in the night and we got up and went into the bathroom to stand in the bathtub so we could hear better.

carel moiseiwitsch is a graphic artist who lives in vancouver with her three children.

dancer, poet joan nicholson manages visual and performing arts programs for the asian american arts center in new york's chinatown, and works with homeless children in dance and theatre.

oms

3

I just moved into my seventy-fourth, or is it seventy-fifth, room and think it might be prudent, perhaps instructive, even entertaining, to trace the real entrances and exits, motivations, men, women, jobs, longings and imaginings that have carried me, propelled me, this way then the other, keeping me still only briefly.

Coveting gardens and libraries, and that mythic home, perhaps I can change my unsettled ways. I will go back now to the many rooms to gain knowledge and compassion for all the rooms in me.

4

There have been rooms and rooms and rooms and rooms and rooms. There have been rooms in Walla Walla, Milton-Freewater, Spokane, Corvallis, Pomeroy, La Crosse, and Steamboat Springs.

Rooms in Chelsea, Soho, Tribeca, Greenwich Village and Brooklyn Heights.

Rooms on the Upper West Side, the Upper East Side, the Lower East Side, and the East Village.

Rooms in Pasadena, Riverside, West Hollywood, El Monte, Brentwood, Westwood, Venice, San Diego, Fire Island, Washington D.C., and Camp Robinson Crusoe.

There have been rooms shared with my mother, rooms alone, rooms with cats, with husbands and almost husbands, with lovers and friends.

Rooms big enough for just a bed and a stack of books. Other rooms big enough for a bed, a hot plate, a borrowed desk and a chair.

Rooms with a handmade bed and a camel stool. Rooms with fireplaces, designer kitchens, a collection of grandfather clocks and a large poodle dog named Darboux, after the French mathematician.

Rooms with all my things in milk crates. One room with all my things in proper dressers and antique armoires.
Rooms in the former summer house of French-Canadian settlers on an island in the Mississippi River.

More rooms on a sugarbeet farm in Oregon. Favorite rooms in a cardboard warehouse in New York City. Rooms over a TV repair store in Okinawa. Rooms in a turquoise-green stucco house next to my stepfather's turquoise-green drive-in movie theater.

Rooms with all my things in baskets and perfect rooms in my own heart's dream: barnsize, more baskets, paintings, sculpture, children, cats, tranquility, love, acceptance.

5

There have been too many rooms. Too many other people's rooms. Too many rooms I've tried to fit. Not enough rooms for me. Rooms just for me are yet to come.

From room to room, I have lost too many treasures. My grandmother's caramel-colored celluloid cameo, a handmade feather comforter in a faded rose color I never liked, that Mother sent to me in Wisconsin from the Starlite Drive-In-Movie Swap Meet in Elmonte.

I misplaced my dear cats Max and Lulu between New York and California. A vintage Mustang was stolen in one of Manhattan's Puerto Rican ghettos. Even parts of my soul have slipped out of my pocket when I wasn't looking.

INSTALLATION AND SET FOR THE PERFORMANCE "PRIVATE PLACES" – VERNITA NEMEC

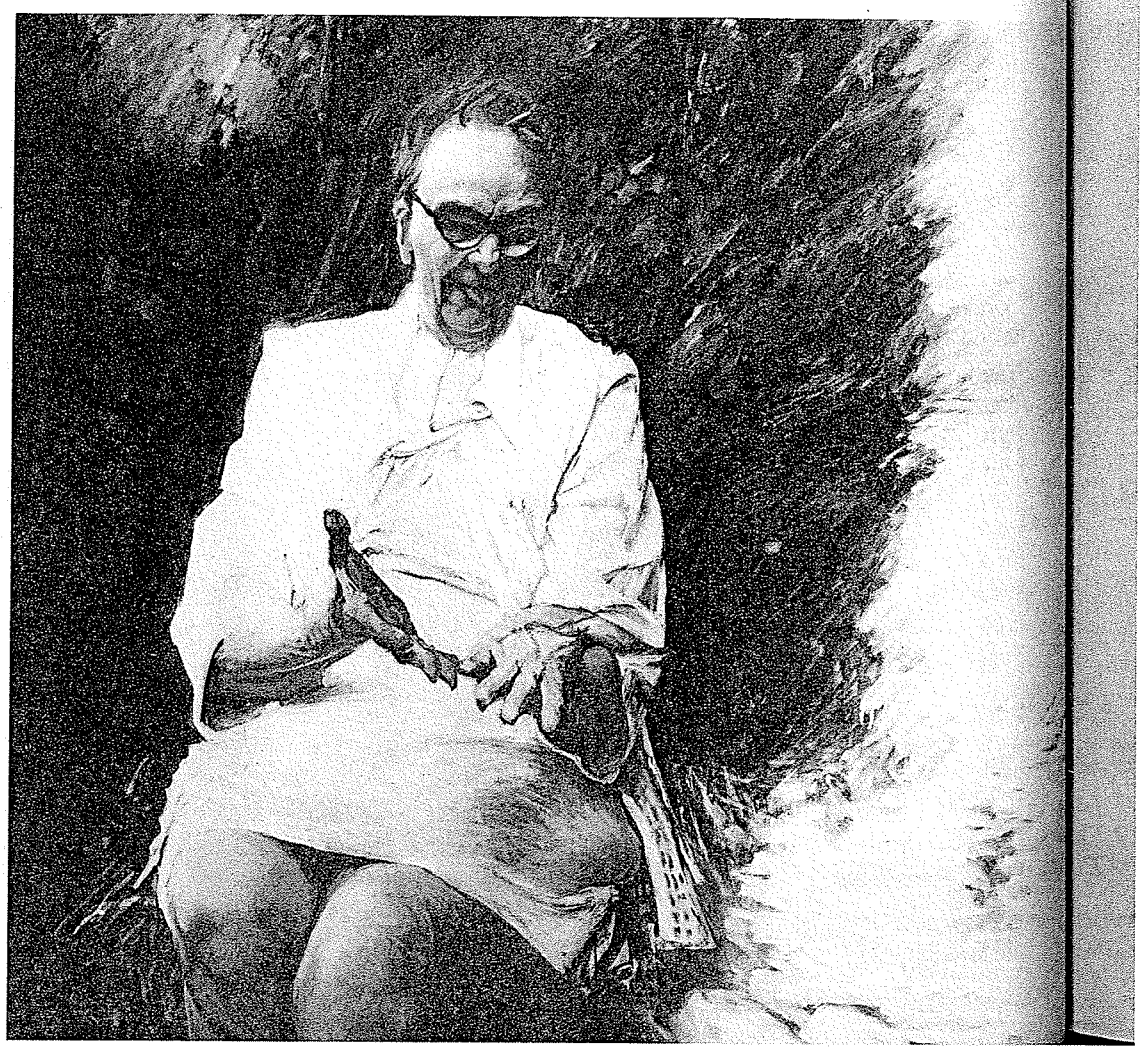
the founder of the floating performance, vernita nemec is a new york city-based performance artist, visual artist and poet.

MAY
STEVENS

GENTLE

You can go.
I hug you close. Take care of your ribs.
Keep your arms in their hollows. Don't talk.
The milk that is spilled
in the well of your neck
I will write white words with it
if you'll be still.
Unfold the layers of your skin
that let out a limb. Make a pact with
brittle or pliant. Under the blanket
ends of the ribs north of the saddle bone
up on the blanket sponge of your veins
chips of your fingers float like a shell
sea's tissue to sea's stone.
End formally.

Hold up your head in its hawkcords
Hood with your eyes the dark you see
ahead of me. Scratch your nose a little.
Tuck in your mouth over the drowsy gullet.
Suck in the places your skin falls to dream
under the jutting bone.
There is great beauty.

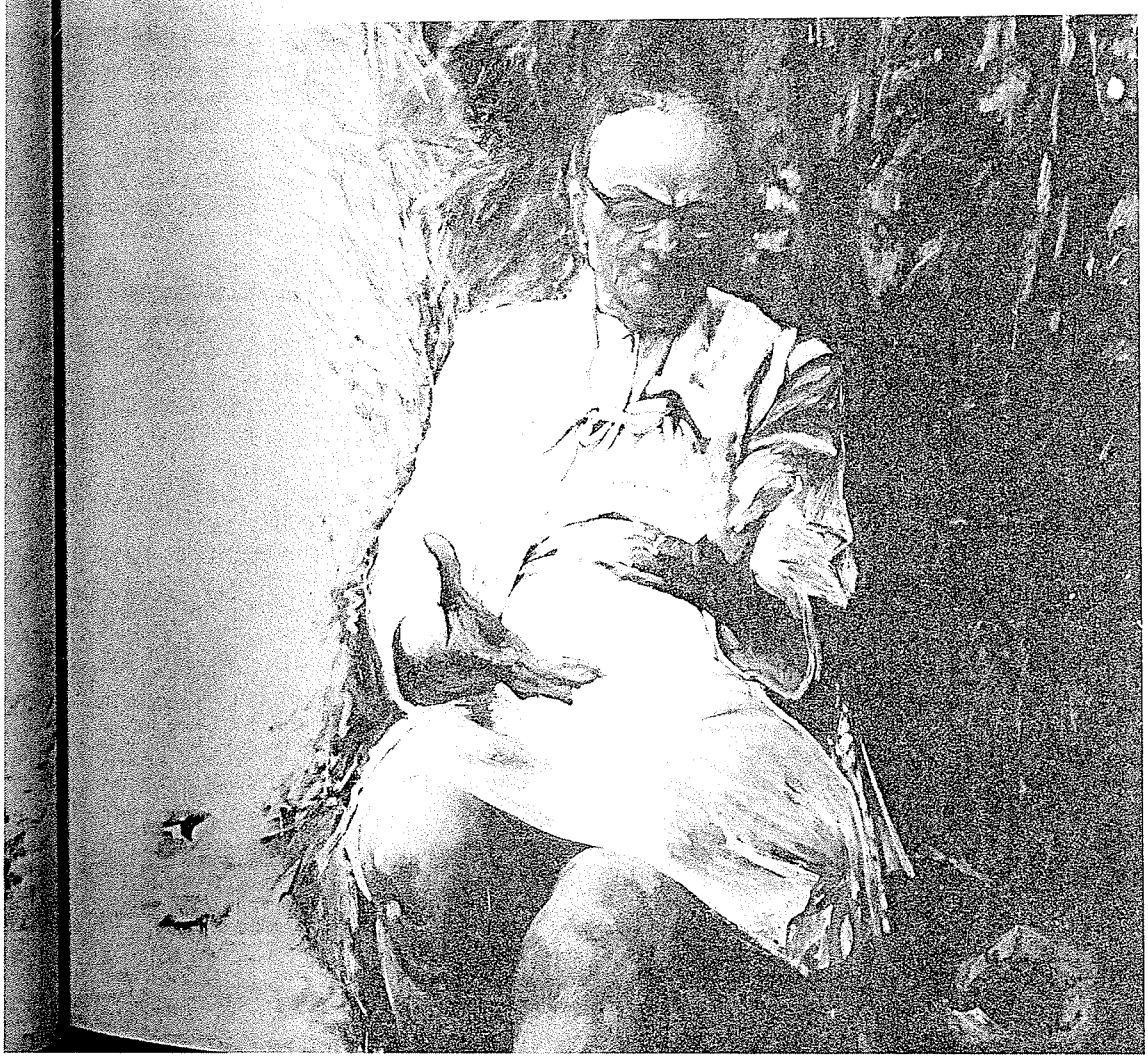


Drink milk.
Color comes to the lips.
You thrum when I hug you and squeeze you
as if you were my newborn daughter.
Brush with your hand
the back of my hand
with faint desire

Don't eat. Turn your head to the wall.
Nothing has flavor: cold paste on a sharp
edged spoon. Not for you. No. You've decided.
Serenely you smile in control of your life.

You're safe deep inside. Curl up in your cot
strapped to its sides. Nothing can happen.
You are washed changed pulled from slumber
for riddles you have no time for.
Close down your eyes. Soon I'll be gone.
Clamp shut your ears and jaw. Find your way
to the smallest light
Enter so softly
it's not an event
I won't even know

EVENTS



FORE RIVER – MAY STEVENS
PHOTO: DAVID HEINLEIN

as an artist who helped to found heresies *in 1976-77, may stevens is looking forward to contributing to the issue that will come out january 1, 2000.*

"Right now is always the best age"

Lucy R. Lippard & Mary Mizenko

The interviews below were conducted in a middle-class senior center and on the streets in Boulder, Colorado, in a black housing project in Houston, Texas, and in private homes in New York City, Boulder, and Hamden, Connecticut. The goal was to look at the aging process from the beginning, and to explore intergenerational notions about youth and age. The interviewees ranged from 8 to 80. Each woman was asked the same series of questions concerning the changes that take place with getting older: her focus on different issues, expectations for the future, happy and unhappy recollections of the past, the number of friends of different ages, and whether or not this society is a good place in which to grow old. We found that all ages bring with them elements of hope and despair, and that flashes of wisdom may come at any age.

Marjorie Johns: I won't tell you my age. I'm angry at society for putting me in a category for the number of years I've lived. When I went to work at fiftyish, I found I was better educated than most of the younger women I had to compete with, since I had been out there living a full life while they were locked in offices. Nevertheless, it was the younger women who got the promotions and I got people telling me a hundred dozen times: "You're overqualified." But if I have to make a living, it's *my* decision whether I'm overqualified for a job. If you want to make it, you'd better get your promotions, get your advances, before you hit fifty.

I also many times had people tell me, "I know you have the experience and the background to be very valuable, but we can't have you in there with younger girls. That wouldn't work out. They don't want an older woman interfering. They don't want *Mother* in the department." In fact, I'll tell you how far this goes. I have been working once a week at the Boulder Day Care Center. I was very skittery about what my position would be in the nursery, but what they really wanted was a granny, and I was happy to hold the kids and love 'em and cuddle 'em. I was sitting in the corner one morning reading to a little girl who was quite disturbed. Another little girl came over who was five years old and told me to get out of that corner; she wanted to play there. I said, "Well, I'm reading to Amy and we're going to sit here awhile." She gave me a bad time about it. I told her again, "We're staying here." And she said, "You know, I don't have to mind old ladies." It really shook me up. A five-year-old kid in this society knows that old ladies are not listened to.

Here in the senior center where I've been a resident for two years, you find a lot of inflexibility and negativism which I really think comes from fear—fear of what's going to happen to us today as society treats us. Every time someone new moves in, you can hear the vibrations all through the building: "How's this person going to change our lives? We can't stand change. We like it the way it is." A friend who's a psychologist working with seniors says she is appalled at the amount of meanness that is inflicted on each other by old people. This meanness is fear, and that brings out cruelty.

I was very popular in my forties, when I became single. The men who thought I was a young chick had made their money and established themselves in their professions and had no responsibilities, so they could take me lots of fun places and do nice things for me. But an older woman who's been out there longer than I had warned me that at fifty this is going to change. I thought, oh, sour grapes. But it did. It's just like there was an invisible sign hung on me at fifty. The telephone didn't ring. I didn't get as many opportunities to do things, and I used to look at myself in the mirror and ask, how did I change on my birthday? I didn't see any difference, but men must have a special built-in detector and they don't *want* women over 50.

I don't like being old. There's no good thing in being old except the bus fare's cheaper.

Francine Barrington (40): I don't really feel as old as I am because of a simple reason. You see, I smile. When you hold your head up and smile, the whole world smiles with you. Try it some time. Most people will say there's something wrong with that person 'cause they smile all the time, but you watch. I'm not as good as I once was, I'm better. Wisdom. That's the main trick to growing old with grace. When I talk to older ladies, I listen to them. I come home and I think about what they're saying. Issues I cared more about ten years ago? Dusting, I hate dusting.

But sometimes when I stoop down and my bones get to cracking, I feel old. My advice to any young person: Enjoy it, baby, 'cause life is so precious. In just about a twinkle of His eye, He can come and get you.

Marsha Freeman (32): I don't feel as old as I am. I think it's the fact of having teenage kids. They keep you feeling young if you're around them a lot. The eight-year-olds, they're so full of that overbearing energy they have, so much get-up-and-go they can't be still. Talking to my grandmother is restful, peace-of-mind-like. I do talk to older people differently, I guess to make them feel more comfortable about being in my company. Because if I act like I feel, maybe it's not going to be mature enough. If I change in five years, I think it'd be towards independence, 'cause I've been married ever since 15 years of age. At 37,

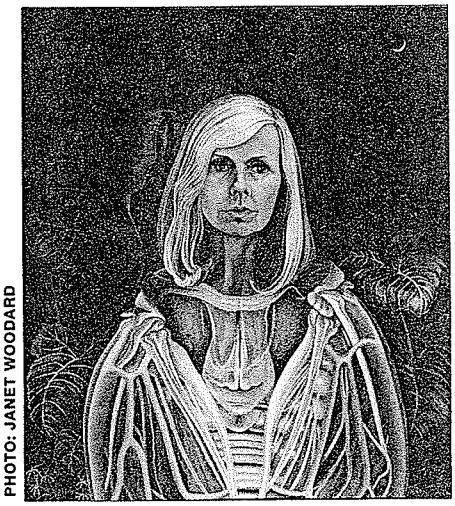
I think I'll be more career-minded, make my life the way I want it to be, before it's too late. When your daughter says "I don't want to be like my Mama," you know you're doing something wrong. That didn't mean nothing to me once upon a time. But since I got older, it does. Once upon a time I couldn't deal with people unless they were just like me. I can get along with anybody now. Like we're talking now? Once upon a time I couldn't do that.

It's my kids that make these my happiest years so far. My kids give me a lot of momentum. And I try to let them go on and be whatever they want to be in life. You see, I was a quitter. I preach to them, "Don't give up. *Tell* Mama and Daddy if you see us doing wrong. You're never too old to make mistakes." There's a lot of young girls around here and they see a lot of women doing a whole lot of things. We try to set a proper example. Caring about what we do in others' eyesight would make things a whole lot better. This is *not* a good society to grow old in. I wouldn't want to grow old out here, in this neighborhood. The dope-smoking and all that. I'm not into it and they're kinda into that kinda thing here. If we had more people here that would think of the kids that's growing up around here, it would be a better place. People around here don't respect women.

Louise Bradley (54): What bothers you is you begin not to have as good a memory. It's all there, but it's the retrieval system that isn't there. Somewhere along the way you get liberated from having to prove yourself. Personal competition means less and less somewhere around the 50 border. You can't get quite as upset or intense about things. Community becomes more important. I'm a weaver and there's a circle of weavers that meets once a month. We're all ages. We buy yarn together and so forth, but the real purpose is a support group. In ways, it's a lot more comfortable. My daughter's 26. She's my best friend. There was a time when I really didn't want to reach this age, but now it's okay. Right now is always the best age.

Alice Eager (73): Your outlook changes when your husband's gone and you don't have that to do, that closeness with him. Young means no cares and no problems. With old age, you get the cares and the problems. I hate getting older, but here I am, trying to ignore it.

Margaret Lippard (80): I feel my age physically, but mentally, no. Being deaf, and with the bad leg, all the slowing up; everything takes so much longer.



ME WAXING – LYN RANDOLPH
PHOTO: JANET WOODARD

lyn randolph is a texas painter.

Youth means heaven, being physically able to do what you want. Youth means spirited, physically more attractive, "with it." Age? Well, it's not the golden years, I can tell you. There are so many *frustrations*. I wasn't so happy in high school, but since then I've enjoyed life tremendously. Maybe I was happiest the first few years we were married, and then all that traveling we did together. I didn't miss having a career. In this day and age I might have gone for one, but I don't know what I'd be like if I were younger. I often think about that, but the way I was brought up, I was very happy raising a child and working and being married, without a real career. If I hadn't had Vernon I'd have been unhappy, and since he died it hasn't been the same at all. I miss most the companionship. There's nobody to read the paper with, or hash over parties with. And the loss of social life. Widows don't get asked out half as much. Losing or having to give up your home is *very* hard. It's like losing your past before you should have to.

I'm more interested in political issues now than when I was young. I'm interested in all sorts of movements, but I'm not active in them. The turning point was reading the autobiography of Lincoln Steffens around 1930, after college. In middle age, I was mostly interested in local issues—race and housing, the League of Women Voters. I guess McCarthyism was really the point I got *outraged*. Before that I was just *interested*. One thing I hope won't happen to me is to stop getting interested in what's going on. I miss contact with really young people. I must say that 10 years ago when I was 70, I never imagined what life would be like now, *never*. In some ways this is a good society to age in, compared with the past. You don't have to live with your children and be a burden to them, which is great. Medicare has helped a lot of people, though there should be a national health system for everybody, not just the old.

Marie Lyons (32): You know, when I was in the Caribbean, they would ask me my age and I would kind of hide it, because I was small for my age. But now I can show it off and boast of it because I don't look like 32. People say I look 21. But when the birthdays come and you see you're getting a little bit older, you make your plans. They say 35 is the best age. Then you're getting up in age. You're a little frightened too, eh? 'Old' means like a grandmother. 'Young' means the teens, 'cause that's when you have all those nice times and sometimes you really feel like going back to live it again, 'cause it's so pretty. But you can't bring those things back.

When I get old, I'm planning to go back home and settle there. In the Caribbean, it's a place you can relax. That's a good society to grow old in. They don't let you stay alone. We don't even have nursing homes. They let their parents stay home with them and they care for their parents. Older women are treated with great respect. They can tell you stories, history, have some good interesting facts to tell you. My grandmother can remember volcanic dust falling into the sand, and that's how she can tell how old she is. In my eighties, I'll go home and stay there. Here, older women try to look a little younger—makeup, exercise. At home old women tend to stay old. It's so different from here. When I get old I'll just go with the time. I'm not scared of getting old except I want to die a peaceful death. You see these things on TV, you wonder which one *you're* going to get. I want to live long.

Katherine Campbell (38): Age is irrelevant. It's more what happens to you in your own life. When you get into your later thirties, you look more into the future and plan where you want to be 15 years from now. You realize how precious life is as it gets shorter and shorter. Working with older people as a community-resource coordinator has made me realize that the best preventive medicine is to keep yourself from being fixed, inflexible, when you're younger.

I have lots of intergenerational contacts in my work but not in my personal

life. My children are 14 and 12, and I talk to their friends really easily, the same way I talk to my own friends, casually, though not as in depth. I'm perhaps more polite with women over 70. Sometimes it's really hard not to be patronizing if they're hard of hearing. You just have to watch the inflections. Youth is looking at a vastness, 60 or 80 years ahead. Older people are looking behind and thinking there's this much time left, this is what my life *has* been. Where they kind of meet is in living day by day, week by week. Middle-aged people live year by year, not day by day.

The economic situation looks bad. We could even have a real depression like the 1930s. It seems like there's going to be a re-evaluation of our lives and what we can provide for our children. I don't look at a real rosy future but I think it will be a real political time. Ten years ago, there were a lot fewer advocacy groups for older people, Gray Panthers, senior groups, and now they're much more active politically. The middle-aged groups will continue to be active and they'll be stronger as they see what's going on and demand that things will be there for them when they get old. The youth is also getting much more aware of the whole cycle of things. My son's in elementary school and he's getting fairly politically aware too.

They say that by the year 2000, a third of our population will be over 65. That's huge. There are people considered seniors still caring for their parents. The 85-plus age group is the fastest growing age group. And we're going to have to support them with social security. Then it's supposed to be there for you and me? I know an 80-year-old woman trying to care for her 60-year-old daughter who had a stroke. She's back to being a mother again, but she doesn't have the physical or emotional strength to cope with it now. So we'll have four generations of political awareness and it's going to be very powerful. Who knows what's going to happen! There's going to be a lot of changes and a lot of upheaval for me and for this whole country.

Giles Leetha Jones (70): Issues? The economy. You don't know whether you're going or coming. It is a really critical time, with the starvation of the many people that's incrowding in Houston here. They are not legal. They're immigrants and they just taking over. We in the low class, if we don't be very careful we won't have nowhere to go either. But there's nothing I can do, so I might just as well leave it alone. Right here is not a good place to grow old in. Oh no. I'd like it to improve a lot. I been here 41 years. I love beautiful yards and not stuff just throwed everywhere. But when you're confined to a certain amount of money, that's it. You have to stay put. We got two bad problems we can't solve. I'm thinking of drugs and AIDS. It's not getting no better; it's getting worse. Now my hands are just like tied. They know what's happening, but they could care less. Everybody's reaching for a whole lot of money. I *earned* my little thing.

You can't sit down on age, because you be gone quickly then. I ain't never been sick but once in my life, and I worked for 35 years. My best friend is . . . How old are you, Joyce? 39. I ain't too much on a whole lot of friends. I'm just a by-myself person. Talking to people, say, 30 years old, we talk young talk. We talk about what's now, not what happened. I don't have to do too much with older friends. I don't need them. *I'm* old. I'm in with the 80s over there, but I like to stay with the 30s and 40s over here. Some people try to play like they younger. They ain't. They wait for a little bitty while and they right back in the shoe.

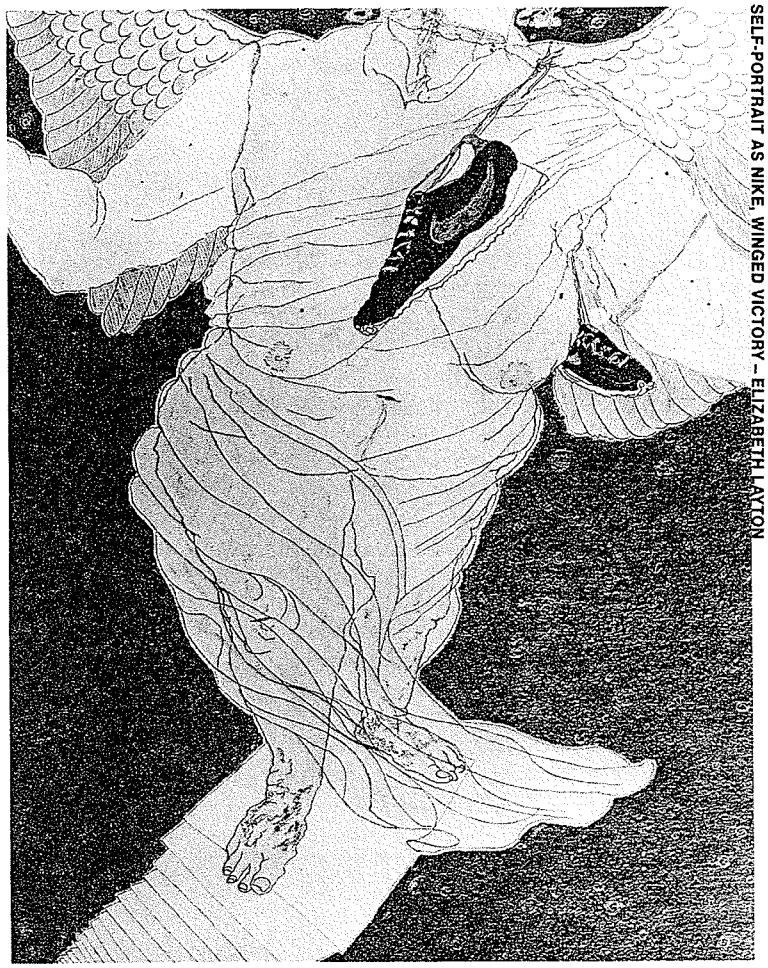
Michelle (17): I want to get out now while I'm my age and work my way on up so when I'm 50 or 60, I can just sit back and relax and teach younger kids how to capture their dreams. If they older than me, I figure they have more experience than me if I need advice. So if someone comes who's younger than me, I can pass that advice on. This is not a good society to grow old in because our community is pitiful. It's poor. Like the schools around here. They not on the right level for the students. They bring our community and our students *down*. I'm the kind of person that can help my community and I'll give all I can. I write letters to whoever be in office. But I don't plan to be here after college. In ten years, my life will be better, a *lot* better. People around here don't respect young ladies. If they started leaning on they parents more, instead of outsiders, things would be better. Young ladies get off on the wrong foot. They scared of talking open with their parents and telling them how they really feel. That's when men start misusing them. A man can help himself, but young ladies shouldn't be out in the streets running around like that. That's when they get their bad reputations.

Tomika (8): *How does 8 feel?* Happy. *Who's the oldest person you know?* Mama. She's 26. *What are you going to be when you get older?* Working.

Joyce Fuller (39): I feel 16. It would be good to be old, because you can see life at the end, how everything done changed. What I like here is the people, the women. What I dislike is the prejudice, the racism and all that.

Azzie Lee Turk (56): Around 40, I didn't feel tired, I just felt like I wanted to slow down. When I was young, going out was the big deal, and havin' fun and drinkin' and stuff. Now I like to go to church and I like to be quiet. I married at 15 and it didn't work. I'd like to have a husband, but you can't get those, not a good one. I have an aunt up in Jacksonville made 99 last weekend and she get around better'n I do. Talks about sex.

Lilly Mae Gonzales (54): Young folks complain all the time. I never have no complaints or nothin'. I work five, six days a week, come home, dig in my yard. Old age means when you get tired, you



SELF-PORTRAIT AS NIKE, WINGED VICTORY – ELIZABETH LAYTON

elizabeth layton began drawing ten years ago at age sixty-eight. now seventy-eight, she has had 130 one-person shows across the country and has been featured in life *and* people.

give up. I have an auntie in Dallas in a rest home who's 111 years old and her mind's real keen. I don't call that old. She just can't walk because she fell and broke her hip. I think this is a fine place to grow old. That's why I'm here. Makes me feel good. I'm not afraid of growing old or living by myself. I just wish things would be like when I was coming up. I know it can't be like that. It be so much better than all that stealing and killing and all that garbage.

Alzata Monroe (67): I don't feel old but sometimes I don't have the energy to get up and go. My mother-in-law was 107. We buried her about 3 weeks ago. Her skin was just so pretty. No wrinkles. She was the color of an Indian. I've been in this neighborhood 36 years. It's home, but it's not as good as it used to be.

Heidi (19): School, sex, drugs, rock and roll, alcohol—those are things I care about now that I didn't care about ten years ago. My great grandmother's in her eighties. She makes me really sad when I see her. But you can be old when you're not. Some people just don't like life. Old age starts about 70 or 60. Young means adventurous. I don't want to live and be like my great grandma. I don't want to suffer. I really don't.

Connie, Heidi's mother (36): Today I think more about what I really want my life to be than I did ten years ago, instead of just accepting, going with the flow.... Little kids are just running around with nothing to do. Really old people are... just running around with nothing to do! A lot of things are similar.

Julie (40) and **Sara** (16) **Phillips**, mother and daughter.

Julie: There's a lot of job discrimination already at 40 for women, and it only gets worse. I have friends who are 50 who are just devastated when they try to switch careers and do stuff, and these are people who are in marvelous condition. One can trek across Nepal but she can't get a job because she's 52. The single least respected role in our culture has got to be the role of an older woman. If there's change afoot, I sure don't see it yet. I'll believe it when we quit calling people senior citizens or start calling the rest of us junior citizens. I'm not looking forward to getting older, but the alternative is worse. I had a salivary gland tumor five years ago, and as I've processed that, I don't really believe very much in goals anymore, as much as just kind of living in the moment and getting a lot out of it. I spent all my younger years planning for the future and then almost didn't have one, so I really re-evaluated that.

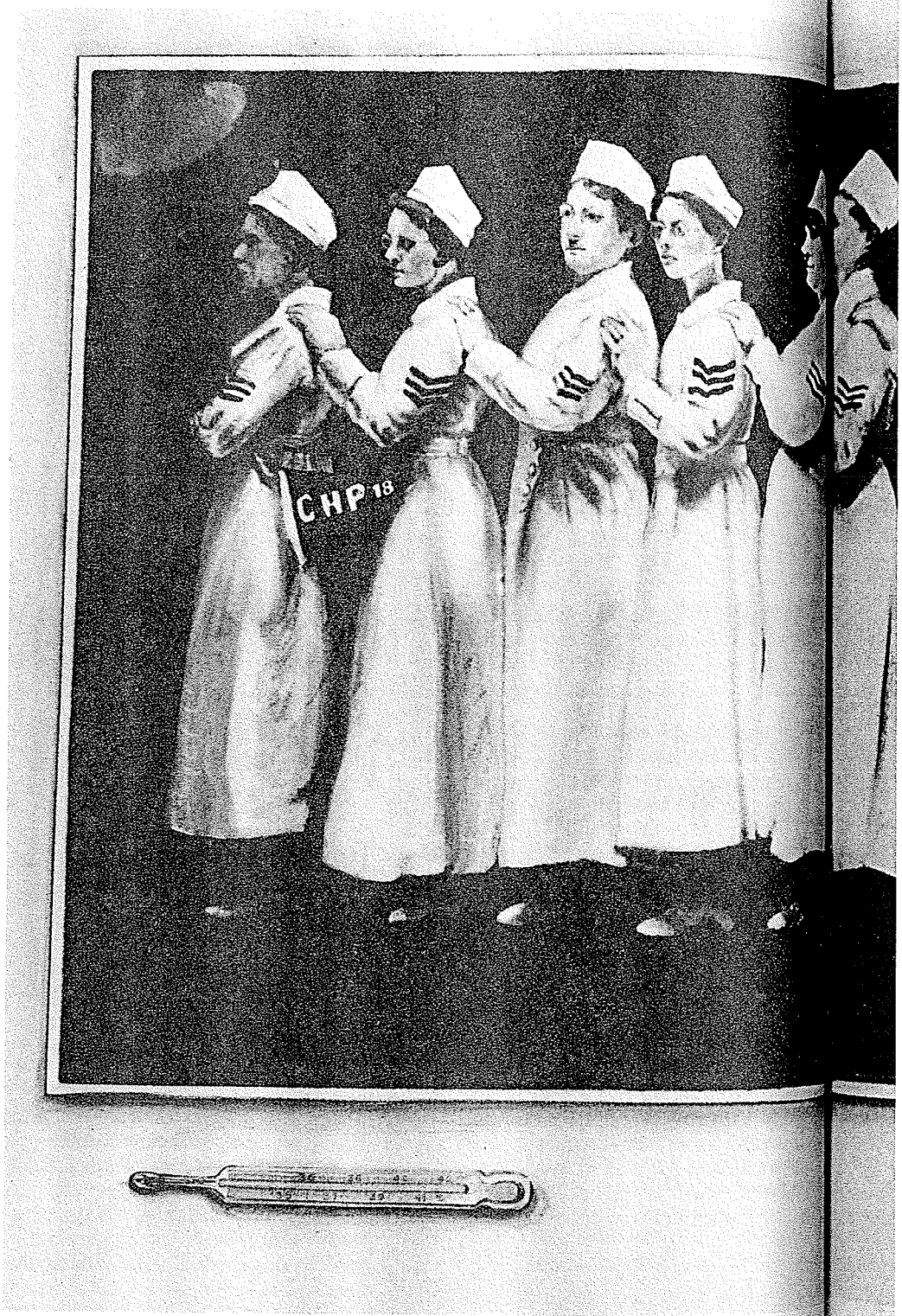
Sara: Sixteen's a neat age in some ways. Sometimes I feel a lot older and sometimes a lot younger. Sometimes I don't feel like I'm *any* age exactly. My grandmother's 72 and she's a close friend, but sometimes I act, like, totally fake with her. That's when she's acting old, and talking about her hearing all the time. And then once in a while I see her as a person and I get all fascinated because she's like, you know, really interesting. With a friend in her fifties I'm almost playful. And with another older friend I'll be totally serious and intent.... I look forward to getting older because I *hope* that I'll get more confident and get more and more dynamic and have more and more fun. But I also know that when you get older than that—maybe after 40, the sureness begins to decrease.

Julie: I couldn't have imagined being middle-aged when I was your age. Getting old would have been 30. That would have been as far in my wildest dreams I could have imagined. That's why it was such a shock to get to be 35.

Sara: There's this thing about men getting to be so distinguished when they're older. Well, I think older women are classy. You have more perspective, more of a sense of humor about things, or some people do. It's more and more gentle and carefree if you're in touch with getting older. I'm looking forward to the day when Connie Chung turns 50, because that's a classy breed of women—newscasters. I hope I don't worry about how I look when I get older. That's really silly. I think gray hair's beautiful. It's not like you can compare a 60-year-old woman with a 20-year-old woman. They can both be beautiful. It was interesting for me to watch you turn 40. I mean, you look better now than you did at any time between 35 and 39. I'm totally serious. It's not all just cosmetic. ... I don't know if I'll be married or living with people. I'm the child of liberated parents. For a while I wanted to be a famous actress, I'd live all by myself and if I was in love, well, *maybe* the guy would come and live with me. But recently I've felt kind of lonely, and you could probably get married without giving up.

Nancy Doub (49): How old I feel is affected by how much weight I have, and right now I feel very old and blobby, for the time being. My mother didn't do any exercise at all after 25 and I remember how old she seemed. I see old age as dwindling capacities, losing your friends, having to face death. It starts around 70. I do have young friends. If I know them first as our children's friends, I think of them as quite young. If I meet them on my own, I think of them as contemporaries. This society probably isn't as good to grow old in as some, where there's an extended family and a happy, comfortable place to be with the family. It seems very lonely here for a lot of old people, though at this point in time, I'm personally enjoying not having an extended family around.

I was surprised. The older my mother got the more she was a friend of mine. I have a lot of respect for the wisdom of age, *except* that times are changing so fast. My uncle just wrote a big treatise on peace and I'm impressed with it but it's definitely dated; it's definitely a thinking from another generation. Maybe I'll send him some of the stuff my son is reading



esther gilman is a new york painter who also works in book illustration, set design and harpsichord painting.

THE GRADUATION – ESTHER GILMAN

and thinking about.

One of my most joyful things in life is moving and running. I love that feeling of fluidity and power. I love to play basketball. I took up hunter riding at 37, jumping horses. But I had an injury last year—not because I was old. Now all I have to do is lose some weight and I'll feel very happy about myself. I never thought I wouldn't get old. I always wanted to see what's going on. In fact, I announced when I was three that I wasn't going to be one of those people who died. That was not for me. I had other plans. And I think I still have that feeling, that I might possibly be an exception! I've read quite a bit about life-after-death experiences, people who were officially dead, and it seemed like quite a nice adventure. *However*... I'd be willing to postpone that as long as I can, even though I do have a great curiosity about spiritual-type things. I wouldn't stake my money *or* my life on it!

Jennifer Albert (21): Twenty-one, but I feel older, because most people my age don't have to do everything I have to do. I work 32 hours, from 7 or 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. four days a week as a marketing director, then I go to school four nights a week and I waitress three nights a week. Some people don't *think* yet at 21. They haven't woken up yet. Having to try so hard makes me feel older, way ahead of myself. I think I'm 35 sometimes. Physically I feel young, but I have bad habits—25 cups of coffee a day, smoking—so my body may feel bad. I'm just beginning to wake up now to things around me. You always knew there was poverty out there, and starvation, and racism and prejudice out there, but until it hits you, you don't think about it. The main thing I've woken up to from my own experience is how people are prejudiced against me because I'm a woman. I'm just beginning to realize that what they say we have and what we really have are two different things. When that happens, it makes me look around and see other people who are put down because of what they are.

I think less about certain stupid things than I did in my teens, like popularity, physicalness, clothes. The social things start to mean less and less, what people think of me. My grandmother's 88 now. Just a few years ago, when she was still all with it, old age meant happy things to me. It meant knowing things nobody else knows because you've been through everything, a whole lot of information rolled into one. Your face

changes, but I never thought wrinkles were bad. If you looked one way your whole life, it wouldn't be any fun. Now, when my grandmother's mind is getting tired, old age looks a little scary to me. Getting old can be like going back to two again, just regressing all of a sudden, and there's nothing you can do about it.

I have a lot of intergenerational contacts. I waitress with women from, mostly, 30 to 35, and they're actresses. At the offices, the secretaries are about 35 to 45 but they're a whole different kind of person. It's probably the hardest part of a woman's life. There's nothing wrong with being a secretary, but when they're typing for someone 21 with her own office... They maybe didn't do quite what they wanted. The actress/waitresses may be doing what they want to do but just not making it. That's scary too.

A lot of people in my classes are women over 65 because we have a huge program at Marymount called "lifelong learning." I like it a lot, going to school with older people. At first I didn't, because they're so excited to be there they can be pains in the neck. They say, like, "*What?* No class today? Well, when are we going to make it up? What's the homework?" They want to learn so badly; they want to go home and have something to do. And I'm, like, oh my gosh, don't they know you're supposed to do the least possible to get through in this world? So I get a lot of energy from them. At school they're the most exciting people to be around because they know so much. They'll say, "In 1929 when the stock market first crashed, it happened like this...."

I don't spend as much time with little kids as I'd like to. I always wanted to be a teacher and then I decided that was almost demeaning in our society, especially with younger children. But at work I make sure I take all the projects at the elementary level, so I get to talk to a lot of younger kids about what they want to do with their lives, to keep kids in school, teach them at an early age where they'll be if they don't stay in school. What I want to do some day is teach law to young children.

There's nothing I miss from adolescence. I was a misfit. High school was a waste of my time. But maybe it helped me grow up much faster. I was happiest from birth to four. You know who your mommy and daddy are, but you don't know *who* they are yet, and that's good. I always say I wish I was five again—no, four, because you don't have to go to kindergarten when you're four. You just woke up in the morning and everything was happy. Every day seemed so long. Going to bed was horrible. Now I dream all day of getting to crawl into my bed and the days seem so short they just fly by.

I think my happiest years are yet to come. I've got everything planned out and I get very frustrated if things don't happen on time. I leave nothing to chance. As soon as I can pay back my student loans, I want to go to Columbia Law School. Marriage and kids? I go back and forth on that. One day, I can't wait to find somebody who'll be my best friend and satisfy me for the rest of my life. Other days, I think there's *nobody* out there who thinks like I do. My mother always told me, "Marry a doctor, marry a lawyer, have a good life." In other words, don't *think* for the rest of your life. What else are women here for, anyway? Another piece of me totally throws it out the window. Okay, I'll get married when I'm 55 and I've done everything I wanted to do. Maybe I'll want to share some of my "riches." But I want to do everything I do as me, as Jennifer Albert—A-L-B-E-R-T—because that's what I've been spelling on my papers my whole life.

People always say old age is a state of mind. I don't think so. People just like to think of it that way. It's an age, it starts at 65. Old people in this society are just pushed aside. We give them discount coffee at McDonald's, discount movies, like that's all they're worth. I would love to live in a society where being old meant you knew more, you were *up* there, high on the totem pole. Instead, we put our old people in little hospitals and visit them now and then. They should be able to go on living like they always lived. If something's wrong, of course they should be helped, but a lot of times we help them without them wanting to be helped. I'd leave them alone. Like with the homeless. In America we just like to sweep all the people we don't think we need under the table.

I think I'm going to like being older. I'll know more. I just can't wait to know so much that when anyone walks up to me I can have an intelligent conversation with anybody in the world, know a little about everything. I hope people will take me more seriously when I'm older. It's hard to be trying to do all these things and people keep telling me, "You're young; you'll understand later." Maybe I'm wrong to think I know now, but I don't want to hear that anymore. I want to get to the point where I've done all the things I want to do so I can relax a little and enjoy it. At 55, I'll be able to sit back and think, "Thank God, when I go to that high school reunion, I'll have things to say."

lucy r. lippard is a writer and activist living in new york and boulder, colorado.

mary mizenko is a 25-year-old artist living in san francisco.

FACING PAGE:
LIFE'S EVERYDAY TRANSFORMATIONS
ANN MARIE ROUSSEAU

MOMMA'S DEATH

She walked
down the hall
bent
one foot
in caution
before
the other

I held her hand
and tried
to take
the weight
but her soul
was too heavy

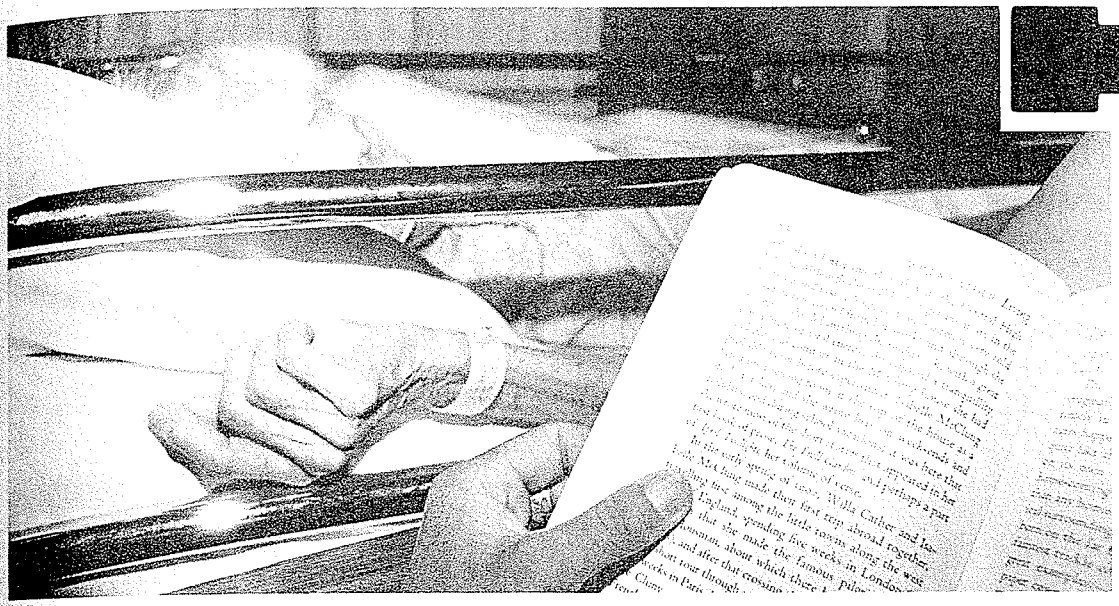
aisha eshe

LOST CHILDHOOD

momma
I see your face
on the pages
I write
Your whisper
fills my poetry
Sometimes
we sing
while I drink my tea
It's all so real
Like the last 30 years
did not exist
Till I stand up
and see how tall I am

aisha eshe's poetry is broadly published. her novella, blood at the roots, *will be published by esoterica press.*

FEAR Sucks



YOU, ME AND WILLA – ANN MEREDITH

ann meredith is a documentary photographer who has been chronicling women's culture for the last seventeen years.

Mary Fuller

a working sculptor and writer, mary fuller has published an art book, many art articles, murder mysteries and short stories. she is presently working on a novel.

The mugging of 70-year-old Rudy frightened some of us, and Thelma began to dye her hair. Rudy was bitter about it. He had taught poor kids how to make airplanes in the trade school all of his life, and now to have his fingers broken by a dude who asked him the time of day at eleven in the morning made him feel like a fool, so he was hurt two ways—in his fingers and in his spirit. "It won't make any difference," he told Thelma. "They can tell you're old by the way you walk."

The fear changes everything. It spoils things, takes the fun away. It makes one think of danger when one never did before. "That's a neat hat," this guy painting the side of the building yelled at me and I was pleased. I like men to think I look good so I said, "Thank you." And he said, "And what's under it looks good too." My walk undoubtedly swayed a bit more than before and I laughed, felt fine in a little rush of pleasure, then, whop, I thought, "I'm alone here in this space with this man, and even though he's grinning and is being so friendly, he may not be what he seems." And all the delight disappeared, all of the little trust and lighthearted bit of foolery we'd had together was gone, and I lowered my head and hurried away, feeling both afraid and disgusted with myself for feeling that way.

The fear is the worst part, and the surprise, because I certainly never thought I would be living in a society where my mother would have her throat cut at the age of 87 or that I would be afraid to go out alone at night at the age of 65. In fact, I even thought of inventing what I called a "Pop Up Man," an inflatable plastic creature, like those dinosaurs the Nature Company makes for kids, that I could put in the seat next to me when I drove up to Santa Rosa for my night classes. Maybe it's not a bad idea at that. I am very proud of the way my mother handled her horror but she stopped driving after that; she was afraid to go out to the car where it had happened.

See, there it is again. That it happens in the most ordinary and unexpected ways, in the bright simple light of day, not in the fearsome dark of the night. Someone asks you the time at eleven in the morning. Mom was going to the driveway of her house, into her car at two in the afternoon. She got into the front seat of the old Chevy, closed the door, and the guy grabbed her by the hair, yanked her head around so they faced each other eye to eye and pulled up this straight razor and slashed her neck. He missed her jugular by a half-inch, probably because my mother, like all of the rational British middle class who demand explanations from life, opened her mouth to ask, "What do you think you are doing, young man?"

So, the fear is based on reality. Old women are injured and robbed, as are old men. Our society does not respect age, does not teach and train for the idea that it is despicable to take advantage of a weaker person; on the contrary, our dominant morality seems to be saying, "Go for the sucker." Bomb Libya. Kill Quaddafi's kids. Invade Grenada. It's just a little island full of weak blacks with no guns.

The fear is not foolish. Caution is wise. Dye your hair. The Pop Up Man is probably to be on the market soon. My mother lives behind barred windows in the little house where we all grew up and no longer drives her car. I have not yet tinted my hair but I try to walk assertively and I rarely go out at night and I wear a hat more than I used to. It is definitely time for a change and the responsibility for that change lies with us, with women. We must spearhead the change because we are the ones who suffer the most from the present situation. Easy to say, hard to do, but we're thinking on it and thinking hard. It is bad enough to be old but to be old and afraid is awful.

WENDY
ANN
RYDEN

wendy ann ryden lives and writes in orange, nj and teaches writing at the new jersey institute of technology.

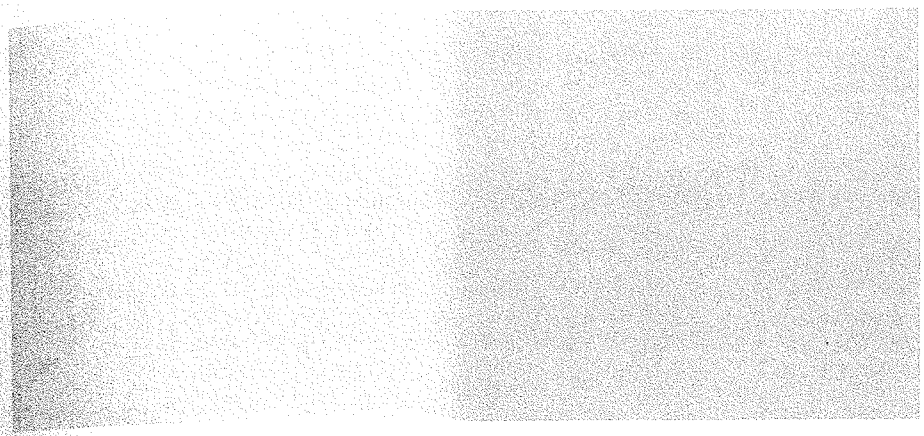
WHEN EVA BOA WENT CRAZY

It was the summer of our coming of age that the woman who lived on the corner of Pierrepont and Montague Place in the ground-floor apartment lost her mind. Maybe she had been crazy all along and no one ever knew. After all, Mrs. Eva Boa was an old woman. God only knew how old she was. Before she went crazy, she had been a very normal, quiet lady. A neat, small grandmother of a person who seemed to live alone, she could occasionally be seen doing her marketing at Hicks Deli or carrying her laundry about the street in her old-person's cart, her head always inclined slightly down, the corners of her mouth always turned slightly up. She was a pleasant, gentle-looking woman and therefore completely uninteresting to us—a marauding gang of pre-teens. We found the antics of another old person much more appealing.

Loony Luke, as he was nicknamed, was a timeless vagabond whose clothes and dirt seemed as ancient as his wrinkles. He was publicly garrulous and disagreeable—you see, he had an effect on people—and he was, therefore, intensely interesting. He stood on the street corner in his cardboard sandals, crusty towel wrapped around him like a toga, and long, matted white hair and beard hanging impressively around his shoulders. Whenever he saw our troupe coming, he would thunder in an authoritative exuberance: "I have the answers; I am the Word. *Moi, Je pense; donc, moi, Je suis.* And it is better that I should rule in Hell than serve in Heav'n for I, Johannes Climacus, assume that there awaits me a highest good, an eternal happiness..." And on he would go, giving us an eclectic, although skewed, introduction to Western philosophy. Luke terrified and thrilled us, yet, after so many years, terror and thrill had become comfortably predictable.

We were, then, in need of expanding our understanding; frankly, we needed a shock, something new to get us going that very first warm evening of summer that the five of us stood on the corner of Pierrepont sucking ice pops. We had assembled at the entrance of the Promenade, as we had every evening so far since school let out, always around that time of twilight when the sun gilds stone buildings, right before it plunges and leaves murky dusk. Tired of playing, of not playing, of everything, really, yet really not tired at all, we lingered, not ready to go home. I watched Virginia struggle with last year's halter top that now clung too closely to her, while I licked the sugar and salt of the cherry ice that rolled down my damp arm. In the heat and boredom, Diana lazily tilted back her head like she was waiting for a grape, arching her neck and back and opening her mouth to allow in the droplets of sweetness. I tugged at the midriff knot I had made in my blouse and lay down on a small spot of moist grass, the blades tickling and itching my legs, while Adam and Michael, having removed their T-shirts, climbed on the Promenade railing, the whiteness of their small arms and chests looking gray-green in the dimming light. Virginia and Diana lay down, too, the three of us head to head forming a star, staring up into the muggy sky and waiting for Venus to appear over the harbor.

Suddenly, Michael squealed from his perch, his Adam's apple jutting out. "Hey, look!"



It was at that moment, as if in response to our restlessness, that Eva Boa chose to fill her ground-floor apartment with light, to illuminate those large street-level windows that shown out through the darkness like full moons on a clear night, drawing our gazes inside: a glimpse through a portal. And at that same moment, as if she knew she had our attention, just as if it were intended for us to see, she chose this same, opportune moment to undress.

Oh, I suppose the spectacle was actually banal enough, but we watched it like a striptease, not speaking, but with a single-purposefulness that would have been embarrassing had we *thought* about it, had we not all been so intensely participating. With her back turned toward us, Eva removed her summer dust frock. The light shown on the frail, withered body which was divided into parts by the hip-high cotton undergarment and the thick strap of the harness-like brassiere. First the brassiere went, then the voluminous drawers, all the time with her back to us. Then, as if we had been tantalized enough, she turned and walked up to the frame of the window, holding an antique gold brush with which she began stroking her long gray hair, now released from its bun. She stood there, her diminutive shoulders surprisingly straight, her hand on one of the hips where her little bulk had accumulated, the tiny, elongated breasts lying against her bony chest. Under her spell, I forgot all about the two boys behind me perched like lifeless gargoyles on the railing, as I watched the smile that Eva had always threatened burst into a wide, empty grin, devoid of teeth or even dentures.

Virginia, Diana, and I stood up together, connected by some invisible string that drew us toward Eva as well as ourselves. The night began to feel like the dark-blue velvet of the stage curtain that hung in the old school's auditorium—something that was being pulled aside for Eva's debut. I think we might have clapped, yes, I think we had stood up to give her a standing ovation when the giggle came from behind us.

At first the noise seemed to lose itself in the thickness of the air, to get muffled in the warm velvet that was cloaking us. But the intrusion persisted, became loud, dramatic, pushing its way through and finally tearing down the curtain from around Eva's stage—leaving her utterly naked—and forcing us to turn away from her. We looked at Adam and Michael, once again wearing their T-shirts, as white as the robes of priests, looking like their old selves again, as they stood up on the railing above us, defying its edge, pointing at Eva's window and hooting.

"Look at those titties," Adam bellowed.

"And look at, at—" Michael broke off, grabbing his stomach in a fresh release of laughter.

Like a strand of beads cut from a woman's neck, the string between Virginia, Diana, and me broke and scattered us at the boy's feet, small smiles stuck on our faces as we lapsed into the shadows of the railing. I tugged at my knotted shirt, trying to cover my cold and clammy middle. I watched from the side how Virginia hunched like a vulture and folded her arms in front of her. Diana simply looked at her feet, smiling that smile of idiocy. Who started first? I don't remember, but gradually the three of us shuffled toward the boys' pedestal, forming a half-circle around them, throwing in our hesitancy for the comfort and relief of laughter until we were all in full swing, together again, laughing—at Eva. The pitch increased, increased to the point where I thought for sure something would give way, and finally I yelled, "Hey, we better get out of here. Somebody's coming, I think."

My words were a marble aimed at the center of the group. We were dispelled in every direction, still giggling in that nervous terror. Down Colombia Heights, up Hicks Street, across Montague. We ran back to those homes—those safe homes that we had recently been so loathe to return to—all because this crazy woman, out of her mind (of that we were now certain), was brashly grinning her huge vacant 0 at us through her ground-floor portal as though it were some kind of promise.

But Eva was something to be reckoned with. At first it was just our secret. Every evening, through some intrinsic understanding, we would meet the boys at the same spot and watch Eva's nightly show. Because we got used to the sight, we got brave, and each night when the unveiling occurred, we stayed on the street corner a little longer, risking the wrath of our parents for violating our curfews and risking God (or Loony Luke maybe) only knew what by remaining to take in what Eva offered us. Adam led the assault on the menace—for I suppose that is what it had become for us: that perverse version of femaleness which Eva presented—using profanity with moderate proficiency. He and Michael practiced, in the language that would carry us through to adulthood, lewdly poking and jabbing at Eva, sharpening their horns by finding inventive descriptions for all that she displayed so proudly: the sagging breasts, the broad hips, the flabby belly, the furred, soft growth in the middle of it all. Virginia, Diana and I found our niche in the affair; we stood behind the boys egging them on, laughing—oh, always laughing as if our lives depended on it—at each insult so that we were all truly bonded together in what had become the greatest of thrills.

But Eva continued undaunted, unabashed in her vespertine ritual; our secret meetings and the business transacted became another something that was comfortably predictable. We began to dare, double dare, triple dare each other—the stakes were high—to move closer, go beyond the limits we had set for ourselves. Finally it was Adam, the most brave and fearless of us all, who accepted the challenge, or rather, assumed the responsibility.

On the evening that Adam took matters in hand, the rest of us hid in the forsythia bushes, long since gone green, that bordered the edge of Eva's small lawn. The distance from our vantage point to Eva's window could not have been more than ten yards, but nonetheless Adam's journey seemed impressively long as we watched him stealthily make his way across patches of grass, darting from tree to shrub, pivoting around a sprinkler; he was a regular G.I. Joe. In the meantime, the rest of us huddled close to Michael. As Adam moved closer to the window, Eva's light reflected off his features, giving identity to the small, dark prowler. He was directly underneath the window ledge when he craned his neck back to see what was inside. At that moment, an irretrievable moment, a strange look—an indescribable impotence—grazed the boy's glistening face, transforming him from an intended hero back into a child, a very frightened child. There was a quickening of our hearts, perhaps it was just my heart, I don't know, perhaps no one else even noticed the hesitancy. Perhaps I imagined the whole thing, or perhaps it was just a gloating moment before an insured triumph, because in the next instant, he reached up and forcefully banged on Eva's windowpane and then just as quickly tore away, keeping low, until he dove into the sanctuary of the bush. Adam had returned to us victorious, and the laughter of conquest, of relief, to which we had become accustomed, spilled out of us like hot, uncontainable lava.

"You did it!" The words sputtered out of us mechanically, but no less enthusiastically, as we congratulated Adam. "You did it." Virginia was the first to say it, and then each of us began repeating the words, like a dull chant. "You did it, you did it, I can't believe what you did," said over and over in rasped whispers. To confess? To convince? Something else? Well, I don't know....

But I remember Adam's response to our chorus: "I don't think anybody saw me. Did anybody see me?" in a breathlessness that made me wonder even then what kind of a question that was to ask during a victory celebration. But none of us would admit any dissatisfaction with the moment. That the event had been of short duration didn't disturb us, didn't lessen its intensity. Not really. And none of us really thought about Eva after it was over. After all, she was the given in the situation. I remember looking at her one last time after Adam had done his deed. In response to the intrusion, Eva had bent her head down, and the big round, toothless grin lost its turned-up edges. The contentment, the pride, that had filled her face and frame vanished as her eyes searched the darkened lawn for her caller. She stared vacantly, both hands helpless at her side, the O becoming bigger, becoming her face. Becoming her.

Eva stopped coming to the window after that, so our business with her was finished. Loony Luke took on renewed importance in our lives. He had taken to wearing his toga at half-mast (we supposed at the time for reasons of style, not guessing he was covering the boils that would eventually leave him legless). We would taunt and tease him as he delivered his sermons in front of St. Anne's church, always counting on a strong rebuttal from him to put us in our places. One day, for the sheer terror of it, Diana and I sneaked up behind Luke during the climax of one of his speeches and furiously hurled a stone at his wall of a back. Luke turned, woolly sunken chest bristling, and chased us all the way down Joralemon Street. I remember hearing the rest of the kids laughing as we ran away. Laughing at Diana and me.

But summer ended and junior high began; the curtain of one season wrenched closed, another's torn open. Halters and midriffs had been cast off in favor of wool dresses and first nylons, inappropriate for the weather that was still warm. I looked for changes: the occasional pair of shaved legs or the touch of forbidden lipstick. Virginia, Diana and I cowered together, trying to ward off the hard glares of the older students who occupied the central schoolyard, the younger, like ourselves, having been forced to the periphery.

It was a terrible feeling, standing in exclusion, knowing the contempt the older girls had for us. The feeling was terrible in its newness, even though deep down we had known what to expect. We did our best to combat it by talking about having a locker for the first time, having a homeroom, having to take a shower after gym class. I watched Adam and saw how he, in his group, was doing no better than we were. He, too, had been relegated to the outer court to stand with those of his own kind—skinny, chicken-necked boys whose freshly clipped hair had deprived them of all the vitality of the past summer's influence. Seeing them as they were—that was the biggest betrayal, to my mind, the biggest insult. I was feeling like I was ready to do anything, anything to put an end to the way I was feeling, anything about this injustice that had been dealt to me, when Virginia brought up the subject of Eva Boa.

"Sophie," she said to me, "I heard my parents talking last night. You'll never guess what. You know Eva Boa? Well, Mrs. Boa's daughter had to come from Westchester to get her and take her away from her apartment."

I didn't want to here it. I had myself to worry about. "Well, so what, so her daughter came," I said.

"Don't you want to know why?"

"No. I don't care."

Virginia went on, compelled. "One night," she stuttered, "one night the police found her running around on the lawn without any clothes on. Naked as a jaybird. All the lights in her apartment were on and the front window was wide open."

My rage doubled back on me like a hunted fox. The three of us bent our heads and studied the dirt embedded on the concrete where we stood. I knew what I wanted. I wanted my two friends, I wanted the three of us to pick up that invisible thread and restring ourselves and walk arm in arm out of the schoolyard, away from all of it, all of them. I suppose what I was looking for was a second chance. Finally, I dared to ask, "Well, what happened?"

"The police called her daughter and she came down and got her."

"But, I mean, what will happen to her?"

"My mother says they'll put her in a home in Westchester. My mother says the Boas have lots of money."

I was relieved by that. Virginia continued, "My mother says it's just as well. She says Eva Boa had gone crazy and that it's for her own good that her daughter is putting her away." Virginia turned her head and looked at me hopefully.

"Yes, that's right," I assured her. "Eva Boa was just a crazy old lady."

The bell rang and we forgot about Eva and the summer that had just ended. I stopped looking at Adam and the other boys in our class. I stood behind Diana and Virginia and watched the older boys and everyone else line up at the door.

PHOTO: D. JAMES DEE

SO HELP ME HANNAH SERIES: PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST WITH HER MOTHER, SELMA BUTLER – HANNAH WILKE

hannah wilke is a conceptual/performance artist and sculptor of a feminist iconography.

LIV WITH LUPUS

mary ferraro

In the year 1974, unknown to me at the time, physical changes which were completely out of my control conspired to disrupt the lifestyle which I had planned for myself.

I was newly married. I'd successfully completed four years of college and had landed a job as a music teacher in a school district within driving distance of my home. After my first year of teaching I was married, in June, to Paul, who was a businessman, environmentalist, and social activist in my hometown. I thought the course of my life had been pre-ordained. I was going to be the typical '70s woman who after about three years of marriage, and the purchase of a new home, would begin raising a two-child family while still retaining a profession. I hadn't really stopped to think if this was what I wanted, it was simply what I would do; it was what my contemporaries were doing.

Then, in less than the span of a summer vacation, I was forced to deal with changes and realities which could never have been predicted. The entire course of my life was changed.

After much testing, I was diagnosed in August of 1974 as a victim of Systemic Lupus Erythematosus (SLE). SLE is a somewhat uncommon disease of the immune system which may affect major organs. It commonly attacks young women. There is no known cause, and although there are various therapies being used, there is no cure. Symptoms vary from person to person. At the time of my diagnosis, the physical changes in my life were minimal, which in some ways made mental adjustment more difficult.

It is terrifying to slam into your own mortality and to be told a disease may be life-threatening when the physical changes are negligible to non-existent.

It was almost as if I were speaking of a third person in discussions with my doctors or my husband. There was supposed to be this sick person, but it couldn't possibly be me. Other than a chemical diagnosis, I was as functional as I'd ever been.

I did the only thing that was reasonable under the circumstances: I denied its existence. The only tangible consequence at that time was a request from my specialist that I postpone any plans for pregnancy for a couple of years until he could see what course the disease would take. I hated the word 'disease'; that word should be reserved for sick people. The request concerning pregnancy did not even ruffle me, because it seemed to be a temporary thing, and I hadn't really planned on children so early in my married life. So, although intellectually I knew there was a problem, emotionally I had not yet begun to deal with it.

For two years I was able to completely deny the existence of SLE because it had little impact on my physical state or my life state. Then in the spring of 1976, I experienced a radical change. The change had been occurring physically since January, and I had been frantically and successfully denying it. I'd become very tired most of the time, had lost about twenty pounds, and I was suffering from bouts of arthritis, nausea, and headaches. I'd refused to face reality, which in hindsight makes me appear very naive, but I was convinced it was simply overwork, grad school, job, marriage, househunting. I'd promised myself a lengthy summer vacation to settle down and set things straight. Summer vacation never arrived. I could no longer walk and was hospitalized one Friday night.

My prognosis had changed somewhat. I was now living through the first of many periods of violent exacerbation of the disease, and more intensive and varied diagnostic procedures revealed extensive kidney involvement (acute nephritis). I spent about a month in the hospital. I was put on extensive medica-

ING

tion, mostly cortisone and immunosuppressants, and there seemed to be no immediate improvement in the results of the tests being administered daily. There was a tremendous decline in both my mental and physical states. After an exhaustive month of this therapy, I was released into my husband's care, with the admonition to remain strictly on my medication regimen. They could not make me well. This time, in my depressed physical and mental state, I was forced to face some ugly facts. I really was the victim of this insidious chronic disease for which was known no cure nor cause. This disease had attacked my vital organs (kidneys), therapy did not seem to be working, and many people who had been in my situation were now simply statistics. Certainly there was hope that the therapy would take hold and a remission would occur, but to me that hope was a distant one.

In addition, all sorts of restrictions were placed on me. It's very hard to deal with physical limitations, and I had rapidly descended from an athletic, healthy individual to being weak, short of breath, fatigued, and depressed.

The things I was being told I remember vividly, and they hurt me deeply—not to do stairs for a while, not to ride my horse, once again not to even consider a pregnancy, and to seriously think of giving up my job. I did not want to be economically dependent on anyone, even my husband.

My first reaction, I think, was a tremendous fear. For the first time in my life I was possessed by an all-consuming fear, primarily of death. Every day I wondered if maybe this was the last, and I was certain I'd never see Christmas.

Secondly, I became overcome with anger and bitterness. I didn't really deserve this, I'd worked hard, according to the prescription for success; it was supposed to be my turn to begin reaping the rewards of that labor.

Finally, and perhaps most important, from today's perspective, came an overwhelming feeling of sadness. Despite the grumbling I was frequently prone to, I really liked my life, and everyone in it. It was the first time that I had seriously considered this fact. With this last realization began a dramatic change in myself.

I had much time for introspection and I came to the realization that the people who surrounded me and my relationships with them were far, far, more important than the trappings of life for which I had been striving. I had finally come to realize that people and relationships, not money and possessions, are the real stuff of life. At that point, and I think it may have been partly conscious, partly unconscious, I began to try and live by the old "Do unto others" adage. When you are really on the bottom, material things cannot add to or create happiness, but people can; people had made my life worth taking very seriously.

At this point, I simply bottomed out. For some reason, and it's still unclear whether the medical regimen had begun to take hold or my own body had garnered its strongest defenses, the disease went into a period of remission, and my life began to return to a more normal state.

Things would never be the same; the course of my future had been irrevocably altered. I would learn to cope. I gave up a steady job. I learned to squeeze every hour out of every day when my health was in a normal state. I'd been told to avoid tension and fatigue, supposed triggers of my disease. I became much more tolerant. For me, tolerance was a method of dealing with tension. I found it helpful to force myself to stop and put events into proper perspective; frequently I'd find that these events were not as important as they'd appeared on cursory examination. I'd always been a high-energy, competitive person; I learned to harness the energy, and sometimes put aside the competitive spirit. I learned to slow down and ruminate on smaller events.

Over the ten years following diagnosis we lived a yo-yo life. There were quite a few bad flare-ups of the disease. In between I did manage to run a small retail business, obtain an M.A., begin a local arts council. We purchased a ramshackle old property, and turned it into a picturesque horse farm. I've learned to drive, as a hedge against the day when I may no longer be able to ride. We still have no children, and I may never again hold a full-time job. We do have a very full life, though. Both Paul and I are heavily engaged in community and environmental concerns, and music and horses remain an important part of my existence.

They have still not discovered a cause or cure for SLE, but advances have been made in both diagnosis and treatment, and research is ongoing. As is the case with any serious disease there are risks and trade-offs to any therapy undertaken. I was last hospitalized about two years ago. It was, I feel, the hardest time I've ever had. Once again my body, my immune system, had turned on my kidneys, attacking them and treating them as foreign objects. My kidney function decreased radically, I became symptomatic, and very ill. Treatment which I'd been on did not seem to be working. The decision was made to go to chemotherapy. I will not reiterate the horrors of chemotherapy, but suffice it to say that it lives up to its reputation. Yet, I am grateful to chemotherapy; it seems to have temporarily caged this demon inside of my body. I feel that I finally have come to acceptance. We still live under a constant shadow, but realize that life can be worthwhile, under almost any circumstances. Having had this to deal with has made me more appreciative of others, and through every single bad time, I have been reawakened to the fact that there are very many caring human beings in this world. I've had to fight alone because it is I who carry this disease, and it is my will which must make the decision to fight, but my strength is possible because of the network of family and friends of which this disease has made me gratefully aware.

mary ferraro lives in forest city, pa. she has an m.a. in music, and is a freelance writer with an interest in equine subjects.

MYKONOS

CAROLE STONE

An old Greek woman strips
mourning robes down
to a knee-length bathing suit,
and dog-paddles among young boys
who dive around her
like dolphins.

Weightless in the salt,
wet hair streaming,
she takes joy from the sea,
turns back into the olive beauty
her husband married.

Given this small mercy,
she rises with the waves,
an Aphrodite like the many
I've seen in museum after museum.

On the beach,
once more in black, she goes
unnoticed by the Swedish girls
sprawled on the sand, white bellies up,
like dead fish.

carole stone is an associate professor of english at montclair state college where she teaches creative writing and literature.

GERALDINE PAGE IN THE FILM "TABLE FOR ONE" BY DORIS CHASE

doris chase, a video art pioneer, has an international reputation for creating innovative works for television and is particularly renowned for her collaborations with major figures in contemporary theatre and dance.

WHISPERING

E.M. BRONER

*Excerpts of this article by E.M. Broner were integrated into an original sound score of the same name by Susan Stone, commissioned by Voices Radio Foundation, 1986. The performance is documented in a film by Suzanne Lacy and Kathleen Laughlin (*Whisper, The Waves, the Wind*). For more information, write S. Lacy, CCAC, 5212 Broadway, Oakland, CA 94618.*

On May 19, 1984, "Whisper, The Waves, the Wind," a public performance created by Suzanne Lacy, took place on a sunny beach in La Jolla, CA. In this piece, an assembled audience watched and listened to 150 elderly, white-clad women talk about their lives and the special joys and problems of aging. Voices, a radio production agency, commissioned "Whisperings," a sound-piece for radio, as a collaboration between Suzanne Lacy, Susan Stone (composer, producer) and E.M. Broner (whose mother participated in the performance). Following is the text Broner wrote and recorded for the radio piece. (For further information on the "Whisperings" radio piece please write to Voices, #2 Washington Square Village, Apt. 16-J, NY, NY 10012.)

I walk on the cliffs of La Jolla with my mother.

Whispers waft up from the sea to the cliff, almost surd, almost inaudible. The whispers clarify, a breathy laugh, a lullaby, the intrigue of lovers. It's as if the listener were a conch shell, a pearl of ear.

My mother and I eavesdrop on the ocean.

I have accompanied her to La Jolla from her home in Leisure World, a retirement community. Mother is away from Dad for the first time in fifty-eight years.

We look below at the beach where the tables are being set up for the performers. The waves beat against the sea wall. The ocean slaps the shore of Children's Cove. It's an amphitheatre of natural elements. The stage is the beach and we, the audience, are in bleachers, standing on the sea wall or seated in chairs where the rock has been hewn into alcoves.

"This is your stage set, mother," I tell her.

The production people are setting up speakers next to us. They box them and weight them with sand bags. The discourse of the women will travel from the beach below up to the round, black mouths of these boxes.

"I'm getting nervous," says my mother. "Let's talk over the questions."

Tomorrow the production crew will spread white tablecloths on the tables. Around each table they will place four chairs, and, on the cloth, will be a sheet of four questions.

Why is this day to be different from all other days? Because, on this day, elderly women will be oracles at the sea, speaking in their true range, from deep to high, about matters of import: their aging, preparations for dying, their sense of freedom, how they feel about the women's movement.

Some of these questions, I, a daughter, could never ask, and yet our mothers and grandmothers must speak of the body in which they dwell, must think of their time as finite.

Mother and I read the sign near the Life Guard Station that is headquarters for the event: "Whisper/The Waves/The Wind: This is a work of art."

My mother is a work of art.

"Do you like my white slack suit?" my mother asks.

Like all the others in the great flock with their down-covered heads, Mother will be in white. They will be walking on white tennis shoes, white Red Cross shoes with heavy arch support, on shiny white plastic shoes, on white leather moccasins, the steadier among them on thongs, on heels. 160 elderly women, from sixty-two to ninety-nine years of age, will be heading toward the sea.

Women have always headed to water.
Women and water.
At the shore
Beating our clothes
Washing our bodies
Washing our hair
A bed of hair
Spreading the wet hair,
Separating it, playing it like a harp
as it dries,
Filling the cooking pots,
Watering the plants,
And, in our bodies, a sack of water,
A floating sack of water.

"Suzanne said we cannot wear colorful hats," says my mother, "or carry our purses."

She, like all elderly women, worries about her purse, a handle on her life, an attaché case of her artifacts: the billfold, compact, comb, hanky, pills, lipstick, cologne flask, and 3 x 5 cards with her notes for the questions that will be asked at the shore.

"Someone will guard all the purses," I say.

The waters of the Pacific have become choppy. The sunset is pink, a hint of purple, a swath of cloud. The rock outcroppings are fierce against the soft sky.

My mother, Beatrice, and I are sharing a double bed at the motel in La Jolla. The drapes are slightly drawn. My mother's face is lit by the moon. She is a different mother from the mother I knew as a child. She feels different, the feel of her skin is softer; her hair has tamed its curls. Her mouth is opened with her breathing. Her teeth have changed. The silver in the cavities has darkened. She has gaps in her mouth. They are not the even white teeth that, until late in life, never needed filling or pulling.

"The dentist never asks me," she told me the first day of my visit, "he just pulls."

Now it's an old fence, pickets missing.

I would place an iron on the time past, smooth out the forehead, color the hair, tighten the chin.

We have to search for our mothers behind the glint of glasses, the block of hearing aid.

I feel suddenly afraid. I want to awaken her to comfort *me*. I am afraid of losing her. I am afraid of aging.

"Mama," I want to say. "Don't leave me. Mama," I whisper, "I feel the slackening of youth."

There is an avalanche occurring, a slippage. The calendar is

reckoning time at a reckless speed. All my features will slide off my face. My chin will rest on my chest. My eyes will become reacquainted with my toes. My breasts and belly will be one hump. And my mother, who has been the young woman of my babyhood, playing snowballs with me, the young matron with dark hair parted to the side and large grey eyes, the mother who, still young and slender, helped me with her first granddaughter. All of those mothers cannot be gone from me—heading out to sea. May 19th dawns, a warm, bright day. The white-clad women cross the street to the cliff, and one by one they disappear over the edge. They reappear far below walking heavily on the sand. My mother is like a somnambulist, taking slow steps on the unsteady surface, as she walks toward her table and her questions.

A woman is already speaking and gesturing. A black bird sits on the sand close to her table.

Who would expect to see elderly women taking over the beach? It is customary for the beach to belong to the smoothly oiled body, the bikini, the muscled athlete. It is surrealistic and unexpected to see this multitude of elderly women sitting in this seascape.

"When I climbed down the stairs," my mother told me later, "and saw the blue sky meeting the ocean, I thought I had stepped into heaven."

There is my mother at a distance, but my mother is not my mother. She is not cooking. She is not serving. She is smiling, at ease with her peers. I see her sweet face. She looks so pretty. She gestures theatrically like an actress.

She had told me yesterday on the balcony of the motel:

"I thought I would become an actress. I was acting in Russia and then in Poland for those two years that we waited for our visas. I thought in America I would surely act, but I had to work in the laundry to help pay back the passage for the six of us my aunt had borrowed. So I went to work in the laundry. And then I married. Now, sixty years later, at the age of eighty-one, I am competing with Hollywood starlets."

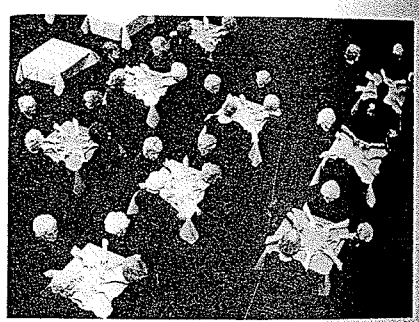
The women speak and look at one another against the expanse of water. I wonder, in the losses of their lives, if the landscape empties in old age like the gaps in the mouth. Are you always looking with your tongue for that missing tooth, remembering, in startlement, a *missing* friend, a brother?

Their stories told, the women can depart, ascend those difficult stairs. The young people will pull them up, as the old women pulled the young up in age.

I don't want you to go from me, Mama. Even if you give away your wavy hair to me, your hazel eyes to my daughter. I don't want you to go away. I need you. Promise you won't go away. I need your steadiness.

e.m. broner has written five books and is on her sixth, the repair shop. *she is the recipient of an nea grant, and is guest writer at sarah lawrence college.*

PHOTO: LIZ CISCO



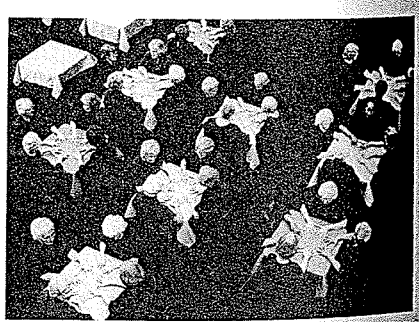


PHOTO: PETER LATNER

"WHISPER, THE WAVES, THE WIND": PERFORMANCE BY SUZANNE LACY WITH SHARON ALLEN (LA JOLLA, 1984). ON A BRIGHT SPRING MORNING, 154 OLDER WOMEN DRESSED IN WHITE WOUND THEIR WAY IN PROCESSIONAL THROUGH AN AUDIENCE OF 1000 AND DOWN STEEP STAIRS TO THE BEACH. THERE, SURROUNDED BY CLIFFS, SAND, AND SEA, THEY WERE SEATED AT WHITE CLOTH-COVERED TABLES. THEY SPOKE OF THEIR LIVES WHILE THE AUDIENCE WATCHED FROM ABOVE AND LISTENED TO THEIR PRE-RECORDED VOICES ON A SOUNDTRACK BY COMPOSER SUSAN STONE.

THE CRYSTAL QUILT

Patrice Koelsch

patrice clark koelsch directs for the center for arts criticism in st. paul and writes about contemporary art and culture. she coordinated the documentation team for "the crystal quilt."

The role of older women in the public sphere is a theme that seems to have a special resonance for feminists who came of age politically in the late sixties and early seventies and who are confronting the aging of themselves, their mothers, their movement. The initial euphoria of liberation has been replaced with the sobering recognition of how difficult it is to achieve change that is more than superficial.

Although the American mass media promotes idealized images of sexually active, career- and consumer-oriented women, an increasing number of women find themselves politically discounted and economically disenfranchised. Older women constitute the most rapidly growing segment of our society, yet they are relatively invisible and inaudible in the public sphere. When the disadvantaged situation of older women is publically acknowledged, the women are usually portrayed as helpless objects of pathos. This stereotype camouflages the diverse and complex reality of older women's lives. And it was the scarcity of images acknowledging both the strength and the struggle of older women that motivated Suzanne Lacy to develop the performance piece, "The Crystal Quilt."

"The Crystal Quilt," performed on Mother's Day, was the most visible component of the Whisper Minnesota Project, a multi-generational coalition of artists, policy-makers, service providers, and community activists organized by Lacy to challenge public perceptions about women and aging.

The site of "The Crystal Quilt" was the glass-covered IDS center of downtown Minneapolis. The aesthetics of the performance called for the transformation of an 82 by 82 foot red and black rug into a colorful patchwork quilt, designed by painter Miriam Schapiro. In order to avoid suggestions of mourning, the 430 black-clad performers did not form a procession but, accompanied by ambient sounds of a "typical Minnesota day" on a soundtrack by composer Susan Stone, they entered gradually from the corners of the quilt and unfolded the black tablecloths to reveal the red and yellow color inside. This slow unfolding echoed the painstaking piecework of quilt-making. During the subsequent forty-five minute performance the women discussed their accomplishments and disappointments, their hopes and their fears among themselves while the audience listened to the participants' recorded reflections on self-image, sexuality, family, community, illness, invisibility, and activism. On sound cues at several intervals they simultaneously changed hand positions, altering the pattern on the quilt. As a finale, the 3,000 spectators took hand-painted scarves from strategically situated volunteers and came on to the quilt to honor the performers by presenting them with these symbols of public investiture.

Other contributing artists were Phyllis Jane Rose, assistant director; Julie Arnoff, hand-painted scarves; Sage Cowles, choreographer; and Jeannie Spears of the Minnesota Quilters. The Whisper Minnesota Project under the leadership of Nancy Dennis and a coalition of older women continues to organize throughout the state. Whisper Minnesota Project, P.O. Box 14129, St Paul, MN 55114.

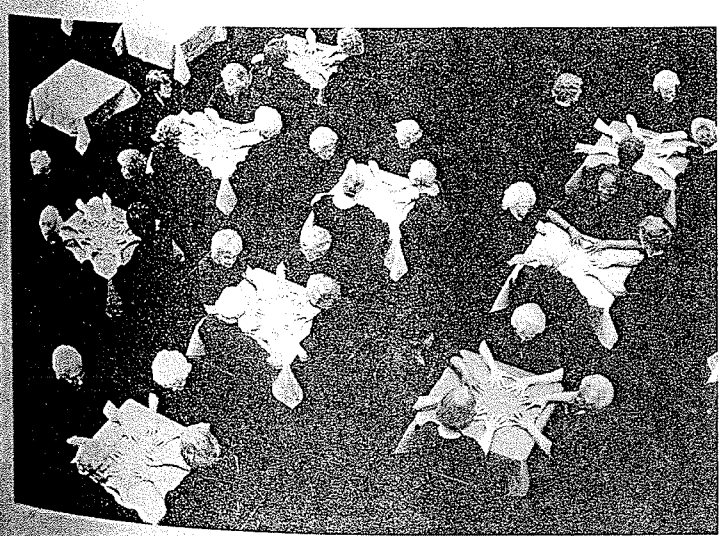


PHOTO: TOM ARNDT

WHERE'S MOTHER?

I have stood knee-deep in children. I have been fire tower and warden, lighthouse and lighthouse-keeper, rotary and traffic cop. I have worn my soul as wrist watch, and, all the while, a bell rang in an empty house, rang unanswered, rang for me. Now, in this adolescence of late middle age, I have begun to remember how it was to be a mother-thing, but I have not yet woven raw edges together, not made whole the fabric of my life.

She is so large with nursing that her naturally wiry figure looks very much as mine did. Charlie watched me getting out of the bathtub with great interest, and then remarked that he hadn't been sure until I put my clothes on that I was not his mother. But the nursing is going extremely well this time around, and I think one makes the decision each time one stuffs that engorged floppy breast against the kid's mouth that this moment of peace is worth being overweight. It's just easier. I wonder if I consciously overeat when teaching on the mistaken assumption that it works the same way with these ninety-nine babies as with the three.

When I see mothers with infants and young children, when I see my daughters who, in their speech, their actions, their looks, carry reflections of myself, I am overcome with an almost unbearable anxiety. No woman, no one, should have to so externalize herself, should have to live in such total availability. Nothing is too much to do for these women.

I've been very aware that this is the visit I was supposed to make when I took the job instead. Naomi is disappointed that Michele doesn't like me: wants her mother and to nurse. Naomi keeps telling Michele that this is HER mother, who used to nurse her as Michele is nursing now. Michele looks at me doubtfully and sucks away.

Yet anything I do has to be an act of will because, unreasonably but certainly, I am afraid that I may again become such a mother-thing. I do not think I could survive.

Naomi half believes that these kids understand her. Three temper tantrums have been created with Charlie already, in which every effort was made to give the child some rational reason for a conniption fit, some place where the parent is at fault. Hell, the kid's been trying to get you to contradict yourself or at least say NO for a full hour and a half.

What can I do to unstress this situation? I retreat to my trailer. But they want the sense that we have lived through all this together, as we lived through that earlier time, that we understand this new irrational child as we perhaps did not understand but did live through the experience of the earlier one.

I am not so afraid when I am alone with the grandchildren: perhaps because old patterns take over and I am numb again: perhaps because I know that they will go back to their parents in a little while. But when they go, the fear is there, lurking. My very bones ache with the pain of it.

I want sometime to tell you about the horrendous fight with Naomi which has just coughed forth the crucial fish bone in its throat: SHE remembers very well what I did/said before she went out into the storm the decade before the decade before last: I WOULD not stop telling her about car accidents in storms. Naturally, this explains why she went out into the worst blizzard we experienced in twenty years with a thin coat, no boots, no money, saying she was never coming back as long as she lived (to her sisters, who, no doubt, debated for several minutes before deciding to tell us, at which point it was, of course, rather too late).

And I feel guilty. These new daughter-mothers are my children. They are also my friends. I am jealous of that friendship, hard-won, out of their growing and my own latency. I don't want to play roles now, old roles that have not been questioned or redefined. But my daughters have not the energy—I have not the courage—to invent new ones.

Naturally, this explains why she ran away from home in the blizzard when she was ten, but does it explain why she continually threatens her three-year-old with leaving forever, and making sure that I hear her doing it? And why she tells him that HE is welcome to leave and find another family at any time; she hopes he does? Although she doubts he will find anyone who can stand him?

I feel guilty. I cannot play the good-grandmother role. My mother played that role for me. She kept my children when I went on vacations; I always knew she would help if things got too desperate. She played her role well. I don't know if she felt terrified as she played it. I feel guilty because I never asked.

The guilt of mothers and grandmothers being what it is, it probably does. I, apparently, who was twenty-three when she was born, have more responsibility for Charlie than she does, who was twenty-seven when he was born.

FROM FAMILY SERIES: #2 – SUSAN EVE JAHODA

NANCY HALL RICE

&

ANN THACHER

I remember once, when my children were nearly grown, Mother came to stay so I could go on a trip. She preferred to keep the children at her own house where she knew where things were, shops were familiar, and friends telephoned all day long; but my children were no longer interested in Grandmother's house. So Mother came to me. The children, caught in the explosion of their adolescence with tasks of growth and reintegrations Mother could neither understand nor appreciate, had no time for her. She could do nothing for them. When we returned, my independent, my elegant mother was waiting tearfully at the door in a crumpled cotton dress. I had not realized until then that Mother was growing older, that the world was becoming increasingly incomprehensible and hostile for her. I never discussed it with her, and I never again left the children with her. Of course, I feel guilty.

At this point, they have been on food stamps; Rob has been unemployed for over a year. They weren't even collecting unemployment insurance, and, in job interview after job interview, Rob was the runner-up after the person they probably had had in mind when they advertised to meet the guidelines.

I am the grandmother now. It is much the same; and it is very different. My mother would never have said any of these things I am saying. She could not have imagined that anyone could share them and not condemn her, for she lived in a time when women shared tasks, shared experiences, shared information, shared almost anything but feelings.

Irma, who was in on the crucial episode at the center of the fight and who was the first person Naomi told that she was never going to speak to me again, asked Rob and Naomi to send her a budget, a realistic one, about how much they would need for the year if Rob were to take this period of unemployment and go to school for his masters (which would mean they would lose their only societal backing, namely food stamps). One doesn't apply for Irma's money unless one is desperate, because it means one exposes oneself to Irma's scrutiny. They decided, I guess, that they were desperate. They sent us a copy of the budget, and I have to admit it blew my mind. They need $20,000! Of course, that includes child care and tuition for two (two children, two adults). I guess it blew Irma's mind, too. In the meantime, far from stabilizing things, it seems to have contributed an additional stress, for now Rob is under pressure to produce for Naomi's family, not just Naomi.

Dealing with a late explosion and reintegration, weaving the pieces of my life together, perhaps I can begin to say what it was like to be a mother, what it is really like to be a grandmother; my daughters can agree or disagree and wonder if it will be like that for them. Perhaps I can help a little, but they are the only ones who can measure the dimensions of their lives or estimate the space into which their children are growing. They must make the new designs.

Meanwhile, I fix my attention on the $500 allotted for Pampers, and wonder what the world is coming to. (Even though I know they have no water for washing diapers part of the year even though I know it would not be acceptable to send the kid to day care in old sheets and cut-down pajama pants like the diapers my kids wore, I STILL, in some part of my head, feel that you give up Pampers before you go on welfare.) One of the things I said to her that she hasn't mentioned, but I knew in my heart wasn't right and would rankle, was that if I looked in France for those $20, all-cotton jump suits for Michele, I would like her to promise to use one of the (totally unused) bibs I know she has when she feeds her in it. Naomi doesn't use bibs or playpens; she doesn't want to trammel her kids. (She also doesn't see to it that Charlie gets a quiet space at naptime.)

Meanwhile, they stand knee-deep in children. They are fire towers and wardens, lighthouses and keepers, rotaries and traffic cops, and they must have a little time to return to their empty houses, to answer their own bells. If I can't mind the children while they do, we'd better figure out who can.

I found dozens of garments in a ragbag which had nothing the matter with them except stains that any one of even my careless contemporaries would have scrubbed up and bleached out. But, of course, we were sitting there in Harvard housing, making no attempt to go back to school ourselves. AND we KNEW (I am beginning to think this is really crucial) not only that our status depended on getting the stains out and having presentable kids, but that it would never be easy to get the money to buy more baby clothes, that there were dozens of people scouring the bins at the Goodwill store for just such little T-shirts, and that life was hard for everybody we knew. Now they've got sisters in computers with a first-year-of-marriage income of $60,000 and a house already purchased.

susan eve jahoda teaches at sarah lawrence college and works with silver prints combined with drawing, painting and collage.

FROM FAMILY SERIES: #16 – SUSAN EVE JAHODA

NANCY HALL RICE & ANN THACHER

nancy tomlinson hall rice is a daughter (of two), a sister (of three), a mother (of three), a grandmother (of four, going on five). she was informed on january 14, 1987 that she has "a very large tumor" almost completely filling her stomach. she is currently working feverishly on the story of her life.

ann thacher has been married forty-five years, has five children, four grandchildren, numerous community service jobs, in numerous communities. at sixty-six, writing seems the most important work, today and tomorrow the most important times.

SEASONS OF

No
stiff tarpaulin
of unmelted snow
can stay tomorrow's
sluice toward spring,
nor can the crow
wing-raking in the raucous sky
uncover spring
today.

I saw an old woman in a nursing home last week, having gone there to visit another woman, who writes poems about the solstice. The poet was at the hairdresser. Since the poet is blind and deaf, I decided not to announce my presence and visit there, but wait until she got back to her room, where at least I could be present with her, and she might feel the afternoon sunlight at the same time.

So I lurked about the door to the hairdresser's hangout, leaning on it and making it clear to myself that I could escape if I needed to.

In seasons' shipwreck,
Mother, you and I,
caught at luncheon
in the window's bay,
play
family faces like a fortune
deck, and say,

While I was there, a lot of wheelchair people sort of rolled themselves about in their chairs near me, or fell asleep, or got wheeled a few yards by somebody or other. It was very haphazard. No one was going anywhere.

I noticed some things. The hair had grown very long on the legs of one lady. I thought it was nice they didn't insist on shaving it off. Lots of people had very strange skin. I thought about how the skin looks on my left foot since I poured boiling water on it last month.

say how they change.
We stir sky fragments
in a coffee cup,
and watch black boughs
of apple trees
bloom bright
behind our eyes.
Until

THEY'RE LEAVING HIM BEHIND
LYDIA BODNAR-BALAHUTRAK

after moving to houston, lydia bodnar-balahutrak worked on a group of drawings and paintings focusing on the elderly and the life/death cycle.

Anyway, this one very clear-eyed and purposeful woman rolled up and halted by me. "Where am I?" she said. I said I didn't know. Where did she want to be? She said, "I don't know. I don't think I have a home. Do I?"

Noon's shiny surface
starts to crack.
Children
too young to marry,
too old to haul
in their perambulators
call me back.

I could see I was in for it. "I don't know," I said. "What's your name?" (Thinking I could go and ask.) She didn't know.

"I can't remember," she said. "I've told them so many different ones. I'm over a hundred," she added. Not true, I'm sure. But she looked very thoughtful, and the above conversation took perhaps five, perhaps ten minutes.

You need not be alone.
You have your telephone,
and friends,
and odds and ends
of wintry springs.
You have...
your things.

So I tried to think of how to deal with this home of hers. Especially since she thought nothing was left any more, and I had been selected as the likeliest hope she had of finding out where she was and where she was going.

I seized on the rings. She had two, and they were rather large and flashy. One was a diamond not unlike my mother's that she sold to get my brother out to California. She said her two sons had given it to her. And the other, she said, was from her grandchildren.

Until

"That's a sort of home," I said with firm cheer.

the seasons stop again

She was thinking about that when a very spry oldster, who may well have been a hundred, judging by her wrinkledness of skin, pulled up short by the wheelchair of the homeless one.

"Hello there, Elsie," she said. Then, "I can see you don't remember me. I remember everything about everybody, and nobody remembers me," she said, to nobody, really, and cheerfully enough.

When

Somebody else came by, being pushed by an orderly. "I was just on my way down to see you," Spry said. The orderly tried to turn her burden over to the spry wrinkled one who was on her own two feet.

"Oh, no!" she said. "I can get about myself, but I don't push anybody!"

you will call me home

When I got my poet out of the hairdresser's (her name is Vida Townsend), she said that she wrote all fifteen of her poems in a two-three year period, (her daughter told me only after she became blind) but that she hasn't written any for about two years.

and

"I'd like to write one more," she said,

I will come.

"about waiting."

DEATH OF AN OLD CRONE

ANNE MARIE PALMISCIANO

ann marie palmisciano is completing an ma in political theory at boston college, where she studied extensively with mary daly. she has written two manuscripts of poetry and lives in providence, rhode island.

most called you
a bitter woman,
having no time
to understand
your bitterness.

mom told me that
your husband slept with
your god-child
for ten years

behind your back.

at dinner, did he call you
honey?

this year, i've learned
of the Goddess Nemesis.
She is more than justice

and is not blind.

perhaps She took
your husband's legs
and cut them off
at the base

for what he had done
to you

or maybe he just festered
in his own

gangrene.

relatives called him
a double-
amputee,

and portioned out
the pity.

Nini told me that
four times
you shut the doors
of your kitchen

and turned the gas on

when your husband stood
six foot five
and left the house.

one of your daughters
always found you.

and between the years
You birthed

two sons

eighteen and nineteen
pounds apiece

from your majestic
cave.

I remember the times
your strong and tiny
body pushed Tony

in the wheelchair
up all the ramps
in the house,

the frown that hovered
over your eyebrows

like a baby eagle
ready to test
the prohibited

salty waters.

You out-
lived
Tony and two sons.

and there was always the scar
between you
and your daughter Anna.

She put her husband first,
you said

and you carried
Your grief

like an old
bag of groceries

into the hospital.

when i went
to see you

you had

the white sheets pulled up
across your face

like a child
afraid of monster
movies

or the boogie-man.

and there was still the scar
between you and your daughter
Anna.

i look back upon
your bitter end.

and at this cold stone

through the hungry grass

i hear your Proud, unwavering
alto voice

the Goddess-
echo

"be good to your
mother"

i whisper
over your bones
auntie

"i always will."

AFTER DEATH

Sharon Olds

sharon olds is a poet living in new york city.

The last thing, in the hospital,
was leaving my father's wife alone
in the room with him. The death was done,
small frail last breath
appeared from his mouth like the magician's blossom,
and she'd spoken, fierce as an orator, from the
Foot of his bed. I had left him a moment and
stood in the corner, pressed my forehead
into the shut door of the right angle,
the minister had come, purple satin
stamens of his stole decurved around him.
The flat moon of the stethoscope had been
slid back into the intern's pocket, the
two girls had sat on either
side of their father, each rubbed and
Kissed a long shapely arm, the
left arm and the right, there was one for each.
And the one on the bed lay, pale-yellow and
gaunt, loved as he'd been loved in life
and now not feared. Then we all left,
priest, doctor, nurses, daughters,
all but his wife, the door closed
and now was the last moment. We stood in the
hall and waited, guarding the entrance,
silent, as if God were in there
making a world or unmaking it. It was the
center, the end and the beginning, five minutes so
sealed I never thought till this morning
What did she do. Did she lie on him I
think not, so breakable, all
ribs and skull. Did she kneel and pray,
holding his big pinkish head going
silvery now, or did she take the sheet and
Gently pull it down so she could
look at him, a last time,
kiss his nipples, navel, dead
warm penis. The man himself
was in heaven, safe, this was the flesh
his soul had sloughed. It lay between them
like a child of their love. She drew the fine
sheet up to his chin, light
cover you'd lay over a sleeping newborn,
eyes shut, mouth open
on a summer night, she opened the door
and walked out, it was over, her wet
face shone, I had never seen her so calm.

BABY CONTEST – ANNETTE SAVITSKI

ELENA WAS BORN

claudia anne chase lives in the white mountains of northern new hampshire with her husband and three-year-old daughter elena.

CLAUDIA ANNE CHASE

you came right next to my pain
the small death a woman survives
whenever a new life
screams into motion

I didn't need to examine you carefully
:would have time to do that later
:was so sure of your wholeness I did not even
count your toes

We leave that to fathers: the obvious additions
and subtractions, the material calculations
and the calculated decisions of how to hold
this new thing
but why is she so blue?

your father captured you all blue and warm
on my belly
and my frightened mask he captured that too
with the camera

You were not at all like a fish
under the intoxicating buzz of the lights
straining powerfully against the thin air
breathing in the chemicals of life

you were not a fish at all
but a hurricane
you were the wind

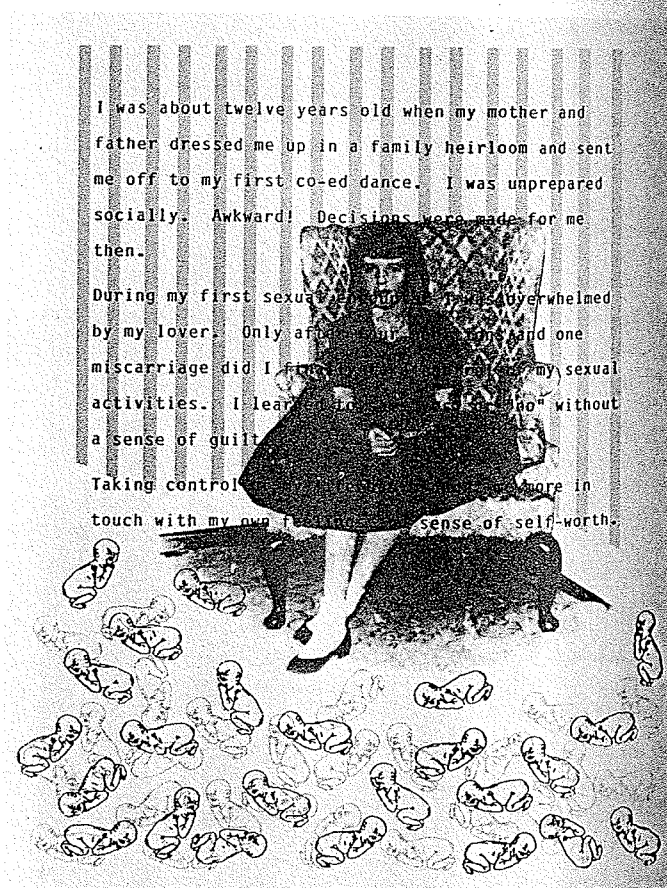
annette savitski is an artist living in northampton, mass. she works primarily in drawing, collage and mixed media.

BEFORE ROE V. WADE

WORKING AT NEW YORK'S FIRST LEGAL ABORTION CLINIC

SABRA MOORE TALKING TO AVIS LANG

So many of us now well past our twenties remember the dismal, terrifying, and often unsafe illegal abortions we and our friends were lucky enough to be able to arrange and pay for back when no other options existed except a ruinous pregnancy and an unwanted child, or a nine-month term as an incubator for adoptive parents. We chose the dangers of infection, malpractice, hemorrhage, extortion, secrecy, and possible death rather than face twenty years of lonely responsibility in a society that treats its children as private property and its mothers as independent subcontractors creating an excess demand for resources. Women under capitalism will continue to endure the trauma of abortion, whether legalized or outlawed, because no birth control but abstinence is completely safe and effective, because sexual desire is a human trait, because conception is an accident but motherhood is a commitment, because single parent in effect means single mother and



NO LONGER AFRAID – SUSAN SPENCER CROWE

susan spencer crowe is an artist who works in steel, and occasionally creates prints.

single mothers are generally poor, because we will not endure a twenty-year sentence imposed upon us by institutionalized hatred of our power to conceive.

An artist and an organizer, not a nurse, Sabra Moore has been through both sides of the abortion experience—first as a desperate, pregnant young woman working in Africa in the sixties, then as a counselor in New York in the early seventies. We recorded a long conversation about the latter, which I have reorganized considerably and edited. But always it is Sabra who speaks. A.L.

LOOKING BACK

From 1970–1972 I worked as a counselor-doctor's assistant at Women's Services, the first legal abortion clinic in New York City. Most of us counselors, including myself, had experienced illegal abortions. At the clinic I was an activist in bringing in Local 1199, Hospital and Drug Workers' Union, to insure patient rights and worker control. Later, I was delegate for the union. I had heard about the job through fellow artists in W.A.R. (Women Artists in Revolution). I took it as part-time work, but it became a full-time emotional and political commitment.

Recently I found my stack of organizing papers from the period when we workers at Women's Services were forming a union. The tone of clarity and combat contrasts with the ambiguity and painfulness of parts of this conversation with Avis Lang. I think both "voices" are accurate descriptions of the experience.

I have had difficulty re-reading this conversation. The clinic returns as a dream returns, with the unresolved feelings dominant. It was a physical experience. I assisted at over 1,000 abortions. Abortion itself is ambiguous. It is both destructive and constructive action. Women helped bring about the Roe vs. Wade decision by breaking the taboo of silence. Eighteen years have passed. New babies, our actual children from that period, are now facing decisions about birth, abortion, sexuality.

Abortion is one of those experiences cloaked in folk belief. It is common; everyone does it or knows someone who has. It was always common. It is also considered selfish. Look at Mary Beth Whitehead, the opposite experience. Her tale can be read this way: a "bad" girl, because she got pregnant by a married man. In working class terms, a "good" girl, because even if she got pregnant, she did it for her family. She is supposed to suppress her feelings and live up to her contract in order to support her family. When she violates her contract, she becomes "bad" again. In middle class terms, she is originally a "good" girl, because she is performing a service (giving a baby). She becomes a "bad" girl when she decides her own feelings are more important, violating both the working class training of "sacrifice" and "self-control" and the middle class belief that she should "want" to serve. Abortion is more clear-cut as a folk belief; it's simply "bad." It's another one of those experiences that's all right if you don't talk about it,

EXCERPTS FROM STAFF PROPOSAL 1972

1- Abortion Is Not Purely A Physical Problem:

Some women become pregnant through failure of their intrauterine devices or through some carelessness in taking the pill. These women can genuinely blame their doctor, some inanimate physical or chemical device, or fate, for their pregnancy, and generally they do. They're right. They may require simply an explanation of the procedure and physical reassurance to get them through the abortion, if there are no additional problems with the man involved.

They represent a minority.

2- Some women come from New York City. They may have supported the abortion movement and feel abortion is their right. *They* may have been raised by mothers who encouraged their daughters to feel comfortable with their sexuality. They may have had children, each by natural child birth. Their boyfriend or husband may agree with the abortion. These women need little counseling.

They represent a tiny minority.

3- Most women who come to our clinic do not fall in these categories. Two weeks ago, a young woman bank teller from the Bronx came here after unsuccessfully trying to abort herself with an enema tube and a coathanger. When asked why, she said she had only vaguely "heard" abortion was legal. She works in the Chemical Bank around the corner.

Many women college students assert they have no problems about abortion. When asked why they didn't use birth control, they may state that they would have felt like "sluts" planning for intercourse.

Many women feel they are killing a baby. They often expect to be punished by sterility, depression, or frigidity. They may ask to see the fetus, inquire about its sex, request it be baptised.

Older women often feel embarrassed.

A woman may have been deserted by her boyfriend or husband. She may not have told him for fear he would insist on her carrying the child. He may have accused her of "killing" his "son." He may simply have been impatient with how she was feeling.

4- Most patients who come to our clinic are from out of town. For these women, coming to New York City for an abortion often involves secrecy and deception. It is an illegal abortion to them.

5- Some women really wanted the baby and were either too poor to have a child or couldn't handle the social consequences of being a single parent.

6- A large number of women have experienced either painful abortions or difficult deliveries and fear the procedure.

7- An equally large number are painfully embarrassed at exposing their bodies and need to discuss their shyness.

but you're supposed to pay a price.

My experience at the clinic was complex because it was both "new" and "old." The "new" part was that all of us were trying NOT to pay a price. Part of this worked fine. First, we affirmed our own negative previous experiences (we had all paid emotional, physical, financial prices for our illegal abortions—I nearly bled to death). We tried to insure that other women would have more humane abortions. That part succeeded, though in our need to change the quality of the experience for others, I think we took on too much. We were all hurt by having to handle fetal tissue and denied to our patients that the fetuses were "anything." I think this was a mistake emotionally and tactically. The Right-To-Life activists have magnified those images, literally. A billboard of a 12-week old fetus is an actual image, but a distortion. Women should know a fetus looks like that, but in a minute scale. It's life, but unformed life.

The "old" part was that we were working with the medical establishment. We tried to handle this inevitable clash of values by organizing a union. I still agree with that tactic. We succeeded for about two years.

The clinic was a kind of microcosm. The first director set up a model of paraprofessionals assisting at the abortion as a way to cut the costs of the procedure and make a more humane clinical environment. He was not prepared, however, to relinquish control. He hired doctors who had all been trained by the medical schools. They were uncomfortable with the patients and with us paraprofessionals. They had their own complex reactions to performing abortions which they took out on the patients. We counselors were in the middle. We needed the doctors for the abortion procedure, but also needed to protect the patients from the doctors' manners, attitudes and, sometimes, lack of skill.

It was too much a mirror of the culture as a whole, with men in control of abortion and women trying to get control through understanding, giving, self destruction and action. —S.M.

avis lang is a member of the heresies mother collective, a freelance writer and editor, and co-coordinator of the patient rights legal action fund.

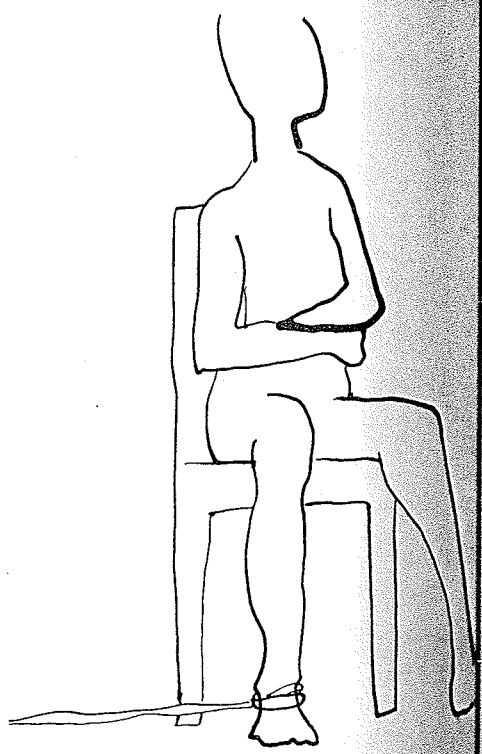
sabra moore is a texas-born artist and activist living in new-york city.

THE CLINIC/ THE ADMINISTRATORS/ THE DOCTORS

Women's Services was set up in 1970, as soon as the abortion law in New York had changed. In the very beginning it was in the Seventies on Lexington Avenue, then it moved to East 62nd Street. The clinic was sponsored by the Clergy Consultation Service of Judson Memorial Church; it was set up by a group of people who had been abortion-rights activists. They were good people but, as we saw in our union struggle with them, classic liberals in their political outlook.

Dr. Hale Harvey was the first director. He'd been an illegal abortionist in Louisiana. We later heard that he was perhaps only a Doctor of Philosophy. Dr. Harvey wanted to hire paraprofessionals to work with the doctors they had already hired (you could say he himself was a sort of paraprofessional!). Then Dr. Bernard Nathanson came on (he's the one who subsequently wrote *Aborting America*). It was a part-time job, but he made a lot of money. As the director, he didn't perform any abortions. He later said he realized he'd presided over 60,000 deaths and it had never occurred to him that the fetus was, in fact, life. How could you be so morally opaque? What did he think it was? No woman, neither the patients nor ourselves, was confused about that. We all knew it was life. But everyone felt that you had to have a choice to decide if you could raise the child.

Nathanson's rebirth as a conservative happened within five years after the clinic's first demise. His earliest anti-abortion articles came out in *The New York Times* and the *New England Journal of Medicine* in the late '70s. In them he said he thought the abortion movement was polarized between the right-wing militants and the hysterical feminists. I realized he meant us. Nathanson had actually been an advocate for abortion before it was legal. When he got hired at the clinic he came in like a liberal, but he was a liberal like Bork is a liberal—a very authoritarian guy. He always had that manner of being an important, high-paid gynecologist. The other doctors didn't like him. He was like a bad father, basically. Our counselors' meetings with the administration would always be awful. We would end up making demands and feeling upset and saying things, and he was just completely impassive. It never occurred to him that there were problems at all, that people had feelings, that the doctors were being sadistic, that the counselors shouldn't be having to strain the fetuses. He was extremely unresponsive, and he hated that we organized a union. Evidently a lot of the administrators didn't like him either.



The doctors had all been trained the standard medical school way. The level of emotional stupidity that I felt from a lot of these guys was amazing. They didn't know how to behave toward people. These guys were making a lot of money. In the early days, there was one who flew in from Louisville for the two days he worked at the clinic. This was supposed to be a not-for-profit clinic, but at the beginning, the doctors were making $75 a patient. These guys were moonlighting, and some of them were making a thousand dollars in their eight-hour shift for their second job of the day! Literally, some of the doctors were *racing* from room to room. Finally, because of us counselors insisting on it, they put the doctors on a salary. So then they made about $500 for the eight-hour shift, and the clinic wanted us to take a pay cut from our $50-a-day jobs in solidarity with the doctors. We did everything except the actual procedure, and they accused us of being mercenaries because we wouldn't take a pay cut.

There were a few good doctors, including one woman who was radical and very nice, but a lot of them were really very hard to deal with. One doctor came in one night when I had a 16-year-old patient who was nervous about the speculum, and he said to her that this wasn't any bigger than what had gotten her pregnant. We got him fired. Another night, I had an American Indian patient, and you always are supposed to say, "Doctor Blah-blah, this is Mary Sue, she's from blah-blah." So I said, "This is Mary Sue Whatever, and she's from X tribe," and he said, "How." I'm not kidding. You know, you're fine, the patient's fine, and you're dealing with idiots who are not used to having to talk to patients as people. One doctor used to put his foot up on the table when he did the examination. Another doctor would loudly count the fetal parts, so you would go over and try to talk over him or shut him up. All the counselors began to feel that we stood between the patient and the doctor, that in addition to helping the woman through a difficult part of her life, helping her get an abortion and then go back to her town and get birth control, we were having to protect her from the person who in fact was there to *give* her the abortion. So it was really hard.

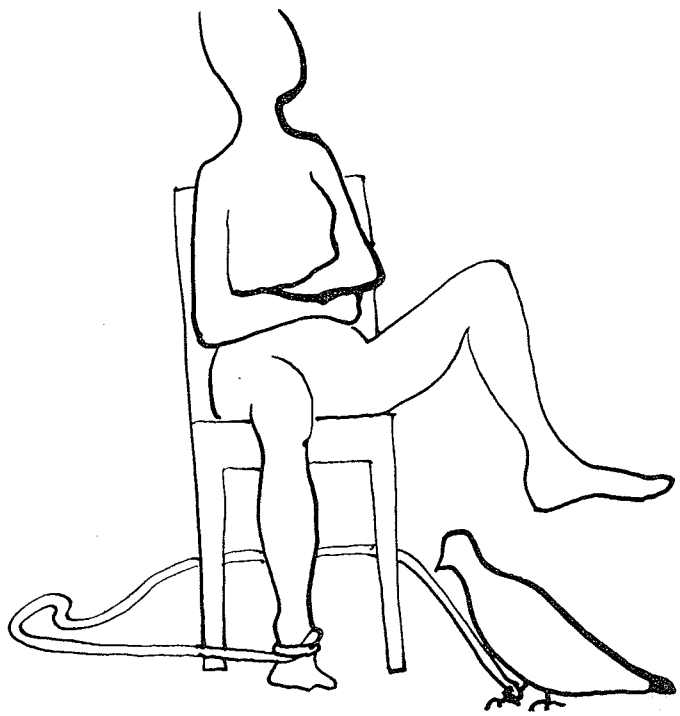
Before Dr. Harvey left, he made us a big Christmas party, and he gave us all hams. There was this big table of food, and he had put the instruments of the abortion out as serving pieces. He had the speculum in the potato salad, and the pinchers that everyone was upset about because they were really painful and we were always having to say to the patient, "You're going to feel a pinch"—he had them in the olive jar. It was obscene. We took the instruments out and washed them off. So there was a pornographic aspect to some of these men. At a certain point, some of the doctors got to bragging about aborting a bigger fetus. It was like a competition between the doctors in a really perverse way.

Actually, a lot of the doctors were feeling upset the way we were feeling upset. It was very hard to be doing this, but they had no mechanism for handling their feelings. One doctor had a dream in which there were fetuses stretched in a line from San Francisco to New York. A lot of the doctors were experiencing a certain kind of guilt. Another doctor ended up opening up a sex therapy clinic; he believed that an abortion should be painful for the woman to expiate guilt, and he actually gave a very painful abortion. We tried to get Dr. Nathanson to deal with these problems, and he wouldn't even listen. We did manage to get a few doctors fired, but we also wanted there to be therapy sessions for them so that they could talk about their feelings and not have to do these bizarre things. But no, it never happened. So we became very confrontational with the doctors.

BEING AN ABORTION COUNSELOR

I got the job because I had met some artists who were part of the Artworkers Coalition, and someone said, "Oh, they're looking for counselors at this abortion clinic," so we just went. It wasn't like I thought about it; I just went to the interview. At the time they were looking for women who had had abortions, and in the very beginning they were also looking for women involved in the feminist movement. This all changed, of course, but that's how it started out. So I got the job, and realized afterwards that I actually very much wanted to do it. I had been very secretive about my own abortion and never dreamed I would use it as a job reference.

At the beginning, none of the people who worked at the clinic were nurses, and we were all young. I was in my late twenties. There were two other



artists, one woman had been a showgirl and had dropped out of the Weathermen, and there were a lot of women who had political experience in the women's movement.

The counselors did everything. We had a five-patient daily load. We spent about an hour and a half with each person; you met the woman, you talked to her about how she had gotten pregnant, her problems, and you counseled her about birth control. The experiences with the patients remained wonderful throughout. We met people from all over the country, all kinds of women. Most of the time they hadn't told anybody or they'd told maybe one person. We had all been through it, and I think we all felt a great need to give support in a situation in which *we* hadn't had support. Also, we were in positions of authority, and so many of these people were very heartened to learn that, yes, we had had abortions ourselves.

First we explained the abortion procedure to the woman, because she would be awake. It was the vacuum method, so she received a local anesthetic. We helped her get in the room, we took her blood pressure and her temperature, and we presented all the facts to the doctor. Then we went through the abortion with her, so in fact we assisted the doctor at the actual procedure.

After we had witnessed so many abortions, we knew exactly which doctors were good and which weren't. So then we had this situation where we had to describe the procedure differently to the different patients, depending on who was working that night. There would be three doctors on. When your patient was ready, you would go out in the corridor and put your number up, and whenever a doctor was ready for another patient, he would put *his* number up on a board. If certain doctors would be on duty, you would just hang back and keep checking—everybody did it—waiting for the good doctor to put his number up, and then we would all rush out trying to get him. It was really hard when you knew that some doctors were not going to do a great job, and it put us all in a terrible position.

If a patient was too far along in her pregnancy, she would have to go to a hospital for a different procedure. A number of people were taking patients home, getting them a room in Bellevue, giving a fake address. Everyone was overdoing it, because we had the feeling that this was the woman's only chance. We all had been through illegal abortions, so everybody felt that they would do anything to help the patient. But almost none of us worked full-time. I don't think you could have, actually; the cumulative effect of having to deal with the clean-up of the abortion was very hard for all of us, and the other thing that became hard was dealing with the doctors.

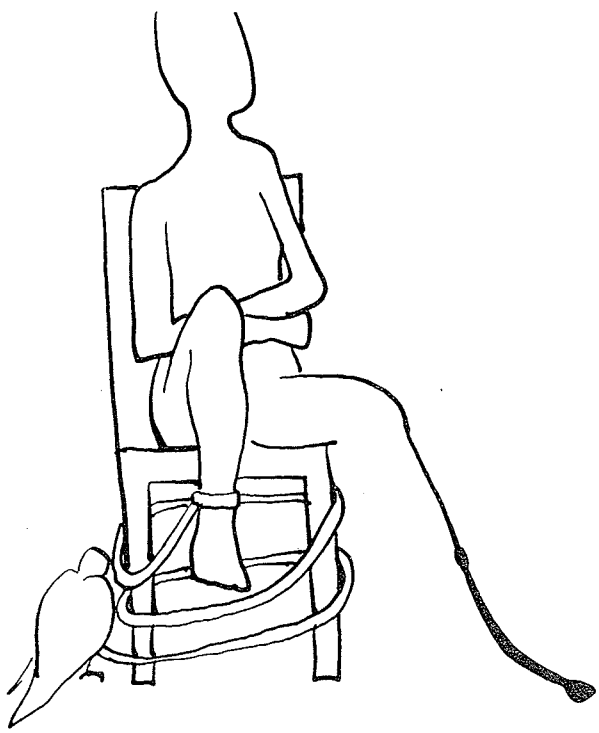
People also started getting a little flipped out and began having trouble about their *own* birth control. One of the counselors later had two abortions; she wasn't using birth control. Another nurse who was a counselor with us had a theory that if you made love a lot, you lowered the sperm count. So that's what she and her boyfriend did, and of course she got pregnant. I had an IUD put in during this period because I just didn't want to think about birth control, despite the fact that I would see patients with the Dalkon shield. I didn't get the Dalkon shield, though I did later have trouble with my own IUD. Everyone started having trouble after a while, cumulatively, and you would do emotional things to kind of block out your experiences.

We later felt that it would have been better for the workers if we'd had a woman's clinic with more of a balance—where you were delivering babies, you were doing abortions, you were caring for old women. I think it remained good for the patients, though. We still had those wonderful moments and conversations and relief and crying.

I left the clinic in 1972, and it closed down almost a year later. I couldn't deal with it anymore. It was just too much for me, really. I quit about eight months after we got the union. I was a delegate, and they were upset when I quit, but I just couldn't do it anymore. I just needed to paint. I took unemployment for six months, and then when my friend Georgia quit, we started doing housepainting.

After I had left, some right-to-life guy came to the clinic. By then we had a private guard, because violence against abortion clinics had already begun. This guy evidently burst through the waiting room doors and ran into the patient recovery room, wanting to baptize the fetuses. But one counselor, who now has her own karate school, formed a phalanx of counselors with herself in the lead (they had called the police, who weren't coming) to keep this guy from getting in. They succeeded.

You have to remember that the people who worked there were very political at the time. A few counselors quit in the very beginning because they couldn't deal with the procedure, but then those who stayed, stayed, because the longer you stayed, the more you felt like you couldn't leave everybody. Though we'd started out fairly idealistically trusting the administration, we quickly found that the situation was very problematic, and when we decided what action we



were going to take—that we would organize a union—everyone felt sort of obligated to each other to stay throughout the whole thing.

The clinic was small, always; probably the whole place was a hundred people, including the nurses. There may have been fifty of us in the beginning. We were all women except for the doctors, who were all men except one, and of course the men controlled the abortion procedure. Most counselors were part-time workers. I don't think anyone worked five days; most of us worked three. You had to work at least two. It wasn't huge, but we worked two shifts. There was the eight-to-four shift, and then I worked four to midnight. It went sixteen hours; there were two sets of doctors. The shift I worked, the doctors would have worked all day, and then they came in and moonlighted. They were making a salary of $350-$500, which was a lot of money for one night's work. I worked eight hours three days a week, and then we had all those meetings on top of it. It was my whole life for about two years.

Deciding to form a union and affiliate with Local 1199 didn't seem like a radical choice at the time. We had considered all kinds of other options. 1199 had never organized an abortion clinic—obviously, *no* one had done it. We were an odd crew, various ilks, but we were all doing this job. It took us about six months to organize.

Anyway, as soon as we started, the management got very crazy. They had already accused us of being mercenary. Many people at Judson Memorial Church thought the only problem with abortion was that it had been illegal, and now that it was legalized, they could speed up the pace and we didn't have to spend so long counseling and could do it more efficiently. What we felt was that they basically wanted to turn it into a mill.

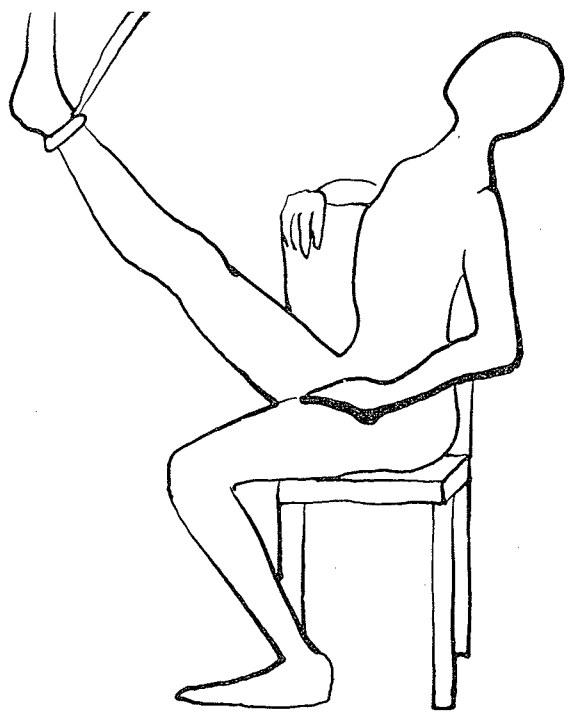
Just at the moment when we finally had most of the group ready for the election, the clinic started hiring professional nurses. We later learned that the administration had wanted to hire people who were hostile to women's liberation. They had also wanted to create a wedge between us by saying we were not professionals and they *were* professionals. But of course, we trained all these people and we all did exactly the same job. The National Labor Relations Board then said it was against their rules to have professionals and nonprofessionals in the same voting category. So when we had the election, the nonprofessionals won the union and the professionals were not in it. Of course, when we negotiated our contract, they got everything we got, and after they had worked for a while, a lot of them ended up agreeing with us.

I helped negotiate the contract. We didn't ask for pay raises, because at that time $50 a day was a very good salary. But we fixed a five-patient limit per counselor per shift, and we wrote into the job description what we actually did—that there had to be counseling, birth control information, the whole thing. The administration was very upset about it, and about a year after I quit the clinic, it evidently shut down and opened again as a runaway shop with society women volunteers. Now the clinic is gone entirely, but we did succeed in organizing it during an important part of its existence.

THE ABORTION

It's a very simple procedure. It lasts about five minutes. There's a painful part in the beginning when the doctor grabs the cervix with these little pinchers that are like ice pinchers, and it hurts, because there's no anesthetic at this stage. He—and I say "he" advisedly—he has to hold the cervix because your uterus sort of floats inside your body cavity, and you have to be able to control the uterus when you're doing the dilation. Then he applies the anesthetic to the cervix with an injection; Lidocaine is what we were using at the time. This one doctor—who I still go to and who was the only really humane one there—developed a method of giving a painless abortion. He would apply the anesthetic in short jabs counter-clockwise, and he would wait about a minute until the cervix was really numb. You have very few nerves in your cervix; it's like a little pink nose. He said it took him about a year to figure out how to do it really well. No one else I worked with got this down perfectly, so people always felt varying degrees of pain.

Then they used a series of dilators. The dilators are like pencils; they're stainless steel, they're like slightly curved long S's and they're made in graduated sizes. The doctor inserts them into the opening of your cervix; it's what opens your cervix up. It's like pushing it open, then more and more and more. Sometimes they do it too quickly, and they can perforate the wall of the uterus. When I first saw the abortion, I almost fainted at the dilators. It was the only time I had trouble, but there was something too graphic about some of the instruments that I really found upsetting in the beginning. Usually if there's going to be a problem in an abortion, it happens when they dilate you. They're supposed



to do this very gradually, as your cervix sort of opens up. I assisted once for a patient who was perforated; she was okay later, but it was a horrible experience and I had to go to the emergency room with her.

After the dilation, they introduce a suction tube, which is like a dilator with an opening, with which the doctor goes around the wall of the uterus. Then at the end, they introduce an instrument that's a little curved wire. It's a scraper. This is the most important part, because he must scrape the whole uterus, and you can actually hear if it's clean. The patient can't hear it, but if you've heard it a lot (I probably assisted at a thousand abortions), you can recognize it. That's what went wrong for me. You have to remove all the tissue, because that's where the placenta attaches to the uterus, and if it's not completely removed, you continue to bleed into your uterus, and that's when people hemorrhage.

Afterwards we would actually have to examine the fetal parts to make sure they were all there. It was important to do it, and after we began to understand all the stages of the abortion, we were all very careful to really look, but it was hard for us. They are beautiful, the fetuses, and they do look like babies. At six weeks they have the little tails, and at twelve weeks it's a perfectly formed person. It's transparent, it's pink, it obviously looks fetal, but it has fingernails. They're tiny, and even though all of us did feel upset at seeing them, there is an enormous difference between this tiny little fetus and a whole baby. Six weeks is about an inch and a quarter; twelve weeks is about two inches. Then they get progressively bigger. I assisted at an abortion of one woman who was sixteen weeks pregnant—the doctor had obviously made a serious mistake.

The six-week fetuses usually come out all together in one piece. Later, you would have to see tiny miniature parts of a human body. It's hard to talk about it. All of us felt it, we all talked about it, we all cried a lot. There was a lot of conversation and feelings and everything among all the women who worked there, but we also wanted to shield the patients. We had all had abortions, yet we didn't want our patients to know what it looked like. You see everything. They are beautiful, but they are also obviously fetal.

Another part of it that was hard was that if a patient was too far along, you'd have to refer her. That was all right, except it meant more money, and in those early days, a lot of the women had barely scraped up the airfare. Most of the time they had borrowed money from people, and a referral meant a *lot* more money. The abortion clinic was about $200; it was cheap, comparatively speaking, but not nothing. An illegal abortion was a lot more expensive—you said yours had cost $400 in the early '60s.

The later abortions are really hard. If you're fourteen weeks, you should wait. That's when I had mine, and I hemorrhaged. You have to wait until sixteen weeks for a salting-out; that's what the saline abortions are. They inject a salt solution into your uterus that basically kills the fetus, and you deliver it dead. It's really hard to go through, and you have to stay a few days in the hospital. In the beginning, everyone who worked at the clinic felt awful having to turn someone down. I think that's part of how it happened with the 16-week abortion: no one wanted to turn a patient down. It was kind of a collusion between our feelings of support and the doctors' craziness about who was aborting the biggest fetuses.

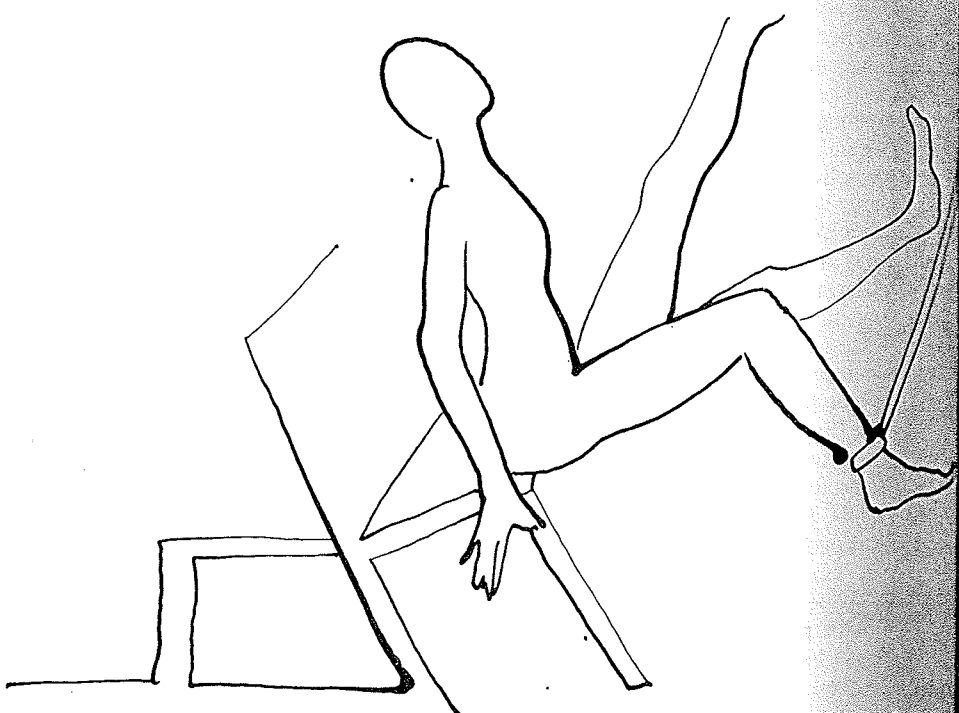
THE PATIENTS

At the time that abortion was legalized in New York, it was only legal in two other states: Hawaii and Colorado. So during the two years I worked at the clinic, except for the very end, a lot of the patients were coming from out of state.

Everyone had a good reason. Nobody had a foolish reason. I'm sure there is no such thing as a foolish reason. You see, all the women had considered this in a very serious way, but Nathanson had obviously never thought about the implications of what he was doing until after he had worked at the clinic.

The ignorance about birth control was really phenomenal. I had a patient who had been taking the pill, but vaginally. I had another woman who was practicing rhythm, but incompletely; she thought it was the frequency, not the date. She would do stuff once a month, but with no regard to when, so the poor thing didn't understand why it had happened. Then there were a lot of people whose birth control devices had failed. During this time we had many, many, many patients with the Dalkon shield.

I had about five 12-year-old patients. The 12-year-olds were really children. One patient came from Florida, a very sweet girl. Well, she didn't want the abortion—she really wanted the baby, she loved the baby. She hadn't had much relationship with the boy, who was an older boy, maybe 16. Her mother had said she wasn't big enough to have a kid, which of course I agreed with, but the girl felt it as a power thing with her



mother, that in fact she *was* big enough, and all her girlfriends thought she was big enough. She had all these plans about how she was going to raise it. So we had a long talk, and I said I wasn't going to force her to have the abortion, but then I asked to speak with her mother. I really liked her mother. She was this fat woman from Florida, and she had been a tire retreader. Somehow she had retreaded more tires in an hour than any of the men had, but they wouldn't give her the award because it would make the guys feel bad or something. She had had a kid when she was 15, and she didn't want her daughter to go through the same thing she had gone through. She really wanted her to get the abortion. Actually, she was a very supportive person.

It took two days. We waited and let the girl think, and eventually I was able to tell her mother what I had figured out about her saying her daughter wasn't big enough to raise a baby. Well, they worked out their personal problem, and she did have the abortion. But a lot of the very young women really wanted the baby. It was like having a doll.

I can't remember everybody, but I saw all ages, all ranges of people. As I mentioned, I probably had a thousand patients. The oldest was in her early fifties, I would say. One of the people from the Weather Underground came and got an abortion in secret. One woman had had ten kids. She was in her early thirties, a lovely woman. I asked her how she managed it and she said sometimes she just shut the door. She had literally been pregnant for ten years or however long it would be to have all these kids, and then the last time it had been about two-and-a-half years and it had felt so good. And when she got pregnant again, this time there was an option, and that was sort of wonderful. I was a clear choice.

I also had a patient who was pregnant from a "right-to-life" senator in Utah. She was his secretary, and he was married. She hadn't told him. She'd lied, she'd come here because she felt he would prevent her from getting the abortion. Of course: he was right-to-life and he hadn't used birth control and he was running around on his wife.

There were all kinds of people. I did have a lot of teenage patients who had done what I'd done, basically, which was to sort of hope it wouldn't happen to them, but most people—it was the whole range of every imaginable person: people who were married, people who weren't married, people who had had kids and couldn't have any more. A few people really did want to have a kid, but they just couldn't do it financially. That was the hardest part of it. There were occasionally people who didn't want to be very open with you, but that wasn't usual.

The only generalization I can make is that it was just everybody. It wasn't like a special case. It was all kinds of people in all kinds of possible situations, who had gotten pregnant and didn't want to be. It was just like us: *we* were all different kinds of people. The only difference was that they could come there and it was legal.

LOOKING BACK/ LOOKING INWARD

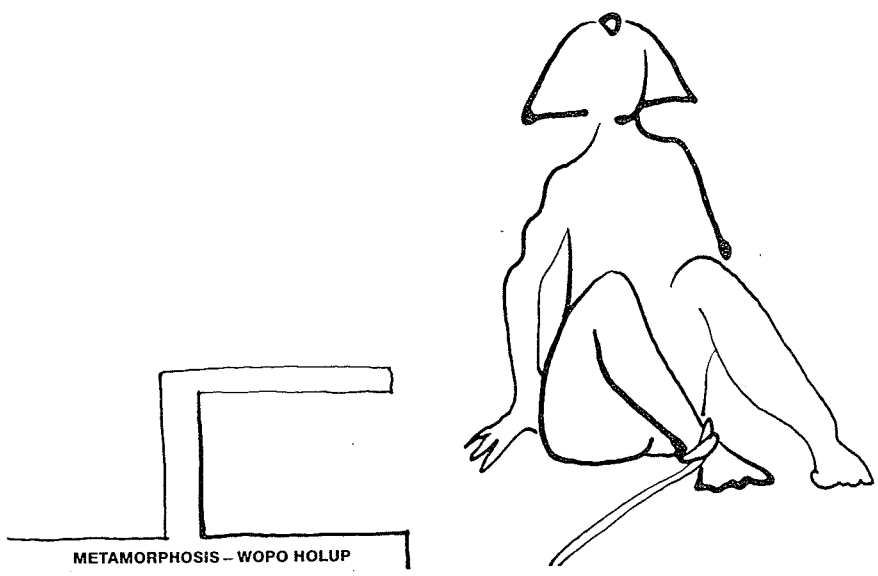
At the very beginning when the clinic opened, our situation was relatively obscure. We had our internal problems with the doctors, but we didn't have external problems. But after the 1973 Supreme Court decision in *Roe v. Wade,* there started to be demonstrations against the clinics.

As a parenthesis, when those judges said something about it being our right, I felt it, I felt vindicated in a way. I hadn't even thought their views mattered to me, and yet on some level there was a part of me that still felt bad for having had an abortion, even after working at this clinic for two years. I was sorry I had to get pregnant, but it happened. I behaved responsibly, yet I felt bad. It surprised me that I was still so involved with patriarchy. It's indicative of the generation we're from.

We were working in a situation that wasn't great, despite the fact that this was supposed to be a model clinic. It was a depressing reality, meeting all those women who needed an abortion. We had moments of feeling that people weren't isolated, but, in fact, everyone was going back into the same situation that had gotten them pregnant. You also begin to feel, when you have to explain birth control to somebody, that the options are not great. We all were opposed to the pill, because if you just read the newspapers, you knew that you might get cancer. One of the possible side effects to the pill was death. Then there was the diaphragm—fine, great.

It was really depressing. We had this little model, and we explained the standard options to the patients. A lot of people had used various good methods, they

wopo holup is a sculptor. she has received numerous fellowships, awards and grants and is currently working on a sculpture project with the state of new jersey public building arts inclusion act.



METAMORPHOSIS – WOPO HOLUP

facing page:
katheryn sins is a sculptor whose works in mixed media focus on the urban experience.

had done everything right, and it hadn't worked out. On top of that, you're dealing with doctors who are representative—and I'm sure not bad representatives—of the medical establishment, and you're having to fight all the time. It was very hard for everybody after a time, because you felt that you were almost part of the problem, that there was this wave of things that were not solved, and that the whole situation was really pretty bad. I think that's what accounted for people getting burned out. At a certain point, too, even after we got the union and we got contracts, the administration still harassed us. I got called in, and a number of people got monitored, and they were encouraging people to quit.

There was another side to what we were doing, you see. It was 1970 and the antiwar movement was going on at the same time; it was sort of a fringe aspect of the clinic. So the clinic had another aura, and I think that's partly why Nathanson hated us so much. We represented a different cultural strain. We had all come from different sides of being involved politically on some level in the antiwar movement, the women's movement, the art movement. We all had long hair, you know, and a lot of people had been attracted to this job because it was a political job, a feminist job. Later, of course, people came in who were nurses and who had none of that background.

The other day, you were talking about abortion and its legalization in sort of a generational sense, as a coming of age for all of us, and this was—it still is—the big issue. It's a basic issue for any woman's life, whether you're going to have a kid or you're not going to have a kid. I had an aunt who had a baby on her own, and the baby died. She was living down in the country on the farm, and she had to leave the country and come to live with us because she was so ostracized. Her life was ruined by this experience. I never quite knew the whole story till I grew up, but I always had intimations of it. I loved her. She was the dangerous example. So there was all this background when I was growing up that a possible result of sex might be social ostracization and death. My mother told me about some girlfriend of hers who tried to kill herself because she was pregnant.

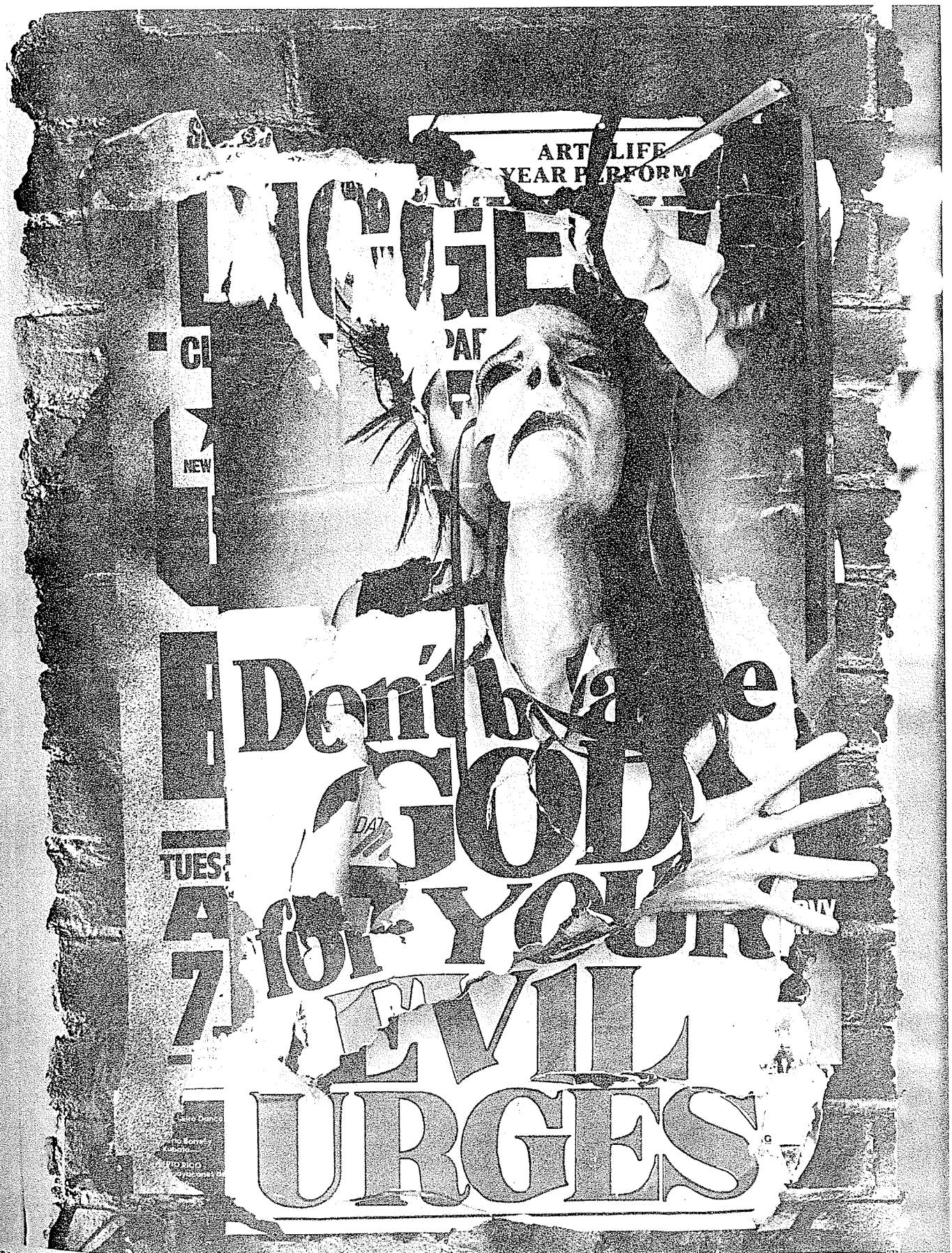
Because I went to college, I knew that there was birth control. A lot of my patients knew, but it wasn't easy to go to an authority, to a doctor—I guess I was afraid of being turned down or was afraid of what would happen. I actually didn't know how to go. And when I left Texas and joined the Peace Corps in 1964, people kept saying in the Peace Corps training that they would teach us about birth control, which was a big issue, but then they never did. I was this mixture of a very sophisticated and a very unsophisticated person. I had read D.H. Lawrence, so I believed intellectually that it was fine, that I was willing to do it, but of course I didn't know how to get birth control information. I actually tried to look in the Bible—I believed there would be some information—the old "he knew her and she knew him," or something. I thought they might say when was the right time. I thought the timing might be in there. I didn't want to ask anybody, particularly the girls I had met in the Peace Corps who were from New York and who really knew a lot, because I didn't want to appear too stupid.

It *is* a coming of age. It's about how you deal with authority and how you handle your own body. When I got pregnant, I couldn't find out for sure for a long time. My biology teacher at the University of Texas had shown us a film of an egg dividing, and all I could think of was this egg relentlessly dividing without my being able to think about it. I wanted it to just wait a minute, so I could think about it, and I knew it was just dividing and dividing like that. It was a horrible image of feeling really out of control of your body. In a way, it's like the first realization that a lot of things *are* out of your control.

You see, I grew up in a family where my father was a union man. He organized for the railroad. But at a certain point my father ran for head of the union in Texas and he lost to a guy he considered a crook and who, in fact, was a crook. After that, he was in the union but he was never active. This happened when I was about ten or eleven, but I remember that feeling of disappointment. It was very exciting and heroic when he was organizing, but he sort of gave up, you know. And when I went to college, we tried to organize our dormitory. I can't remember what the incident was now; it was something about electing our own floor officers—certain decisions about self-determination, really. I helped to organize the protest movement. We refused to eat our desserts. It was very Victorian. I wrote my father a letter about it, and in my heart, I thought he would be very proud of me for having done this. But he wrote back and said, "I'm going to tell you how the cow ate the cabbage," which is a Texas way of saying, "I'm going to tell it to you like it is," which is that you can't win.

I guess this is part of being out of control. I was very bright, and this feeling didn't touch me for a few years. I went off and joined the Peace Corps, and my parents approved of it because I was 21 and the Democrats were in power and it was right and I could do it. That's how I left Texas. My father got killed a year later, and I got pregnant a few months after that. But it was all part of coming of age. It's when you suddenly come up against that part of life you can't control, and the feeling I had about not being able to control my body was part of the whole feeling that things happen and you can't solve them and you can't stop them.

And I guess the feeling of empowerment and also of freak-out at the clinic was feeling that we were trying to control it. In fact, we *were* controlling it, but only a part of it, because we weren't controlling the doctors, we weren't controlling its status, we weren't controlling the birth control situation, we weren't controlling any of these things. In the end, I think I did get more control, but I paid a price, like you do for everything.



THE THEATER OF LIFE FROM BEHIND NEW YORK WALLS – KATHERYN SINS

MICHAEL ANGELO SKY

Tone Blevins

"Now you know, Annielee, don't you, she's not goin' be like she was."

The countryside outside the close automobile shimmered in the dense heat, unusual for this part of the world and season. The little girl, more rightly 'young lady,' tried not to shift and wriggle as she listened to the old woman pressing into her with that voice.

"She's apt to have changed a considerable amount, and I want you to promise me you'll say nothing, not one word about that business the other day. No need to get her worked up."

The old woman subdued a grunt of disgust and then added in a tight whisper, "And there's no use denyin' it. I heard you sneakin' outside the door listening."

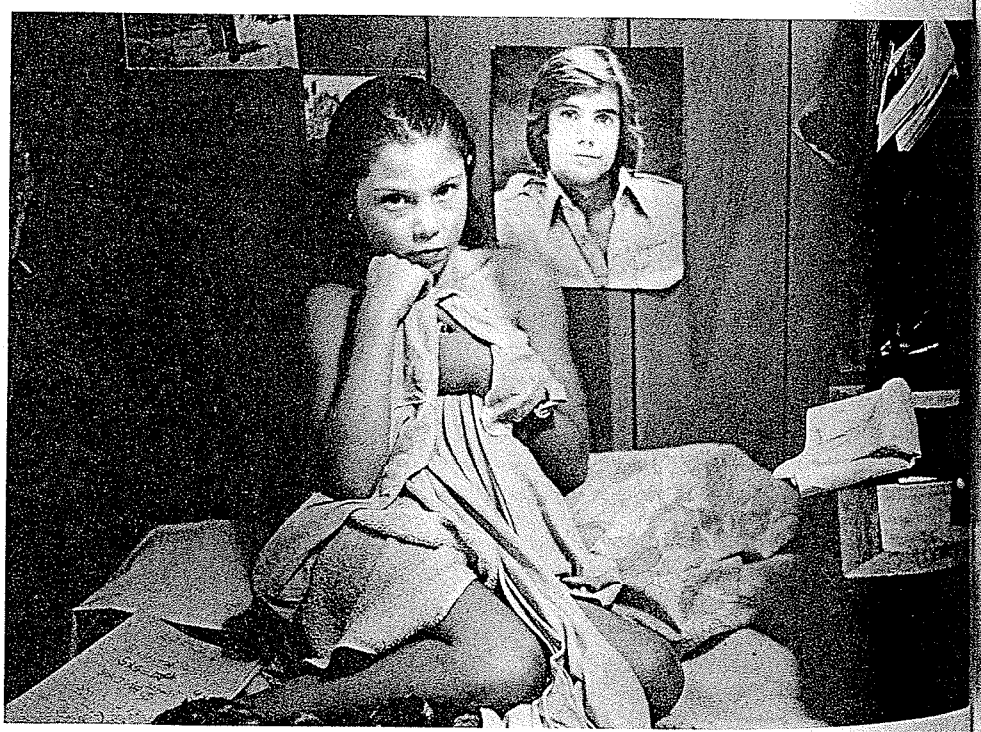
"But grandma, he's goin' try to sue us, I heard him!"

The girl hadn't meant for anything to come out, just her mind racing along in response. But, as had been happening lately, the words just slipped from their moorings before she could stop them.

"Don't 'But grandma' me, Annielee! Ease-droppin's a trashy thing and I won't have it. We'll deal with that problem in good time, you watch." She tried to stifle a thin smile. "There's some things even brains don't help you with, thank the Almighty."

With that pronouncement, the old woman settled into her weight and pretended to look out the window at the scenery whizzing by on the dusty, stark road.

Off in the near distance, a pack of dirt farmers tramped under a load of potatoes, a scraggly line of human bodies nearly bent double making a slow, but persistent, bee-line for a mangly pick-up a hundred yards away. Neither the woman nor the little girl gave them a second thought. The driver, one Harold J. Wannaker, Jr., didn't accord them much attention either, other than to snort derisively, or as derisively as possible under present circumstances. Harold J., second son, had been forced to forego a perfectly lucrative dry-cleaning venture because of a run-in over in Cherokee last month, where words and weapons had crossed paths. Since that unfortunate incident, he had been remanded into the kindly custody of his sister Merle and brother-in-law Ralph, and now made his livelihood taxiing lowly souls of the twin countries who owned no automobiles of their own. Harold tried hard not to like the work, mostly on account of its lack of "glamour," as he liked to call it. But deep



YARO, AGED 10, JUST AFTER HER BATH, ON THE BED IN HER ROOM WITH A PICTURE OF HER FAVORITE STAR – ANN MARIE ROUSSEAU

tone blevins is a writer, performer and filmmaker who was born and bred in north carolina.

ann marie rousseau is a photographer who lives in new york city.

down, it wasn't half bad. At least he got to get out of town once in a while, and while Ralph's rigs weren't Cadillacs, they didn't run too shabby if you applied a little foot pressure to them.

"Comin' on into Hicksville," Harold shouted into the rear seat, where the woman and the girl were still sitting in comparative silence.

The girl had originally wanted to sit up front with Harold, seeing as she didn't have too many opportunities to ride in an automobile. At least not for this far a drive.

"Thank you kindly, Mr. Wannaker," the woman said. She leaned heavily to the left, squishing the girl, in order to catch a glimpse of the driver in the rear view. "I swear he's starin' at us," she had confided as they set out.

"He ain't interested in us, grandma," the girl assured her. "He and Johnny Duncan's brother go over to Fayetown most Saturdays and play craps and buy moonshine off old man Perkins and..."

The sentence died unripe as the woman tightened her already iron grip on the girl's arm.

"We'll have none of that kind of talk, missy, you hear me?"

By this time Harold was indeed staring up from his driver's seat at them. When he met the old woman's eyes, he smiled quickly, and with a measure of what he would have called "innate charm," he tried to sound nonchalant.

"You have folks over this way, ma'am?"

The old woman pretended she didn't hear him.

"We're goin' to see my Mama," the girl said loudly.

"Well, that real sweet, it truly is. She work over this way, does she?" Harold spoke too loudly for the small, stuffy automobile, as if one or both of the passengers were deaf or a strong wind was blowing from somewhere.

They didn't answer him. The sky overhead, which had started out foggy and chill, began to thaw up a little, as it did most summer days in that part of the world. Little by little, the mist rolled to the other side of the bed and the huge, billowy clouds marched in over the open heavens. The girl, throat dry, stuck her head out the window and looked upward.

"Annielee, get back inside this automobile this second." The woman tried to tug on the homemade jumper. "If you're not goin' behave, we'll turn right around and go back home."

The girl reluctantly ducked back inside the automobile and the woman fussed with her braids and collars while she squirmed.

"Now you remember what I told you. She's not herself.... Lord only knows, but anyway, you just try to be on your best behavior and don't get her excited or... Oh, fix yourself up..."

The girl adjusted her jumper and faded into silence. The road veered into the small, dinky town, much like her own, much like hundreds of dust-marked communities in that part of the world. The old woman protectively touched the bag of fruit which was half hidden in her never-ending purse.

"Grandma?"

"Huh?"

The old woman seemed to find the little burg fascinating, and with something approaching delight, she gazed at the shop windows, the people strolling on the sidewalks, the bright marquee over their sole movie theater.

"Is Mama really sick? I mean, is she goin' get well, really get well forever?"

The girl knew what she meant to say, but this time when she really wanted to say something out loud, her words came out all wrong. Life sure was funny sometimes. Especially when it came to talking.

"Honey, only the good Lord can give us the future."

The girl sighed inwardly, knowing that when that name was introduced, she wouldn't get an answer she could use. She gave up and stared out the window again.

They left the town proper and cruised along a tree-lined street. The smell of honeysuckle tangoed with the melons, tomatoes and cow manure, just hanging in the heavy, humid air. Somewhere, quite near, you could just make out the outline of several large, sturdy buildings. And the road was making a straight line for them.

The girl started to shiver.

"You catch a chill, Annielee?" The old woman reached for the open window. "Here, sit away from that draft."

With ancient instinct, she wrapped her arms around the girl and drew her close, raising the window in the process. The girl continued to shiver, teeth making little bites against each other. The woman smoothed the girl's hair and rubbed her neck, right down near her back where it always hurt lately. She sat bolt upright.

The forty feet around the curving driveway in front of the buildings was the hardest. While Harold stiffened and let out an audible grunt when he saw the sign, the old woman did and said nothing. The girl had recovered, eyes dry, no shivers, no pain.

"Well, here we are," Harold announced, braking sharply and looking hurt.

"Thank you, Mr. Wannaker."

The two got out of the back and stood bewildered in the wide driveway, as if for a second they floated on a thin strip of land dividing two warring countries. Which, thought Harold with some lack of what he referred to as "delicacy," wasn't far from the nub.

"Mr. Wannaker, if you could... busy yourself for an hour or so, we'll be needin' a ride back then."

When Harold hesitated a moment too long, the old woman was forced to remind him that he had contracted and been amply paid, in advance, for a round-trip ride. And they would be waiting an hour from now for him at this spot.

As Harold drove slowly down the tree-lined street, the girl broke from the old woman's grip and ran after the dust-spewing automobile. She only got as far as the end of the driveway and stopped. Above and around her, the skies were moving like slow locomotives, and there was nothing, no amount of running, that would stop them. The girl straightened her wrinkled jumper and walked demurely back and took the old woman's hand. And hand in hand, they climbed the dozen steps to the Hicksville Regional Hospital for the Mentally Disturbed.

Loony bin, cracked, touched, bats. Loose screw, loco, nut house. Crazy as a loon. Lightheaded. Mad. Everybody had heard these words. Even then, I knew what they meant and, most often, who they were describing. It didn't mean nothin' to me. I could always look up at the dancing skies and make animals and pirates from the separated clouds. And not listen to the words. Mine or anybody else's. Today was different. Today, Grandma had brought me, and Mama wanted to see me, and we had rented a real taxi-automobile and drove all the way to Hicksville in the pouring heat.

Grandma could hardly open the doors—they were so heavy—which I thought was novel, since they had glass in their centers. The front hallway was empty except for some people in one of the waiting rooms off to the side. I couldn't think where everybody was, and maybe we were interrupting dinner

and should go right now and come back some other time and...

"Now, don't get antsy, Annielee. They say she's been on real good behavior. And she wants to see you, she really does."

"May I help you?"

A cool, unaccented voice rose from the starched person walking briskly down the long hallway to meet us. She was younger than Mama and sad looking, and I was wondering suddenly if I would ever have a voice like she had instead of the raspy, mumbling one I seemed to have been born with. She was looking us over as Grandma explained why we were here: to see Mama, to check on Edith, to, er, visit Mrs. Cabe in 413.

"The doctor told me over the phone it was all right to bring the girl. She so wants to see her." Grandma was rummaging in her purse for the letter. She fairly forced the nurse to take it.

"I'll be just a moment, Mrs... Becker."

The nurse conceded and motioned us to the vague area which included some benches against a wall, a waiting room and the refreshment area. She was already disappeared into a side hallway.

"Well, they don't go out of their way to be friendly around here, do they?" Grandma observed. She was looking for a comfortable spot to park ourselves. I got the feeling she anticipated a considerable wait. But it wasn't more than three minutes, I was timin' on my birthday Timex, when the nurse returned as silently as she had gone. A crisp man who shouted 'doctor' all over him accompanied her.

Someone in the waiting room behind us started crying. Loud, ugly gasps. The doctor frowned, the nurse peeled out of formation and went over to them while the doctor smiled broadly at us.

"Mrs. Becker, I'm Doctor Bailey. Good to meet you."

They shook hands. He belatedly took mine in a mock grip.

"I came up to see my daughter and I brought her girl, she wanted that..." Grandma tried not to sound pleading, but the doctor not talking made that difficult.

"I know Edith, I know my daughter, would want to see her, especially since we made this trip special and all. How is she, doctor?"

It was all a rush, and the doctor shook his big head and took Grandma's arm and began to steer her away. I held tightly onto her other arm. The bawling was still goin' on in the waiting room, making it difficult to hear just what the doctor was trying to tell Grandma. Besides which, he was prone to mumbling himself, but I made out enough. "Erratic behavior," "anti-social tendencies," "potentially, er, physical reactions," and "pronounced delusional patterns resulting from some unknown trauma." In other words, Mama wasn't getting any better fast.

Grandma seemed not to take in the words, but she caught the meaning right enough.

"But doctor, the poor thing wants to see her own flesh and blood. She told me so herself in that last letter." Grandma made a last effort.

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Becker, we just don't feel it would be appropriate at this time. Later, perhaps. After more extensive therapy or..." He trailed off, handing Grandma's letter back to her. "But you, Mrs. Becker, can visit with your daughter if you like. I'm afraid we'll have to keep it short, she shouldn't be disturbed or excited..."

"But I've brought fruit!" Grandma's voice broke. She fumbled in her purse, locating the bag of oranges and apples that the roadside seller woman had assured us came from California direct. The doctor, keeping his hand on Grandma's arm, called for the nurse.

"Nurse! Nurse, take Mrs. Becker up to Ward C, 413. Now, now, Mrs. Becker, go with nurse and she'll direct you and wait for you and bring you back downstairs when you're through."

Grandma, still trying not to cry among strangers, began to follow the nurse, leaving me dragging along.

"Grandma! Where...?"

"Oh, Annielee, honey, you go sit right over there, next to the Pepsi machine. Here's a quarter."

I don't wanta a Pepsi, I wanta see Mama." There, I did it again, the words just darting out of my mouth when I thought I was only saying them inside me.

"Course you do, but your Mama's feelin' poorly today. And we have to do all we can to help her get better. So be a good little lady and sit and wait for me."

The nurse smiled, obviously surprised that Grandma had the feel of controlling a potential situation so well. They walked down the hall and up the stairs at the end.

I don't know to this day what possessed me to get that Pepsi. I wasn't thirsty, and hadn't any conscious intention of spending good money so liberally dispensed on a soda when I could just as soon have water from the fountain near the door. I just found myself popping the quarter in the machine, getting the change and watching the syrupy liquid pour into the cup, and then the ice, and then the water. From somewhere upstairs a long, loud yell rang out and then what sounded like something soft making contact with something hard. I took one sip of the Pepsi. Sharp, metallic taste, too cold, too immovable. In one rearing motion, I flung the cup and its contents onto the wall opposite. Nobody noticed. Only I watched the sugary water splat and swim down the pink, dingy walls. I watched till the first and last drops hit the tiled floor.

Through the high, barred window, the day looked to be gettin' brilliant, the clouds frozen in their passage through the afternoon sky; as surely and as hugely as I stood immobile, locked, in front of the Pepsi machine at the Hicksville Regional Hospital some thirty years ago.

When Grandma came down, she was teary and prayful. Edith was better, thank the Lord. She had thrown a fit, sorta, and tried to smash the apples and oranges against the walls and at the nurse, but who could blame her, when she wasn't left in peace for a minute?

Grandma and I stood outside, not daring to look behind us at the building, which seemed to retreat once again to its original scary state that had first greeted us. On that thin strip between the two countries. We had a considerable time, since Harold wouldn't be back for at least the hour we had given him. Grandma smiled wanly, pressed my back and neck and raised her wrinkled head to the sky.

"Why look, Annielee." She pointed to the formation in the sky: two bunches of clouds, side by side, but not touching. A strip of brilliant sunlight separated and illuminated them both. Like a secret door with no password we knew.

"It's a Michael-and-Angelo sky. The one on the right's Michael and the left is Angelo, or is it the other way round... anyway, they live like that, side by side, cause they got separated by something or other a long time ago." She sighed. "I haven't seen one of those for the longest time. Used to have 'em pretty regular every summer evening... when Edith was just walkin'... My, my, my, that takes me back."

I wanted to ask her then who those people were, were they brothers or what, but she was disinclined to talk any more, so we found a semi-comfortable perch on the stone steps and waited for the taxi-automobile to come collect us and go home.

I never did find out.

IT'S NOT SO GOOD TO BE BORN A GIRL/

That's why societies usedta throw us away/ or sell us/ or play with our vaginas/ cuz that's all girls were good for. at least women cd carry things & cook/ but to be born a girl is not good sometimes/ some places/ such abominable things cd happen to us. i wish it waz gd to be born a girl everywhere/ then i wd know for sure that no one wd be infibulated/ that's a word no one wants us to know. infibulation is sewing our vaginas up with cat-gut or weeds or nylon thread to insure our virginity. virginity insurance equals infibulation. that can also make it impossible for us to live thru labor/ make it impossible for the baby to live thru labor. infibulation lets us get infections that we cant mention/ cuz disease in the ovaries is a sign that we're dirty anyway/ so wash yrself/ cuz once infibulated we have to be cut open to have/ you know what/ the joy of the phallus/ that we may know nothing about/ ever/ especially if something else not good that happens to little girls happens: if we've been excised. had our labia removed with glass scissors. if we've lost our clitoris because our pleasure is profane & the presence of our naturally evolved clitoris wd disrupt the very unnatural dynamic of polygamy. so with no clitoris/ no labia & infibulation/ we're sewn-up/ cut-up/ pared down & sore if not dead/ & oozing pus/ if not terrified that so much of our body waz wrong & did not belong on earth. such thoughts lead to a silence/ that hangs behind veils & straightjackets/ it really is not so good to be born a girl when we have to be infibulated, excised, clitorectomized & STILL be afraid to walk the streets or stay home at night. i'm so saddened that being born a girl makes it dangerous to attend midnight mass unescorted. some places if we're born girls & someone else who's very sick & weak & cruel/attacks us & breaks our hymen/ we have to be killed/ sent away from our families/ forbidden to touch our children. these strange people who wound little girls are known as attackers/ molesters & rapists. they are known all over the world & are proliferating at a rapid rate. to be born a girl who will always have to worry not only abt the molesters/ the attackers & the rapists/ but also abt their peculiarities: does he stab too/ or shoot? does he carry an axe? does he spit on you? does he know if he doesnt drop sperm we cant prove we've been violated? these subtleties make being a girl too complex/ for some of us & we go crazy/ or never go anyplace. some of us have never had an open window or a walk alone, but sometimes our homes are not safe for us either. rapists & attackers & molesters are not strangers to everyone/ they are related to somebody/ & some of them like raping & molesting their family members better than a girl-child they don't know yet. this is called incest, & girl children are discouraged from revealing attacks from uncle or daddy/ cuz what wd mommy do? after all/ daddy may have seen to it that abortions were outlawed in his state/ so that mommy might have too many children to care abt some "fun" daddy might be having with the 2-yr-old/ she's a girl after all/ we have to get used to it. but infibulation, excision, clitorectomies, rape & incest are irrevocable life-deniers/ life stranglers & disrespectful of natural elements. i wish these things wdnt happen anywhere anymore/ then i cd say it waz gd to be born a girl everywhere. even though gender is not destiny/ right now being born a girl is to be born threatened; i want being born a girl to be a cause for celebration/ cause for protection & nourishment of our birthright/ to live freely with passion/ knowing no fear that our species waz somehow incorrect. & we are now plagued with rapists & clitorectomies. we pay for being born girls/ but we owe no one anything/ not our labia, not our clitoris, not our lives. we are born girls to live to be women who live our own lives/ to live our lives. to have/ our lives/ to live. we are born girls/ to live to be women...

SOMETIMES

ntozake shange

ntozake shange is a widely published poet who lives in new jersey.

"DIRTY PICTURES"

CAROLEE SCHNEEMANN

selected text & preparation drawings from the performance work

Interrogation: erection

(Man in white doctor's coat asks the questions. Below the coat a transparent pink nightgown can be seen. A woman answers the questions. She wears a man's white shirt and undershorts. Specific slides are coordinated with each interrogation.)

why did you once say my biggest problem was with the structure of the penis? . . . what was the meaning of that?

oh yes, well, for several months I was quite confused as to which end was up. . . .

which end was up?

well, you know when you're pressed together and both wearing clothes the erection feels like a bar . . . a vertical . . . I couldn't tell at which end it was attached to his body . . .

perhaps, perhaps I see what you mean . . . is there something else you want to mention?

well, there it was, rigid between us, and I was all secretly wet but I couldn't tell how it could get inside me . . . I mean, what was its aim? what was its angle between where it was on him and where I was inside me? I mean, if it was attached at the top would I need to stand on a chair? or if it was attached at the bottom would I bend over?

Interrogation: keyhole

why were you looking in the keyhole?

I don't know

what did you see?

I could see a lady's feet sticking out under a sheet and the edge of his white jacket. . . .

what did you hear him say?

I didn't understand but I think he said "when did you last menstru-ate?" and the lady said "when? what?" and he said "when did you last bleed?"
she said "oh, bleed . . . not for six weeks" and he said "then I better examine you"

then what happened?

I thought he was going to look inside her the way we look inside a cow calving . . . and what an awful thing to do to a lady . . . I wanted to run away but I couldn't . . . I wanted to see what he did . . . I felt proud of him

why did you feel proud of him?

because he could know all the women's secrets and tell them what to do and look at whatever he wanted to look at . . .

Interrogation: boat

where were you sitting?

in the middle of the rowboat

where was your brother?

my brother was on the bow seat dropping his net

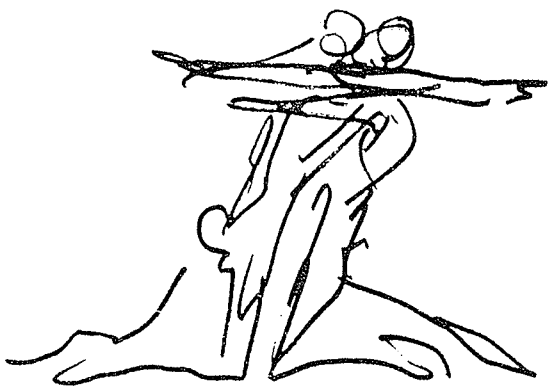
and your father?

standing up in the stern and dropping his net

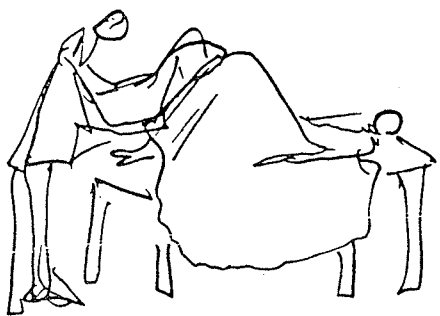
then something happened?

carolee schneemann is a painter, performance artist, filmmaker, and writer.

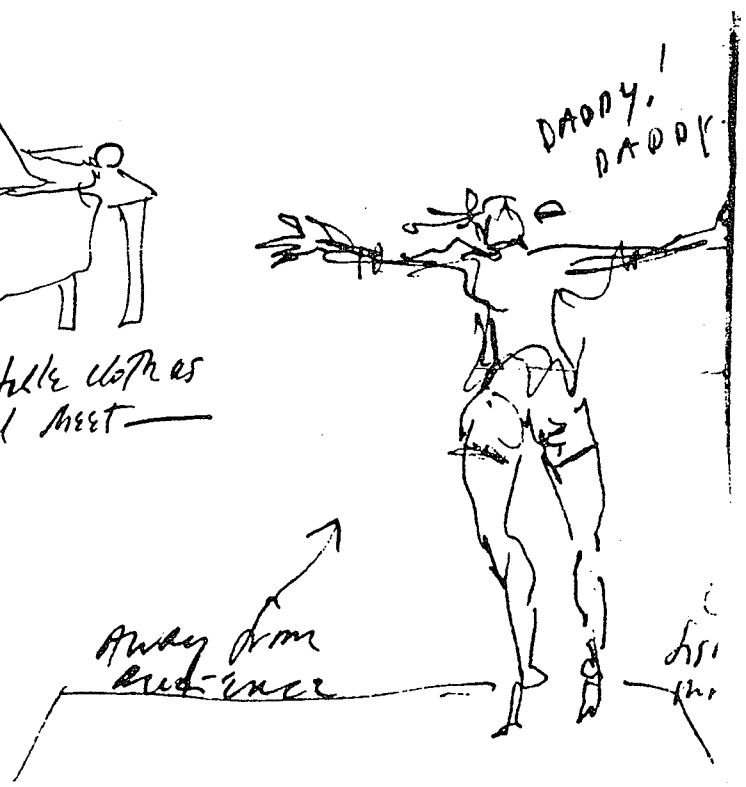
my brother yelled he had a crab on his line
my father stepped back & bent over the line
and then?
he disappeared!
what?
he just fell into the bay!
where was your mother at this time?
I think she was home cleaning, feeding the baby, and worrying that one of us would drown



Interrogation: [redacted]od-[redacted]pot
why did he say to put out your hands?
he wanted to sniff them
did he?
yes
were you frightened?
yes
why did he want to smell your fingers?
I think he guessed about the god-spot
what was the god-spot?
where I could go to heaven touching myself
how old were you?
four
did you put out your hands when he asked?
yes
did he sniff your fingers?
yes
what did he do?
he had a strange smile
what did your mother do?
she looked confused
did you say anything?
yes I said *I just ate bacon*



Interrogation: [redacted]reed
which seat did you have?
by the window
where was the bus going?
back to school after the trip to the zoo
and why did you get so angry?
because of what he said to me
what did he say?
he whispered in my ear: would you breed my babies for me?
and why did that make you angry?
I wasn't some cow of his!



the forest of wild grass

WINNIPEG, 1914

Olga Cabral

olga cabral lived in canada until the age of ten. a new yorker ever since, she has published books of poetry and children's books.

i.

Leaning over the rain barrel
we watched, two children intent
on the drowned insects floating
in the soft rain water.
Almost five was I and he
was half-past. He had promised
a secret. He revealed
a small pink thing and climbing
on the upended wooden bucket
Hjalmar my small playmate
dangled himself in the water
in genial display.

Little fish it floated
pink in sun-warmed water
made brown with moss that lined
the wooden barrel staves
and floated with dead spiders
tattered moths seed pods
larvae stray leaves thistle fluff
all the small debris of summer:
you can't do this he explained
'cause you're a girl he said.

Eve's daughter. Tabula rasa.
It being morning in Eden
knew nothing of shame. For shame
had not yet been invented.
'Cause you're a girl he said
but what was it that was lacking?
To dip and dangle the flesh
in an old rain barrel.
Eve claimed me for her daughter:
I said I didn't care.

ii.

Small animal was I
living close to the ground
breathing the intoxicating
dark and slightly sour smell
of earth. I hunted
garden snails digging them out
from moist and shady homes
to race them with one another
on the wooden veranda rail.

Making my pencil mark
on the sun-blistered paint
to measure a snail's pace
I left them overnight
and I never knew I was cruel
when I found them black with death
in their thin coffin shells
and none had moved even the width
of a spider's thread.

Joy! The frilled trumpets
of the petunia beds
blared out the colors of noon.
The clock is forever at noon
and noonday is summer-long
in the forest of wild grass
where I played in secret thickets
a solitary child.

iii.

Not tidy like a room my forest
it stretches like a pampas a wild steppe
but it was only a vacant lot next door
that the rank, coarse prairie grass
had captured and overrun.
There it grew child-high
a sunny ocean of rippling stems
into which I plunged exploring and eager
lost in summer hidden from adult eyes.
There everything was to my scale.
The forest embraced me with its mysteries.

We played follow the leader. I led him
through the hole in the back fence
where the gray weathered boards had rotted
behind the morning-glory vines.
We played hunters tracking game.
Then grew tired. It was hot.
We hollowed out a sunny place
we called a cave.

Come closer he said. I did.
Put your arms around me he said.
I did so. It was awkward
for we sat facing each other.
Put your legs around me he said.
And I did. It was very quiet.
The wind ruffled the tall dry stalks
the air was dusty with pollen.
My head on his shoulder we rocked
as in a cradle gently together.
Ignorant of sex yet in sexual embrace
we remained clasped to each other.

iv.

She was combing my hair. I told her
about the rain barrel.
She tied the ribbon, said nothing
but he never came to play again.
His sisters came, Chrissie and Kirsten
but I looked for him all the rest of the summer
and then forgot. A lifetime went by.

v.

I never told of our secret
having then no words
or thoughts that could shape the words
for mystery, strangeness.

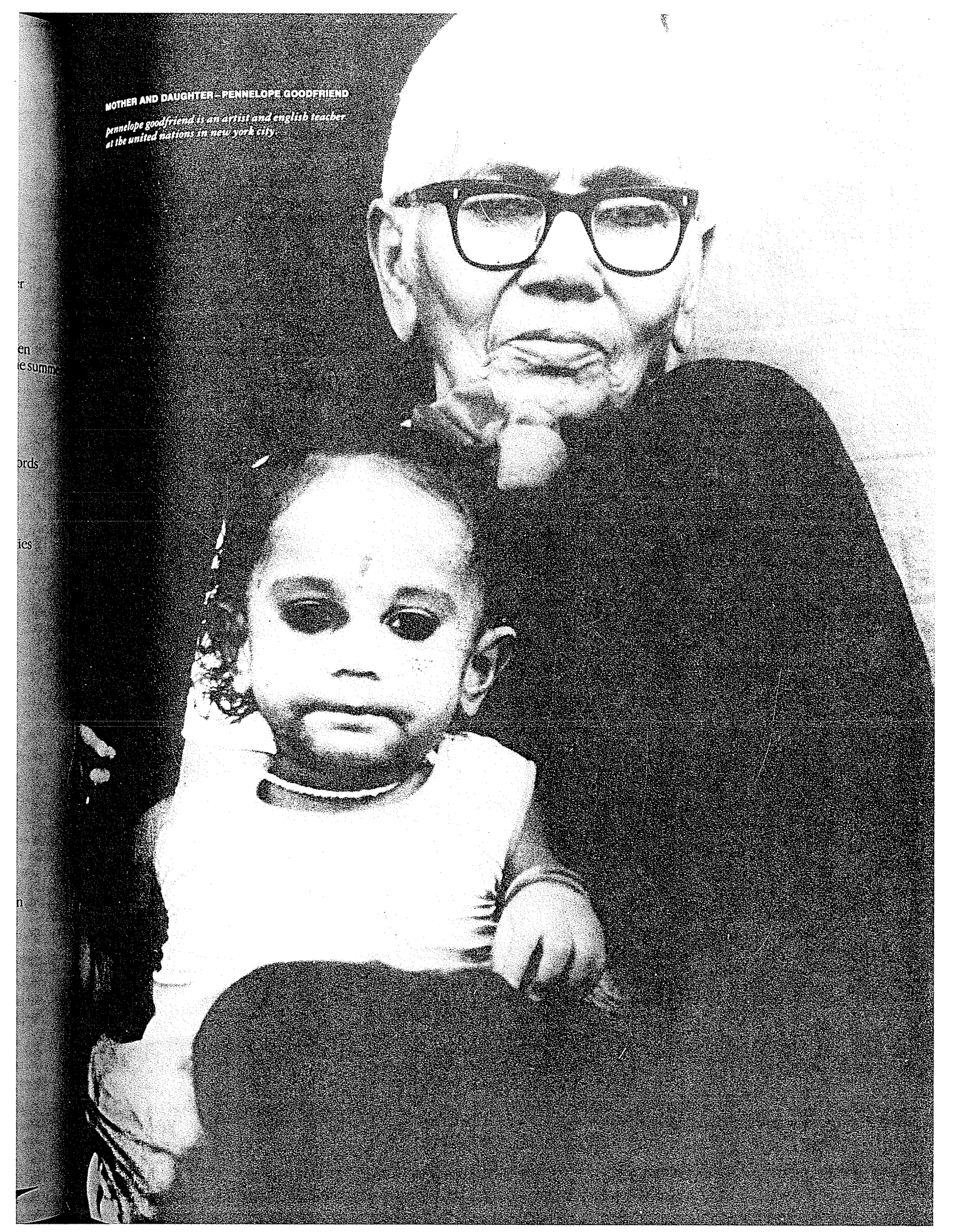
Nor did I tell, for I could not
(having no words)
of how I walked through a sea of lilies
when the wild grass flowered.
Tall spikes reared about me
each spire crowned with clusters
of flowerets, each floret a lily
miniscule and most perfect.

So sharp then my animal's eye
I saw with perfect clarity
each infinitesimal lily
separate, singular.
I touched them. They became dust.
I turned my head. Minute flowers
dusted my hair. Entranced
lost in uttermost delight
I saw their colors: mauve,
spires of cloudy white and others
of the most delicate pink.
Looking and only looking
I could never look enough.

Everything shone with its own light
and I did not know what I knew then
until long after:
prodigality of shapes and colors
squandering of beauty, generosity
of endless creation
perfection of humblest things.

vi.

There stood I first amazed.
There hidden as in a fragrant cave
among the slender swaying stalks
of the high prairie grass
alone with a bee and its cello
alone with a white butterfly
I fell asleep and dreamed
I was an old woman
writing this poem.



MOTHER AND DAUGHTER – PENNELOPE GOODFRIEND

pennelope goodfriend is an artist and english teacher at the united nations in new york city.

SOME OF MY STORIES

rosemary mayer's work includes sculpture, watercolors, writing and teaching. she lives in new york.

rosemary mayer

at forty-four

I want to sleep for twenty years,
Twenty years ago was better
And maybe in twenty more,
It will be better again.
Here are the stories and why
I want to sleep, but
Know I cannot sleep,
Because I know
No Henry Hudson will
Come to play with me,
I am no Rip Van Winkle.

And then of course I will be sixty-four.
Remember that song of twenty years ago?

My friends will love me,
But, if, will
They still be there?
I hear tales of women,
Some with gray hairs,
None of us kids,
And how do we survive?
On little jobs and money,
Honey had the nerves to have
A comfortable place
With a husband
Comfortable, no, safe,
Enough.

How do you live with graying hairs?
A very educated woman,
You go to interviews.
They look at you.
I have only three or four at once,
But I have seen them,
The women working for so much less,
Getting rejected in new places.
"Uh, dear,"
Yes, they might even say that to you,
"Oh, dear,
Well,
Eight dollars an hour,"
And I knew I was getting twice as much,
Or more,
And I would mention it,
And they would get upset.
What is the future there?

II

There is still the other side,
The one of endless birthdays.
It's Utopia; the best occurs,
And there we always know
Exactly what to do.
When I'm sleepless,
It fades to black,
But other times,
I add some details.

Now this is only one woman speaking; it could be different for you. No doubt you are some other age and in a different circumstance; but listen to me for I am one of you, and I shall tell you stories.

When I was nine I loved my life. I was safe, and yes, this is looking back and seeing it now, but I was safe. There was food, a clean bed, and I could play. I knew Grandma was ill, but could she die? Not in my cosmogony. Then she died and I got older.

Then one by one the others died as I grew taller in my prom gowns, secretly reading, arguing, hiding in museums and at concerts in parks. At sixteen I had no parents, but many friends, a little sister, and a mean old guardian uncle. I knew no women who showed me any of what I might want to do, and I never thought then I could do it alone, so I married a man. He wasn't Uncle, and, at first, he liked the same things I did and we could talk, but we knew nothing of each other, and that got worse as we lived longer in the same places. But listen, I have promised you stories.

Here is the story of Gerlinda, yes, her name was Gerlinda, or maybe she was Emma. We went to grammar school together. She quickly learned English enough to almost win from me the eighth-grade prizes. And then, when I saw her last, she worked in a tiny travel agency, where once the old ice-cream parlor had been in that old, old place, in the old neighborhood of our eighth grade, and then we were thirty-four.

There is also Claudia, from a different time of mine and other circumstances, and wealthy, yes, born wealthy. And she threw herself away, for nearly twenty years, on a self-important man who, yes, he did, he beat her. So I and friends, we talked to her and finally she left, and soon enough, she could support herself and life and child and sneeze fully on that now inconsequential male.

This is not to say that it isn't possible to conjugate, as a girl with boys, or as a woman with men; but I think it's hard and can lead to much confusion, which is not to say it can't be done. Nor do I mean to say that Emma Gerlinda might not have had, secretly, later, or in another place, an entire other life, perhaps in her room at night. And I might have been Gerlinda, or you, Emma. Instead, I had already flown, on a sixties youthfare ticket, to get divorced in Mexico, come home delirious, to be alone, and then done what I could of things I wanted to do.

But I need more stories, so here is the story of Mara. Mara lived with her mother and father and a younger sister. Then Mara met Bill. In the oldest-fashioned sense, it was love at first sight. They soon produced another Mara, and Bill gave up all his old lovers, boy and girl, and man, and woman. Mara went back to school. And the new Mara, well, you should see her. But I should add that the sister of the elder Mara killed herself. She jumped out a window alone and high on drugs.

There is also Sara. I did love Sara's mother. We went through schools and lovers together. And then she married, and Sara, well, there is a bell that could ring in tomorrow.

Now these have been mostly easy tales. We forget, I do, maybe on purpose, the women who died of cancer in the fifties, feeling only their family's resentment. How could you do this to us? You are so ugly now. And then there was no help. There were sisters and daughters who dealt with this mostly in silence, or among those too young to be telling anything to. We forget too the women who stare from windows. We forget purdah,

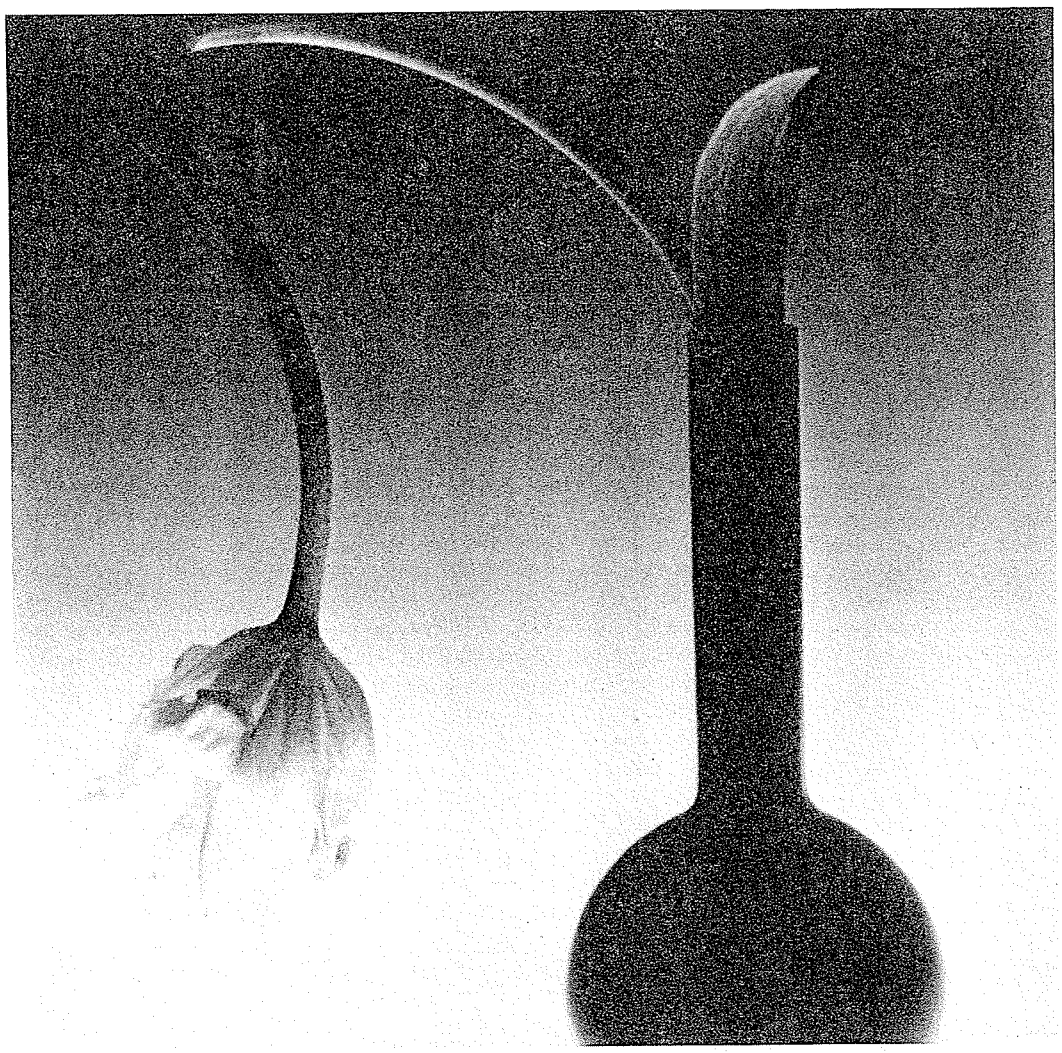
and many no longer young or sane or talking.

And there was Mara's sister. Rose went out some, from twenty to twenty-three, but thought to herself and said to us that she was dumb and ugly. We who knew her saw she wasn't, and with Mara and others, well, we tried to tell her, but it didn't take. Then she met a boy, yes, he was still a boy, silly on drugs, and he gave them to her, and we would see her incoherent at dinner, unable to eat, and we'd still try just to talk to her. Her parents were worse. They yelled and threatened. But she did try to stop, and then she did, and then her boyfriend disappeared, and then, mostly, she stayed in her room at home till one day when, somehow, when she was out, she got more drugs, and that night, really it was almost morning, everyone else was sleeping, and she climbed out onto the balcony, then she climbed over it, and then she fell.

I remember, too, a novelist, chubby and nervous. She drank a lot, and she wrote well. Then she went to London and bought a house. Once we ate an elegant lunch she'd made there, under her skylights, and we talked about writing and clothes, mortgages and loneliness. A few months later she was dead, in her late thirties, of sleeping pills and alcohol.

So there should have been more dinners and lunches, more letters or phone calls or more of almost anything from all of us. We could have brought the birthday cakes and danced in a circle, listened and sang. But I have promised you stories. What age would you like to hear about? Emma Gerlinda was thirty-four and Claudia's almost fifty. Mara is now thirty-seven, and the new Mara and Sara aren't ten. Mara's sister was twenty-four, and the novelist, thirty-eight. At forty-four I remember nine because I'm tired and I want to rest. I've been thinking how I have been dancing a long time. At twelve I was learning the steps, and at seventeen the pattern is often inflexible. But slowly, if you can, you crumble the rules, and you dance more and more in a way that you choose. Now and then you question your steps. Maybe you change them or even decide to give up dancing, but then you get dull and thick and bored and come out again with a better pair of shoes. So my stories might tell you how you cannot, a woman, be Rip Van Winkle.

Or maybe you can. Or maybe the comparison doesn't quite hold in this story of Josephine. Yes, that really could be her name, it can be, you know, a name. Josephine married young and quickly had three boys. Her husband, well, she left him when she had three babies, one and three and five, and she was twenty-four. She went to work as a secretary typing for money for food and rent and babysitters. The boys grew and so did she. Then she married a teacher and they all went West and lived and grew up further. Then the boys were gone to college. Josie left her second husband, and where was she then, she thought, with no money and no place to go? She worked at dull, dull jobs, and then she found a



PRIVATE PARTIES – CAY LANG

Cay Lang is a conceptual artist and sculptor who lives in California.

place of her own. With no help, she moved what she had on a dolly she pulled through the streets. Then she found more little jobs. Once, then, I met her at one of her jobs, and she had no money at all. I had brought a tuna sandwich, iced tea, and we shared it. She wouldn't take any money. Then Josie met Roy. All went well. Josie made sculptures. Roy did too. They bought some land in the country. They lived in tents while Josie designed a house and then they built it. They are busy there with sculptures and guests, flowers and ponds and frogs, and even birds and stars. Josie worries about her independence, or dependence. The last word depends on how you see the story.

Now I do have other stories, so I hope you will listen more, but first consider that last story, the one about Josie. It's a help to me, because I come of age as I tell you stories. The gray hairs, mine, the three or four at once, like the interviews, they get longer. In other places and other times, that metallic glint, that changing of colors, it would have been respected. In old China, when a woman had passed the years of so-called fruitful sex, she became, to those younger in her family, and to others, one of power and wisdom. The older women of the Iroquois sat in council, made laws.

Now for sure it isn't any fun to need strong glasses. It's also a bore to have your feet or back or hands or knees hurt all day or be stiff at sunrise, but here and now, for some at sixty-eight or more, alone or even with company, or even very much less in years, it's hard to have just the cash for food or rent unless you've been extraordinary. All would give presents to children, or to their grandchildren, if they have them. So many do what they have to. I know about have to; that's how I met Catherine. She is fifty-two. She knows how to write very well for textbooks—reading, grammar, spelling, she can do them well, and then what, or why? To get the money. But have you looked at a textbook lately? Pick one up—grades preprimer to twelve. This is what she does, and this is the future, and she does it for very little money. Last time I talked to her she had a cold. She had it because she'd turned down the heat in her house. No, there isn't always enough for heat at eight dollars an hour, and yes, to some extent, she is part of the system, and readily hired, at eight dollars an hour.

There is also Madelaine, or she is a different Catherine. Now she is seventy-six. Once they were nine, the brothers and sisters, and as often happened in that time, the father, a bricklayer, died before fifty. The mother relied on the sisters and brothers and children. At twelve Catherine was working in a local garment factory. Nothing happened, just work and Christmases, more New Years and returning Easter Sundays. She still says she was never pretty like her sisters. In fact, she has cut off the parts of old photographs where she stood. At twenty-nine she married the owner of one of the factories in which she sometimes worked. He was educated. She was not. He spoke of music and the ballet while she ironed his shirts. He went to the opera. She stayed home. They had a son. When her husband died, Catherine was fifty-four. She still wears black, and her son seldom visits. She lives on pensions, food stamps, occasional phone calls, and what's on television.

Unlike Claudia, Clarissa was not born wealthy, in fact, she doesn't know exactly where she was born. She was adopted early into a farm family in the American Midwest. As she grew, she got bored, so she went away to study art. She was good at it. Then she lived the scrabbly life of a young woman artist alone in a big city. Then she decided. She didn't want the life she had and nothing more. She found a delightful man and she married him. Then she decided again. She wanted a better job. She got it and her work continues.

There is also Brenda. She lived ten years with a man who didn't want children, but she did. She wrote poems, and then she left him. She married another poet, a man who wanted children. They had three, and they wrote more poems, but between them it didn't work. So she left again and now she has the children and friends and poems and eager students in writing classes.

Betty was different. She loved Claire. Betty wrote novels and Claire loved math. For a long time, Betty's novels didn't do so well, but Claire learned more and more about computers. Now they live in an old, old house that Betty bought with some money from the novels. When I visit them, I get their rocking chair, and we tell stories.

Annie's also quite a tale, but it would be too long to tell about all her sculptures, or they could be paintings, about her lovers and family, her many one-time jobs, and how she got to where, now, she can do mostly what she wants.

But if I had the time, the story would go something like this: Annie made sculptures or maybe she made paintings. Then she found a man. She made more sculptures but he didn't like them, or they were paintings. Her friends did, and so did "they" who gave her money in grants, and she figured out how to sell her work. But he was impossible. There were more sculptures, or they could be paintings. Friends applauded and he scowled. He got lost.

So now I've told more stories. But I and my friends are a privileged bunch. We are white, educated, we look fine, and we are a small, small part of all the women, so our comings of age, though important, speak and tell of only really a little edge of all the women. We owe a lot, and we need to understand, if we can, the worst.

So can I write for you, a story of really the worst, of desperation? Yes, indeed, sometimes I have no money, but usually I can get it, and I live in a place with running water, heat, and I have not only a possible bank account, but also years of good enough schools and books, and jobs and pleasures. People will hire me. They even like what I do. So I sometimes have money to spend even on cats I keep for my pleasure, and sometimes time enough, but I want more, to play at doing what I like and asking questions. Though I sometimes wish I were nine again and could play forever, then again I would soon become ten and thirty and fifty and seventy-three. I also know few women in all the last several centuries have done so well as I and some friends of mine. So can I tell you stories of the very hardest lives and should I? What good would it do if I could? Would we then go out and feed the hungry, give them warmth and dignity?

Here's a try. There is a woman with only one leg who sits on a corner near where I live. She is black but scarred light and pink on her face and arms. Different people bring her food, give her money and help her home to the shabby hotel in which she lives. What does she think as she lies in bed? No, I cannot tell her story.

So here is how I see it now, because I heard it from my niece. She is eleven and she said:

When you are old enough you know what to do, and
you can do it without asking anybody. You fix up
the world. Like that old lady. She likes the
cookies, and we talk. She tells me stories.
When you are old I will take care of you.

Sock Relations

JENNIFER JEAN O'NEILL

Your grandpa wore white cotton socks summers
grey woolens winters
Your grandma balled his socks
darned hole Thompson toe poked through
They stayed mated.
Your ma married a man wore white cottons and grey woolens
The marriage endured.
You married a man wore orlon
knotted his socks
kept a spare drawer with lost mates
The marriage was a mismatch.
Your new man's got himself a darnin' egg
doesn't ask you to mend what his livin' wears out.

jennifer o'neill is a poet living in sacramento, ca.

THE EMPTY NEST SYNDROME OR SING A SONG OF SOLITUDE

hettie jones

treasonous hairs of grey
And me without a man.
A few unripe ones slipped away
And while I waited for the next and best
The season passed
And suddenly there were no more,
Only a strand or two of grey
Slithering through the tall grass.

Somewhere in the jungle
men crawl on their bellies,
Cradling rifles
Not yet pointed my way.

Woman greying in the mirror,
How can I be growing old
And feel so immature?
Should I grow it wild and wooly again
As in rebellious youth, my hair,
Or shear it, clip it back or up,
Dam the flow of rage and laughter?

Somewhere in the jungle
Those men are creeping closer.

I pull out the traitorous grey,
One, two, a dozen,
But as I do, I touch
How strong they are,
Thicker cable than the threads of youth,
Tougher cloth to weave.
There will be some compensation
For the lost brass ring.

And I will be ready
for the sniper's bullet
When it comes.
In a rough cotton smock
I will stand in the clearing
And face the green jungle.
Perhaps as I raise my aged arms
I will tremble.
But I will be ready.

hettie jones writes books for children and young adults as well as poetry and stories for grown folks. she teaches at nyu and suny purchase.

45 in the Washroom mirror

carole rose livingston

alone again
the children gone
and time enough to

fix the toilet

Only string works—and rots—
though old telephone wire's
an excellent underwater medium
it's too stiff to do the job

details, she said
don't complain
about others boring
you do the same

and it's true

But oh how I mark now this lone self
this woman I don't know
the habits of

gone her hardcore phonewire life
I'm strung, all fiber

rotting like my toilet works

my hands in the tank
as the house stills

as the water fills
frees the string

and I too do
float away

coordinator of the women's studies program and assistant professor of english at brooklyn college, carole rose livingston is a folk singer, songwriter, poet, scholar, and political activist.

THE JEWISH

NORA R. WAINER

nora r. wainer was raised a second-generation feminist participant. she has published stories, articles and a book on matters of feminism, literature, education and going to sea.

I guess I did kind of take a special liking to Ina right when I was first assigned to her, but then I always had a weak spot for the more unusual ones.

It wasn't a bad job, now that I look back, though the pay was only minimum wage. It was a job I was eligible for since I turned sixty-two and started collecting Social Security. It seems Social Security has this program, sending you out to take care of people older and more helpless than you are. I suppose you get a chance to see that way how you yourself are likely to end up.

When I first met Ina I was just doing my job the way I was supposed to and I had no intention of "getting involved," the way Social Security warns you against. She was one of the oldest on my route—near eighty-six. The first thing I had to do right off when I went to her place in the trailer court, after introductions, was change her diaper. Well, this wasn't as bad as it seems. I was taking in babies all last year before Social Security put me on this job (I got a license on the basis of some college courses I took) and of course you have to change infants all the time. Changing adults is worse, not because of the fact of the mess or anything, but they're usually embarrassed—at least Ina was—or cross with you as well as themselves that they've had to revert to childhood in their broken old bodies and can't take care of themselves right. I must admit, Ina had some of that too. What I usually did right after getting them changed and into fresh clothes and back in their wheelchairs, was put up some water for coffee and invite them, no matter how senile, to sit up and chat for a while. Even if they can't remember three sentences on the same subject, they usually like to have you sit by them to show some kind of human respect.

That first time, Ina reached from her wheelchair to let me in through the screen door of her trailer. She'd been expecting me; Social Security had sent her people before—she sized me up good—not too thin, not too fat, looking perhaps young for my age. I did not know how to respond. I'm used to this going over when I first come to a place, yet it always makes me feel like a whore on parade. We introduced ourselves, shook hands, her grip firmer than some. After the preliminary hygienics, which we both bore with no complaints, I offered to make coffee. Ina, seated in her wheelchair, issued instructions like an old general on grudging retirement. I drank in her accent—the way she dropped the "h" in my name, imperious like in a voice flavored with the exotic stuff of faraway ports.

"You know any languages, Marta?" Ina said to me right off the first day while I was running the water into her pot to make us some coffee.

"Passed English. Flunked French," I said. "Know two or three words in Spanish—you have to around here. I guess I'll do with the one I mainly get by on."

"Yiddish was my first language," said Ina wistfully. "But that I almost completely forgot. French was the main one. Spanish. Some German. Egyptian, Arabic, Hebrew. English came close to the end. I was hoping even out here to practice a little with the other languages."

"There's always the Spanish girls from Meals on Wheels," I offered.

"I do that, too. Don't think I don't," she said.

"How come you speak all those languages?" I asked her once I sat down with the coffee at the little table in her dining area where she parks her wheelchair. "I don't know anyone in the whole of San Luis Obispo County speaks all those languages, 'cept maybe up at Cal Poly where my son goes—and there they mostly teach them Sheep, Cow, and Pig."

"You got a good sense of humor," she said. "I'll let you stay. Bring me the sugar and cream—and a spoon." No please. No thank you. She ordered me around like that every visit right up to the last. My husband Ray says it's a sight to watch he's never seen before. All she has to say is scratch my back, and lo, I scratcheth the backeth until she tells me she's had enough.

"No fooling, Ina," I said when all the coffee was satisfactorily served, and I had placed a napkin up at her neck for her because her hands seemed to shake—"How come you know all those languages?" Then, of course, she proceeded to tell me.

It occurs to me now that what seemed idle getting-acquainted chat may have been what got me hooked in the situation—at least that was the start of getting "involved."

"My first husband was Jewish," I said when Ina started in about Yiddish. "But that didn't last long. I got a daughter by him back East in New York and they have a lot of Jews there. She even married one of them so I guess my grandkids are Jewish."

"That's not the way it works," snapped Ina as if I'd said something dumb. "They go by the mother. But I been all over the world almost. I get along with all kinds. Even you. You're cute. Someday I'll tell you some stories."

Meals on Wheels came in on us that time—that's the volunteer organization from the hospital that provides two meals a day for shut-ins who can't fix their own. Ina spoke something in Spanish to the woman who brought in her lunch and the girl answered back with an embarrassed laugh as if she hadn't really understood. I knew that was my cue to leave.

Over the next several weeks I got to know just about all there was to Ina's life,

MERICAN PRINCESS

if you can tell eighty-six years in five or six sessions. Her husband was a diamond merchant in Paris. She came from a small town in Belgium. She was quite young when she married; he was considerably older, but rich as they come. As soon as the Nazis invaded Poland—I think it was in '39, they had the foresight to get out of Europe. By then there were a couple of kids. She has six all told now but I forget which ones were born where. They spent the war years and after in Cairo and it was there she learned her husband's jewelry business herself. They lived very well—big house, car, servants until 1957 when the Egyptian Government confiscated all foreign wealth. Then broke, widowed, a few of the children still small, she moved to Israel and made a modest living, enough to keep going, teaching languages and, on the side, still dabbling in gems.

All that talk of cities and places was like magic elixir to me. Ever since I was in high school I had dreamed of traveling to all parts of the world. I even started at UCLA to be a dietician because I figured that would be the only way I could work on a ship. But marriage and pregnancy put an end to that. Sometimes I even think I married my first husband, Maurice, because of his accent and the fact he'd spent his grammar school years in Cannes. When I first met Ray he was in the merchant marines and I always forgave him his long absences because of the stories he'd tell me of ports, cargoes, and local color. Then when we got married and he settled in to construction he stopped telling stories—putting all that behind him, and I stopped getting one word out of him about going to sea.

Listening to Ina, I felt all those old yearnings come back in a rush. I'm now in a position—my children from both marriages grown—but who's going to take on a sixty-two-year-old sailor's apprentice—so I guess I'm just stuck here in Los Perditos.

Still, I encouraged Ina to tell me more stories about prewar Paris and raising children in Cairo and housing problems in Tel Aviv while I fussed in her kitchen and saw she was clean. Finally I wanted to reciprocate—that's just the way the idea began. We had settled into her kitchen, expecting the imminent arrival of Meals on Wheels. Ina was just about to get around to telling me how she wound up in a trailer court here in Los Perditos when I was suddenly struck with a thought. "Hey, listen," I said finally, staying past my time while she was already looking out for her lunch. Meals on Wheels arrived just at that moment and I had to wait until she was settled into her meatloaf to go on. She looked so haughty as she ate, mincing bites, keeping her elbows off, sipping soup from the far side of the bowl. "What I was thinking . . ." I went on, fascinated, watching her eat. "How would you like to go out to the Swap Meet?"

"Put up the coffee now, Marta," she said in that hoity toity accented voice of hers as if she hadn't heard me. "Come," she said—it sounded like a command—"Come drink some coffee with me."

"You didn't even let me finish my offer, I said, but I went on ahead and put up the coffee—just instant, from a jar in her refrigerator. "You act like a princess," I said, but I tried to sound gentle, not mean. "The way you order everybody around—I heard you do the same thing to your daughter Elena. You know, that's just what you are—a Jewish-American Princess—JAP, that's what my grandson tells me is all the rage in New York."

"What's that—JAP?"

"I just said it—Jewish-American Princess. Seems she's a spoiled young lady, a pampered Daddy's darling brat. They had that in the movies—Good-bye Columbus, Marjorie Morningstar."

"I was out of the country when that happened," she said.

"Well, you can catch up on it now," I said. "They have jokes about it. My grandson writes me letters full of them. That's all he has to say about life in New York—JAP jokes. Like this—don't let me interrupt you while you eat, I really should be scooting on out of here."

Ina looked up, muttered something in one of her eight languages that I did not understand, then reached for my hand as I started to go. "Don't go yet. Stay. Tell jokes if you have to tell jokes. I'm not too old to understand jokes."

"Okay. Here goes. But you're not going to like it. What's a Jewish-American Princess's—JAP's—favorite sexual position?" There was a long pause in which she did not say anything. "Give up?" I asked. Again she said nothing, just quietly took her hand away to break bread and offer me some. I waved it away. "Okay then, I'll tell you. Facing Bloomingdale's."

"What's that?" Ina said. She motioned to me to pour her more coffee.

"The Jewish-American Princess's favorite sexual position."

"I heard that part of it," Ina said. She didn't dribble or spit as a lot of them her age do, but delicately blotted her lips with the napkin Meals on Wheels provided. "What's this Bloom—that part I didn't get. I might want to tell this to Elena. She always says I act like I think I'm a princess."

"Bloomingdale's is a big store in New York. I went there last time I was back to see my girl. The prices you wouldn't believe. And the stuff—you never saw such stuff in your life. I couldn't afford a square inch of it. And all those fauncy-schmauncy ladies in their get-ups. I had to tell my daughter to get me out of there before I fainted from too much suffocating gla-moour. I'm afraid it's the Swap Meet for me."

"They're telling these jokes about Jews in New York?"

"Jews are telling them. About their own selves. They tell them to each other and pass them around. My grandson picks this stuff up from other Jews in his school. Then in his letters he tells them to me. I guess I should be honored. He doesn't think I'm any different from what he is."

"It's good to have a sense of yourself, I guess. To laugh at yourself," she said, but she wasn't smiling. "Jews always do, I suppose."

"I wouldn't know about that," I said. "I didn't stay married long enough to that Jewish guy to find out." Then I started once again to go out.

"Tell me," she said as if her questions could hold me there, "what is this Swap Meet?"

Well, I did wind up staying way over time to tell her. I couldn't blame her for

wanting to know about things going on outside her little trailer. Although she has a ramp leading up to the door, built by her son-in-law so they can get the wheelchair up and down, she almost never goes out. Oh, a couple of times a month a special van comes to take her to the Seniors Arts and Crafts Center. But I'm about the only person she was seeing outside of her daughter Elena, and the Spanish woman from Meals on Wheels—but she doesn't talk much. So I found myself going on maybe a lot longer than I should have explaining the Swap Meet. But all I said about the Swap Meet was that it's the same thing people tell me they call a flea market back East. On weekends people who have stuff to sell rent a space on what's a big blacktopped lot left from when some developers thought they'd build a shopping mall there before the Air Force moved out of town and all their jobs and personnel with it. Some realty people got the idea to use the place as a Swap Meet. Some part of it—the part where I mostly go—is booths where people bring their crafts—just stuff they made at home, macramé, hooked rugs, jewelry made out of shells or rocks they picked up at the beach. Mostly, however, there are marked-off stalls where people got a good deal on a gross of luggage, say, or sweaters, jackets, men's suits, belts, any kind of thing and they sit there all day on camp chairs hoping somebody will buy. Then some sell fruits and vegetables, but that's almost all Mexicans and Arabs, and you have to watch for prices and thumbs on the scale. Most of the people are pretty nice and offer you coffee if you're there selling with them, and the fog starts coming in thick. I usually get a stall end of November through Christmas for selling my granny dolls. My granny dolls—by that time I had given Ina one—are simple to make—I spent fifteen years in Frisco as a sewing machine operator so they're pretty easy on my machine at home. I take a granny face with a wig—you can buy those wholesale at a notions supply house and attach it to a base then sew up a hat and this big full-length skirt. I put pockets in the skirt to hold napkins or dried flowers for a centerpiece on your table, sort of to get a conversation going. Made $257.50 sheer profit on them last year and that, of course, was weekends only.

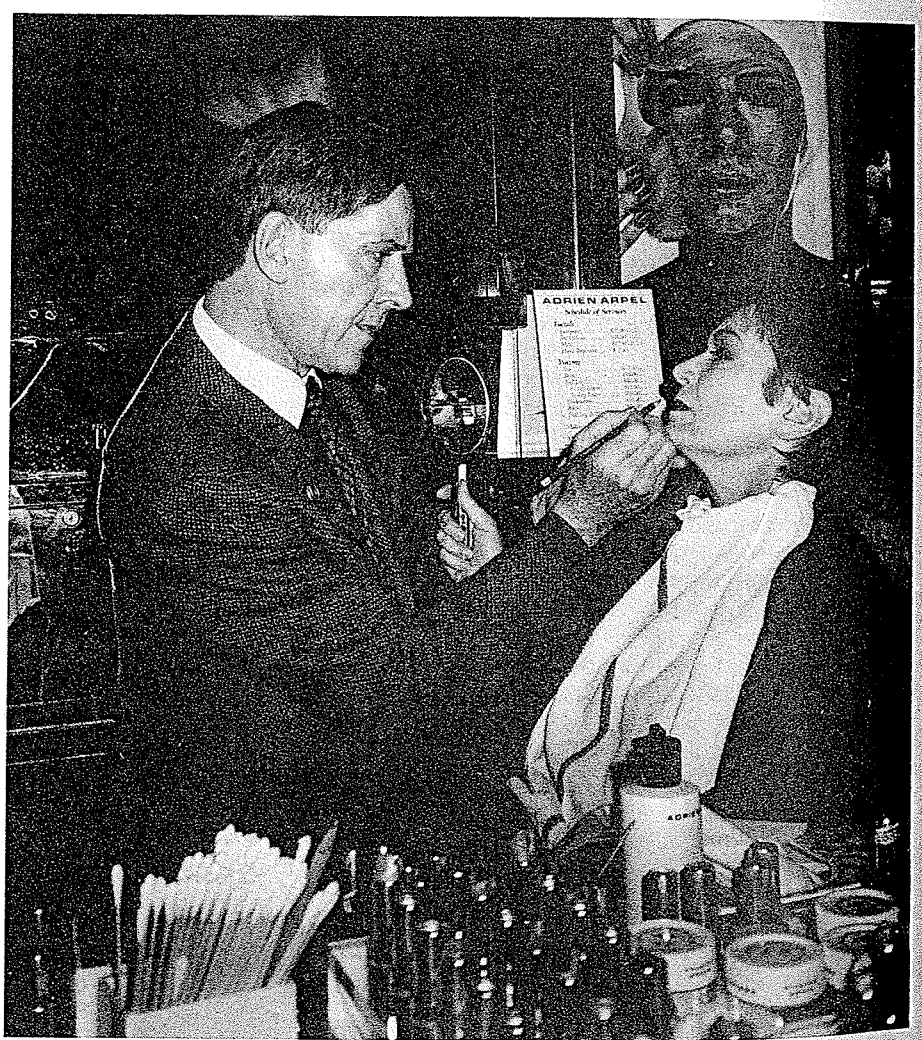
Well, that was all Ina had to hear. "Marta, it's just like a bazaar, isn't it? I mean like the ones they had in the small towns in Egypt and then, I remember, we used to go in the Arab sectors of Israel."

"I never thought of it that way," I said. "Just a regular California Swap Meet like they have all over the state. I don't know what they call them in other places."

"And you sell things there. And the people come to buy... with my crochet ... Can you take me there?" Well, I had to tell her I couldn't, what with Social Security rules. But she begged and wheedled the hell out of me. Finally, after a week when it'd been raining hard out of season and she'd been entirely shut in with no one but her daughter to come by—and hers only a perfunctory visit—and Ina didn't even get out to Senior Arts and Crafts, and had to ask me to pick up some yarn for her crocheting, I began to give in.

The thing you have to understand about Ina and her crocheting is that she's getting close on to being blind. She usually recognizes me whenever I come. The smaller details she sees dim. But at Senior Arts and Crafts they managed to teach her how to crochet—she'd never done it before. But they only gave her one pattern. Typical. She does over and over again these sort of top hats that fit over a roll of toilet paper so you can keep a spare roll hidden on the counter if you have one in your bathroom or on top of the tank and it'll look decorative instead of just a roll of toilet paper sitting there staring at you—Johnny-toppers the SAC calls them. Now, of course, with her bad eyesight Ina has to crochet them in large stitches so, even though the point is to hide it, the toilet paper shows through. You never want to tell Ina about that, though, because that was just about the only creative thing she could do.

But she wanted so bad to go to the Swap Meet and I wasn't thinking about why or why not. She wanted to see about selling her crochetwork, she said, and I said that was pretty impractical but



lyn hughes is an artist living and working in new york city. she is currently

I did not want to let on to her in any way that I did not think her Johnny-toppers would go. "Why do you want to sell stuff at the Swap Meet?" I asked her. "It's a full day sitting there dealing with people and not much of a payoff. You're not used to that kind of hard work—Miss Jewish-American Princess."

"That's it," said Ina, and there was a teasing glint to her smile. "It must be because I'm Jewish. You never heard of that? Jewish people like to sell things. That's how we survive. For years it was diamonds across the exchange. Now yarn made into hats for the toilet paper. You got to keep at it. Keep going. Stay alive."

To stay alive and keep at it—I knew exactly what she meant. Then with those words and the look on her face, I finally gave in. "But we'll go the first time just to explore—check it out, as my grandson would say. And I've got to see if they're going to have my space back for my granny dolls in time for Christmas shopping and all."

"We could sell together. I'll pay half the rent," said Ina, and her face was all elated and cheery with smiles. "That way you could still take care of me and everything would be kosher with the SS."

Well, Ina and I started out swell at the Swap Meet, at least to begin with. Some Mexican fellows helped her out of my car with the wheelchair and we set out together, me pushing, exploring the stalls, with her speaking all her languages that fit. All the time sitting up regal like some queen of the Gypsies. First, to sort of get a feel of the place, we went up and down the squares of tomatoes, cutlery, tools, galoshes, old and new clothes, books, books, books—mostly Reader's Digest Condensed. Everywhere we went I had friends from the last couple of Christmas seasons when I sold granny dolls and I was having a grand time exchanging weather reports, health news, and estimates of this season's crowd. I showed Ina off to everyone, introducing her as a prospective seller, and everywhere the folks all were nice to her and she was full of smiles for whatever or whoever she saw or could dimly make out. Finally, after she'd found some Arabs who'd migrated up from L.A. she could talk to, she began to look a bit peaked.

"It's not quite like an Egyptian bazaar, Marta," she whispered, "but, even so, it brings back my youth. And the mountains in the background all yellow. The sun beating down. Dots of green from the shrub oak, but mostly the yellow grass mountains take me right back to Israel."

We had stopped by then, found some sodas, and I sat on a camp stool beside her, both of us in a mood together we had not been before. "I wouldn't want to live anyplace else," I said. "I mean rather than here in Los Perditos. I once spent a couple of years in New York City when my daughter was young, but, hell, I couldn't live there—I don't know how she stands it. Here with these yellow hills is where I fit best and I'll probably just grow old here watching them roll."

"That is, if somebody's good enough to wheel you out to see them," Ina said. And she took my hand in hers—and she'd never done that to me before.

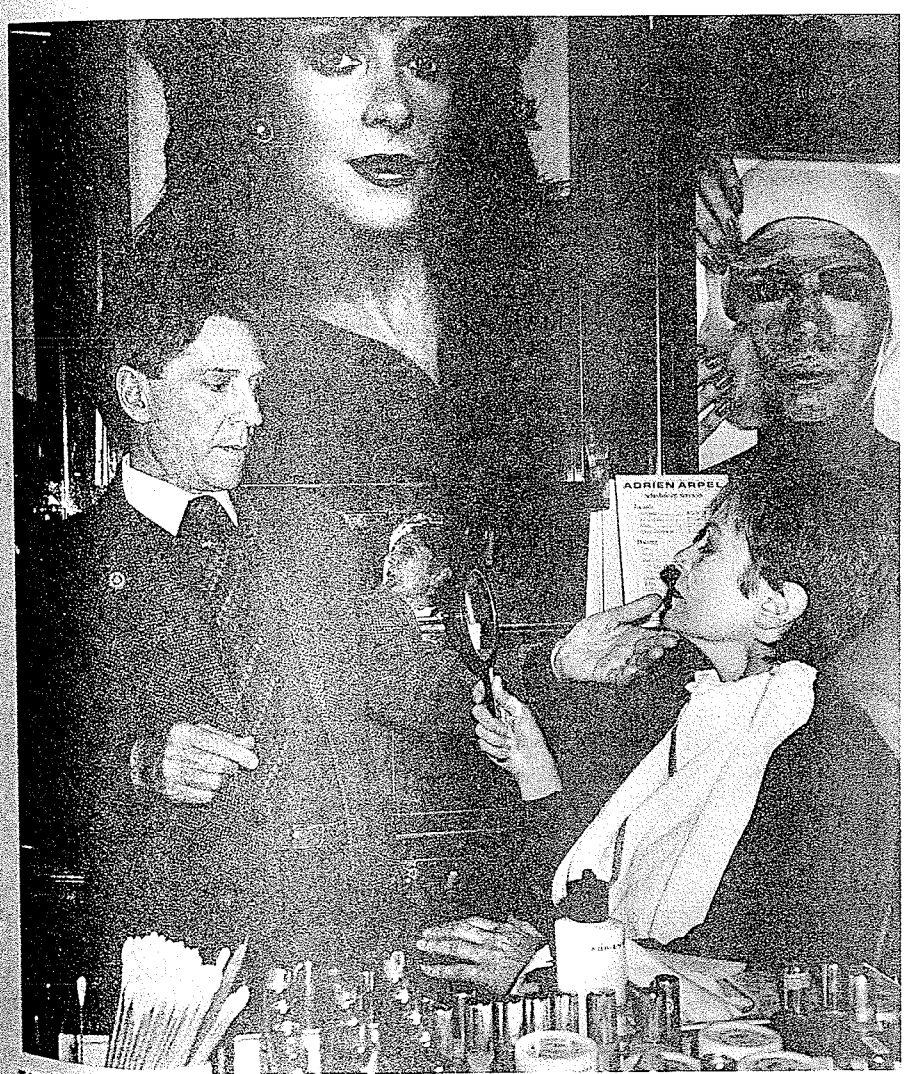
"Come on," I said before I teared up, "let me find out about my selling space for the napkin dolls up in the crafts shed before it gets booked."

"And the Johnny-toppers," Ina said, stiffening up for the resumed ride. "Don't forget that. You and me selling here together. We'd have a hell of a time. I'm good at selling—"

"I know, I know," I said, patting her hand, "you're Jewish. You know how to sell."

She didn't answer, just smiled.

Well, I guess the trip to the Crafts Shed was the beginning of our undoing. I had forgotten that the woman who rents the space there on weekends is also a something or other for Social Security. I wasn't even thinking of that by that time. And she didn't say word one to me about it either. Only too glad to get my check for the space. Once I was finished, Ina was just getting herself drawn together to speak up for her share. Then the woman—Stella Marks—looks down by the wheelchair where we had it parked with the brake on smack dab in her Astroturf. And hers was one of the few stalls had more on the floor of it than blacktop, gravel, or plywood. Then I looked down,



UNTITLED – LYN HUGHES

managing editor at the image bank.

too. There was a big puddle streaming off under the wheelchair in that yellowy color all of us know. And I had double-diapered her too, both layers lined in surgical plastic.

"You can't bring this lady in here, Martha." Stella started to reach for the wheelchair herself. I pushed her away. "She belongs at home. You can't bring her out here at her age."

"She doesn't mean anything by it," I said. But I felt guilty the way you do when you take a new baby out for a visit to in-laws and right away it pees in their lap. "Her nerves in that part of her body are all gone from her stroke," I explained. "She doesn't even feel it when it comes out."

"Take her home, Martha," Stella said. "I guess I can hose it down later. Hope none of my customers see."

It must have been Stella Marks who reported me to Social Security. A lot of people who saw us at the Swap Meet knew I worked there, so maybe it could have been anybody—who knows, even Ina's daughter Elena—upset that I had worn Ina out. Ina was pretty beat down by the time I got her back home.

The people at Social Security did allow me one last visit, though, to make the rounds of all my shut-ins, say good-bye and tell them they'd be getting somebody new. Ina was the last on my list.

I could tell she knew what I came for. Her eyes were just a bit teary—not much. She handed me a Johnny-topper. "I want you to remember me," she said.

"I already have ten at home," I told her. "You'll definitely be hard to forget."

"Take this one," she insisted, and thrust one into my hand. It was sort of a rose color and she'd even managed, in spite of bad eyes, to sew on a few beads.

"Okay," I said. "All right. At least it matches my paint." I stuffed the rose-colored Johnny-topper into my bag. "Hey," I said after a bit, "my grandson sent me a new JAP joke. This one's fresh from New York."

"How's that?" she asked. Maybe it was late. She didn't seem to have her usual spunk.

"Jewish-American Princess. I told you—they're calling them JAPs."

"More of your anti-semitism?" she said. A spark of the old tease came back to her eyes. I told her the joke—the one about how do you know when a Jewish American Princess has an orgasm. And the punchline is that she drops her emery board.

"Oh," Ina said, when I finally explained it to her the third time through. Just flat like that. "Oh, I get it. Anti-semitic but funny. I guess I can laugh at orgasms, too."

Then we both laughed together. "Don't get me started," I said while we were wiping our eyes. "Don't make me laugh. Ever since my bladder infection every time I laugh or I cry, I leak."

"That's how it starts," said Ina. "You better watch out. Pretty soon it will be me diapering you."

"That's only fair," I said. "I'll be sure to call you, so I don't get just any old dope Social Security sends out."

For a while neither one of us spoke.

"Will you be able to get another job, Marta?" Ina suddenly asked.

I thought for a minute about how to answer. I knew what the situation was but I wasn't sure how much I wanted to worry Ina with that.

"They had somebody younger answered the ads," I said. "Right after they told me I didn't have enough experience for this kind of work."

"Forty years raising two families isn't the right kind of experience?" Ina asked.

"Well, what do I know—go fight City Hall. Anyway, I've got a good man promised to support me. So as long as he lives and is able to work I guess I'll be okay."

"The next twenty-five years without working?" The fading sun streaked Ina's hair silver while she talked. "If I had the money that's slipped through my hands I'd hire you to work for me permanently."

"If I had that kind of money myself, I'd quit your old job and take off for the countries where you've already been."

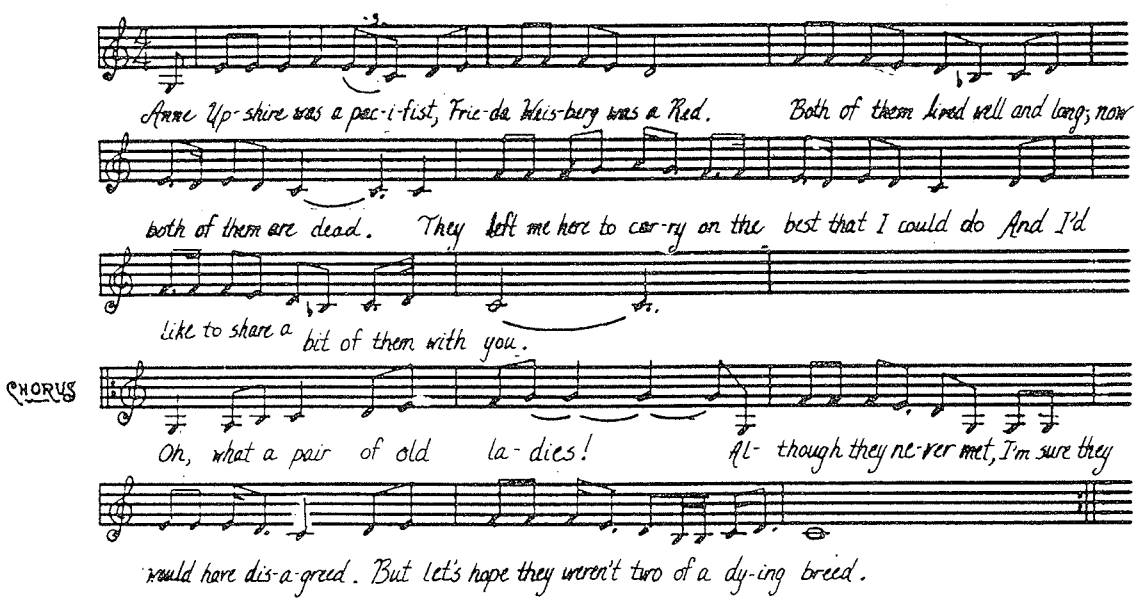
She smiled, creasing the folds of her flesh. There was a long pause when she did nothing more than just squeeze my hand. "You'd better go," she said finally. "Go on. Scoot. I know good-byes in eight languages. You would be here all night."

Even so, I urged her to let me change her and wash her down clean for the night one last time, and do her up ready for bed. We squeezed hands again at the end. That was all.

Out in the evening, driving away from the trailer court, I watched the sun set on the Pacific over the dunes, making sort of sparkly little doodads on the surface of the water like tiny red fish scales shivering in the night sky. To either side I could just make out the parched yellow hills with the shrub oak still dusty and dry before the real rains started in. I did not want to go home right away. I drove up the coast a ways to Morro bay just in time to watch the fishing fleet come in around the reef. I always thought this stretch of coast looked like pictures of Italy I used to pore over with grand plans when I first married Ray.

I parked the car near the shell shop and walked down to the pier to watch the young boys leaning over their rods and the old men lowering crab traps baited with fish heads and guts. Some tourists were snapping pictures of the boats, the boys, and the crab men. One turned her camera on me as I leaned in loose sweater and slacks over a rail. Local color were we? I was probably going to wind up in somebody's slide show, which I supposed was the only way I'd get to be immortalized. I badly needed a drink. I walked down to a little out of the way bar off the pier where a lot of the fishermen came. Some were Portuguese and spoke almost no English. One of the men, fish scales gleaming off the backs of his hands, went to the juke box and put on some kind of Iberian beat. I downed a straight shot of Dewers all in one take. This was, I decided, as much as I was ever going to see of how the rest of the world lives. Ray probably wasn't home yet or I would have called him to join me. I thought of what it must have been like for Ina living in faraway countries to come here. If I had had another chance at an outing with her I might have brought her here to this bar, but she'd probably just leak out on the floor again right where she sat, and then I'd have these people mad at me, too. I was kind of counting on this part-time work to help give me a chance to go with Ray to see some of the places he saw in and out of the war before he married me and gave up going to sea. But if Ina says it's all pretty much the same thing as California, maybe I shouldn't get myself so upset about not having enough time left to get out past Los Perditos.

Vicki Rovere



Anne Upshure was a pacifist, Frieda Weisberg was a Red.
Both of them lived well and long; now both of them are dead.
They left me here to carry on the best that I could do
And I'd like to share a bit of them with you.

Oh, what a pair of old ladies!
Although they never met, I'm sure they would have disagreed
But let's hope they weren't two of a dying breed.

Annie met a black man and, despite some people's fears,
She lived with her dear Theodore for fifty of their years.
She scorned organizations, but she lived Community
Annie made the Movement her own family.
Thumbs down to all oppression—thumb out for the open road:
Annie in her eighties wouldn't mind the highway code—
Arrested in Ohio; busted at the Pentagon
For our loving friend, the struggle was all one.

(CHORUS)

Frieda never married, but she had a few affairs.
She lived for years in Greenwich Village, up two flights of stairs.
She was a rabble-rouser, and she wasn't always kind
'Cause she liked to give folks pieces of her mind.
What she thought of Reagan was pure acid from her tongue.
I like to think that righteous anger helped to keep her young.
We'd watch the news at dinner while my stomach writhed and reeled
But it somehow never seemed to spoil her meal.

(CHORUS)

Marion Wade is touring, and Faith Petric's full of song,
Ronnie Gilbert's harmonizing—they're chugging right along.
There's lots of others who don't sing—they march, and talk, and write
And they're plotting revolution in the night.

We're growing a new crop of old ladies!
It's an honor of a title I'd be proud to earn
And I hope I last until I get my turn.

We're growing a new crop of old ladies!
It's a treasure of a title I'd be proud to earn
And I mean to last until I get my turn.

vicki rovere is a pacifist, feminist and anarchist, in no particular order. she helps to run peoples' voice cafe, a political coffeehouse in new york city.

ILLUSTRATION BY CARRIE COOPERIDER

ELEANOR WACHTEL

Where it C

eleanor wachtel is a vancouver-based journalist, a member of the collective that publishes the feminist literary quarterly, room of one's own, *and a photographer.*

PHOTOS: ELEANOR WACHTEL

AUDREY THOMAS

DOROTHY LIVESAY

JANE RULE

ADELE WISEMAN

Canadian writing came of age about two decades ago. A conjunction of assorted events precipitated this new maturity: the country's centennial and rising nationalism, and buoyant economic times which made it easy for government to support writers and small publishing houses. What was unexpected was that women, who conventionally constitute about twenty percent of whatever is being counted—representation in anthologies, literary awards, arts juries, books reviewed, reviewers, and so on—rose to become what's been described as a literary matriarchy. In other words, even by the prevailing literary standards, often the best writers turned out to be female.

The writers pictured here began writing long before this literary coming of age. Like women in so many fields, they were often isolated by what Judy Chicago's researchers have termed the "bon bon theory," where "special" women are enclosed in individual wrappers, separated from the currents of their time.

For us to come of age, we needed their words—and the words of other women writers—or our view of the world and of ourselves would be fundamentally distorted. Having encountered their words, it has become difficult to return to the words

oming of age: ords ounts

PHYLLIS WEBB

ELIZABETH SMART

of men. As Dale Spender said when accused of bias or exclusionism, "I spent the first thirty years of my life reading men, so I'll spend the next thirty reading women, and then we'll talk about equality. In the meantime I'm specializing in women because everyone else specializes in men."

I took these photographs in the course of interviewing these writers about their work for articles tracing their lives and their books. For me, their portraits retain the power of those meetings.

List of authors and their major works:

Dorothy Livesay b. 1909 poet
Green Pitcher, The Unquiet Bed, Plainsongs, Right Hand Left Hand, Ice Age, The Woman I Am.

Jane Rule b. 1931 novelist
Desert of the Heart, This is not for you, Against the Season, The Young in One Another's Arms, Contract with the World, Themes for Diverse Instruments, Outlander, Lesbian Images.

Elizabeth Smart 1914-1986 novelist
By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept, The Assumption of Rogues and Rascals, Necessary Secrets.

Audrey Thomas b. 1935 novelist
Ten Green Bottles, Mrs. Blood, Songs My Mother Taught Me, Blown Figures, Ladies and Escorts, Real Mothers, Latakia, Goodbye Harold Good Luck.

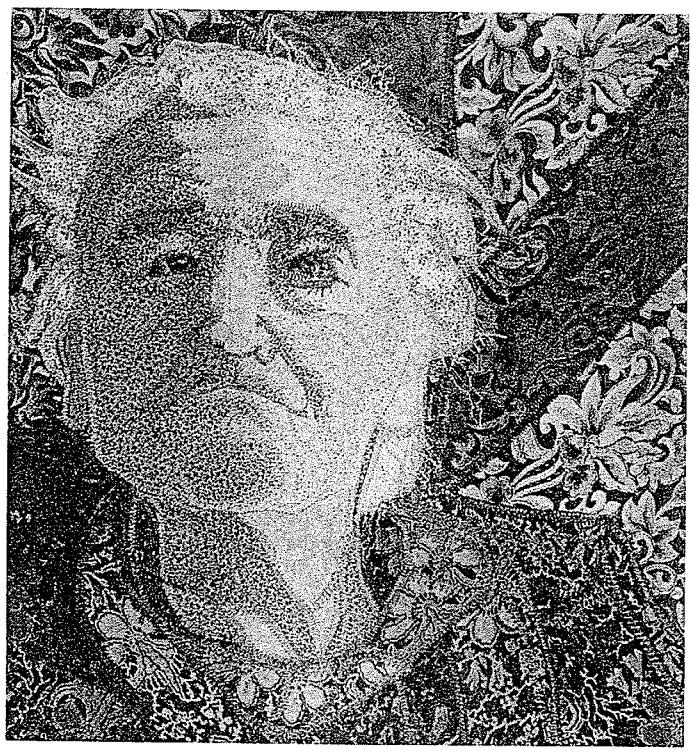
Phyllis Webb b. 1927 poet
The Sea is also a Garden, Wilson's Bowl, The Vision Tree.

Adele Wiseman b. 1928 novelist
The Sacrifice, Crackpot.

MEETING GRAN

FAITH WILDING

faith wilding is a feminist artist/writer/radio producer/teacher who lives in new york city.



FREIDA–DEIDRE SCHERER

deidre scherer is a resident of williamsville, vt, received her bfa from the rhode island school of design and has had numerous collaborative exhibitions.

Gran died on March 17, 1977, four days after her 87th birthday. She was born Alice Wilding, the eldest in a family of eight children (in 1970 I took her name in order to link myself more closely with her). The Wildings lived in Ormskirk, Lancashire, in the north of England, and the father earned his living as a housepainter. At 12, Gran entered domestic service as a "tweeny," or "between" maid, whose job it was to be at the beck and call of both kitchen and parlor, and to do all the odd dirty work of the household. At 24 she met and married an off-duty seaman and persuaded him to get a job with the railroad so he could live with his family. For many years they lived in tiny rooms with very few amenities and an outhouse in back. In 1915 my mother Edith was born. Her parents were determined to give her an education, no matter what scrimping and sacrifice this might demand. "Ede" won a scholarship to a teacher's college in Brighton. She began to teach in the overcrowded slum schools of the ugly industrial town of Widnes, and her earnings helped the family to buy a tiny detached house on the Liverpool Road just outside of Widnes. Though it was cramped and damp, this house had a real bathroom with modern plumbing, and tiny gardens in front and back.

In 1939 life changed radically for my mother. During a walking holiday in Wales, she met a young conscientious objector named Harry. They became engaged, and she was drawn into a circle of friends who were opposed to the gathering war forces in Europe. In 1940 Harry discovered a group of German pacifist refugees living in a community on the Cotswolds. He applied for membership and was accepted. Soon after, he and my mother married and moved to this community—to the great dismay of my mother's parents.

Their dismay turned to grief when, a

few months later, due to war-time harassment and internment of its German members, the community made the decision to emigrate to Paraguay, South America. My parents went out with the first contingent—there was barely enough time for a train-station goodbye—and then my grandparents were left alone. In 1943, three years after the separation, my grandfather died of a heart attack. Gran was bitterly convinced for years that the grief over losing his only daughter had been the chief cause of his early death.

Only three years, then, after her daughter's departure, Gran found herself essentially childless and widowed, living alone on a pension in a house suddenly too big for her. But she was immensely practical and social, with a love for life's basics: friends, weather, flowers, food. Her many friends and their children became her family, and she began to take in boarders for money, companionship, and to satisfy her need to tend someone.

Everyone loved Gran; her wit, generosity, asperity and honesty were teamed with a gentle heart, a touch of sentimentality, and an acute sense of life's small daily pleasures. As growing children in Paraguay, my siblings and I knew Gran only from our mother's picture albums and from the loving, awkwardly written letters she sent. Her simple gifts to us seemed exotic: store-bought clothes, rose-printed birthday cards, real English shoes, flower-seeds, tea, biscuits and chocolate—and best of all, books! Over the years she sent me on my birthdays the entire *Flower Fairy* series. In return I sent her books I wrote and illustrated, watercolor paintings, a carved and polished cow's-horn, book covers woven of palmstraw.

In 1961 my family emigrated to the United States, where I soon entered college. My correspondence with Gran had never stopped, and in 1966 when I decided to take a year off from college to think things out, I wrote to ask if I could come stay with her. I received her guarded answer after many weeks: yes, I could visit a short time, but I could not live with her. Only much later did I fully appreciate the jolt my sudden request must have caused her. After almost thirty years of living alone, having seen neither her daughter nor her grandchildren, the prospect of my visit must have caused her a terrible mixture of joy and pain. Separation was easier to bear when clean and complete. Later she told me about the anger and old bitterness that first welled up in her when she got my letter, then said, "But how could I say 'no' to our Ede's daughter?" and added, "I'd forgiven her anyway, long ago."

I left NYC in a February snow storm,—on my own for the first time. I was only one or two years older than my mother had been when she left home. The plane came in over England, moist and mild in light rain, the fields green and brown, every inch of it a cultivated garden. It was 10 p.m. by the time I hired a taxi for the final leg of the journey; looking out through its windows, I was struck by how crooked and dingy all the houses looked in the wet lamp light.

I was emotionally dazed, just as she must have been when I first saw her at the door with two kind friends who had agreed to stand vigil with her. The first terribly awkward moments were smothered by her practicality, as she bossily insisted on paying the cab driver, lecturing me all the while about tipping and extravagance, etc. Meanwhile, we stole looks at each other, shyly and hungrily, not daring yet to express our confused emotions openly. She looked much like her pictures, except that those had never conveyed her height, her surprising vigor, her angular boniness, and the mischievous twinkle in her eye. For her part, she kept exclaiming over me: how like "our Ede" I was, yet how unlike, how pretty, how thin, how American my accent, what a lovely coat, what lovely luggage, etc. We were inside and alone by now, and fussed 'round each other, half-heartedly eating some stale biscuits and cheese and drinking burned cocoa. Finally, we gave up, exhausted by unexpressed emotion and anticipation. "Time for your bed," Gran said, and led me upstairs to what had been my mother's bedroom, though years of boarders had used it since.

The small downstairs parlor had been warm and close, but the two upper bedrooms and small bathroom were damp and icy. Gran helped me undress as though I was a child, fingering each garment curiously and folding it neatly upon a chair. She marveled that I insisted on brushing my teeth and long 1960's hair, then tucked me into bed and kissed me good-night, "God-bless."

For a long time I couldn't sleep. The bed had an ancient lumpy mattress and was decidedly damp, and the threadbare flannel sheets had been washed and darned hundreds of times. I lay there freezing and thought about Gran. What kept her going all these years? How had she found the strength to live in this cheerless, lonely little house so long? Was she so poor that she couldn't afford new sheets, a proper heating system, good blankets? Later I was to learn that thrift was so deeply ingrained in Gran that she practiced it unconsciously, often denying herself things she could easily have afforded. After Gran's death from hypothermia, my mother found the warm nightgowns, thick blankets and new towels she had sent Gran over the years, carefully stored away in drawers, never used.

I was awakened by Gran pulling the curtains back vigorously on a damp, grey day. "Time to get up, now, love. I've done me marketing and there's a nice egg for your breakfast." It was 8:30. I said that I had to have a bath first, and she handed me a threadbare towel with the admonishment not to use more than a few inches of water because "I've got me washing to do today." Baths presented a problem throughout my stay, and I had to compromise by washing my long hair in the sink. She herself washed standing up at the sink, and took a bath in five inches of tepid water every Saturday.

While I ate the boiled egg, tea, cold toast and marmalade, Gran slurped at a

cup of tea and talked away about the neighbors, wet weather, the minister's illness, politics and the latest football scores. Although she had only an elementary school education, Gran had an intelligent, alert mind, read the paper, listened to the radio, and was prepared to discuss current affairs very knowledgeably.

Breakfast over, she announced that it was time to do the washing. She had set the clothes to soak the night before and now took out her "dolly" tub and wooden washboard. Each garment was vigorously scrubbed on the washboard, after which the whites were put in her boiler and the darks rinsed, put through a hand mangle and hung in the grey drizzle outside. It would never have occurred to Gran to buy a washing machine or to take her wash to the launderette in town. She did the tasks of her household in the exact way she had done them for almost fifty years, heedless of the many labor-saving machines which had been invented during that time.

We spent most of that day talking as we worked about the house and took a walk in the rain around the rural lanes. Gran was as shabby as a gypsy in her old tweed skirt, felt hat, mackintosh and rubber boots. She pointed her nose into the cold drizzle, sniffed the earth-fresh air sharply and led me along at an incredible pace. We walked arm in arm at her insistence, though she was always a pace ahead of me, and as we went she recited the history of each street, lane, tree, and field, describing how it had looked when my mother had walked with her there. A few times, I think she forgot who I was, and thought she walked again with her daughter at her side. We laughed a great deal together—she had a wicked sense of humor which spared no one. When she saw a team practicing rugby in a wet field, she leaned over the gate and started shouting to the men about their lousy scores at last Saturday's match, and as we watched them, she saucily mimicked a sports announcer, sending me into fits of laughter.

The next day I had a chance to see how neatly organized and purposeful Gran's daily life was. We rose at 6:30 and went downstairs, where Gran kneeled at the fireplace to scrape out the ashes and heap fresh pieces of coke on the still glowing coals. The fireplace heated the bathwater. Then breakfast—usually just toast and tea and marmalade—and afterwards, the daily marketing round, for which we walked to the bus stop and rode into Widnes. There we shopped at the covered market, picking a lettuce here, a piece of cheese there, a mutton-chop for dinner, three potatoes. There were other errands in town: a stop at the post office where she paid her "rates" and deposited a few shillings weekly in savings, and a visit to the pleasant Victorian library where she dropped off and picked up exactly four novels a week. We went home to mid-day "dinner," which was a chop, a boiled potato and a bit of unadorned lettuce, followed by the inevitable digestive biscuits, cheese and tea. After tea it was time for her daily radio program, during which Gran knitted furiously. The postman's call brought an invitation to Sunday dinner with Gran's adopted family (Gran had no telephone). After a short nap it was time to do some gardening, Gran's greatest passion, although she didn't have much room for it in her tiny front and back gardens. At five we went to have tea with some of Gran's friends and came back in the evening to listen to the radio and chat companionably.

On Sunday, Gran, who was a staunch Methodist, took me to church with her. She proudly introduced me to everyone as "my Ede's daughter" come from America to see her, and added that I washed my hair every day. After church, Gran triumphantly carried me off to dinner with her "family," for whose children she had cared and who had adopted her as their grandmother. We were served a huge, overcooked dinner in the English style, and throughout the meal, I was told story after story about all the things Gran had done for them. It was obvious that Gran was an adored and precious member of this family, and it made me feel immensely relieved and grateful. My own family had not abandoned Gran out of malice or neglect, but had been forced to leave her because of ethical and religious calls to another kind of life. With wonderful human versatility Gran had simply made herself another family, which was, in many ways, much more akin to her beliefs and way of life than her biological family.

After a week together, I announced that I was now ready to go to Oxford to live and find a job. Gran seemed both relieved and reluctant, and at the last minute offered that I could live with her for a while if I liked—making the supreme sacrifice of her independence. I smiled through tears, thanked her and said that I would certainly consider it, should I not be able to make my way in Oxford.

Gran saw me off on the bus to the south of England. The morning was dark and drizzly. I saw the tears in her eyes as she kissed me quickly, and I whispered, "I'll come back at Easter to see you, Gran." I kept my promise.

My father called me on March 17, to tell me Gran had died. She had been ill, suffering from hypothermia—the loss of body heat. Clinging fiercely to her independence, she had only been moved to a nursing home at the end. My mother, summoned from America, went to spend Gran's last days with her. Mother and daughter sang hymns together and reminisced. The room was bright with the garden's earliest daffodils when Gran died, having hung on with great will power until her birthday. Gran had put all her things in order. My mother found carefully wrapped away all the things we children had ever made for Gran, and she had left each of us $100, a sum it was difficult for me to spend when I thought of how much comfort it could have bought her. But it was her way.

Gran asked astonishingly little from life. She let it come to her in its rhythms and seasons. I hope I will be like her when I come of age, gaunt and joyous and vigorous, sniffing the keen wind, walking the muddy lanes in my old mackintosh.

On Common Ground

Helene Aylon

belene aylon is a process painter and ritual artist whose ten-year ecofeminist ceremonial bringing together of women from warring nations in lebanon, the u.s.s.r., and japan will culminate in 1990.

In 1980, I closed the studio to go down the San Andreas Fault Line in order to gather the sands from the trail of the earthquake and cover these sands with the salt I would gather from Death Valley—as though the salt could soothe the soreness of the Earth's crack like a gargle of salt water soothes a human throat that is scratched from screaming.

At the southern end of the quake line stood the San Onofre nuclear power complex thrusting its silhouettes against a stretch of beach which was marked with my truck prints. There were no bird prints or foot prints on these sands. These sands were endangered and therefore had to be gathered. Then, on the northern end of the quake line, near the Livermore Weapons Design Laboratory—a nuclear hamlet with numerous parking lots that accommodated an unknown society in the life affirming Bay Area, the endangered Earth was also gathered.

Ocean sands would be the antidote poured onto the endangered sands/lands—as though the tidal regenerative force of the ocean could be transmitted by its very shores.

Among the specific sand gatherings at the Pacific Ocean was one with pregnant women who swore on each other's stomachs that their unborn child would never go to war. On the first day of 1981, mothers with infant sons gathered sand in California and in New York City to make this simultaneous New Year's vow—that their tiny male child would never go to war; in the gathering with mothers and their teenaged sons, the boy children were told of the draft so that they could begin to think about the invitation awaiting them.

All of the quake sands and salt and endangered sands and endangered earth and dry ocean sands and damp ocean sands were brought to the Women's Building in San Francisco in February of 1981.

They were poured in a ceremonial performance made from two levels of steep scaffolding—two women on each level, as 500 sitting on ten tons of sand, resembling an indoor beach, harkened to the sounds of the pouring like a *Tkiyah* on the Day of Awe. The various sands descended and descended—grain rain and salt snow. Sand showers over Onofre, shore plops over Livermore. The four women who poured almost keeled over with the heavy pull of the falling sands, and the eight women who carried the sealed plexi frames of endangered sand/land walked in silence.

When it was time to take the ten tons of sand out of the building, the 500 carriers knotted sacs and carried it out—their burden of survival—like refugees in the night. Composer Pauline Oliveros instructed them to hum "hmm" and when the load got too heavy, to voice "hmm-uh." Dancer Anna Halprin led the Exodus of the carriers, some of whom pulled the burden, some who pushed it out. Some who dragged. Some who went alone. Some who went with others. Some who knotted the sac with a triple secure knot. Some who just twisted the end and filled it fully. Some who filled it halfway to ease the carrying.

The metaphor touched a deep place, a longing to move mountains. Can the women do it? Ah. Mount St. Helens, you too were erupting, convulsing. You too could take no more.

May, 1981. Gathering sand at the Pacific Ocean. On the next day, these sands would be brought to the Mediterranean. "Here," I would say to the Arab and Jewish women, if ever I found them in Israel. "Here are women's canvas handkerchiefs filled with sand, a gift from the Pacific to the Mediterranean." Each, a long

string, two tiny bundles of sand wound on each end of the string. The women in Israel would wear these like open necklaces around the backs of their necks—the small double sacs hanging against their breasts, the sacs swaying slightly as they bent to gather stones.

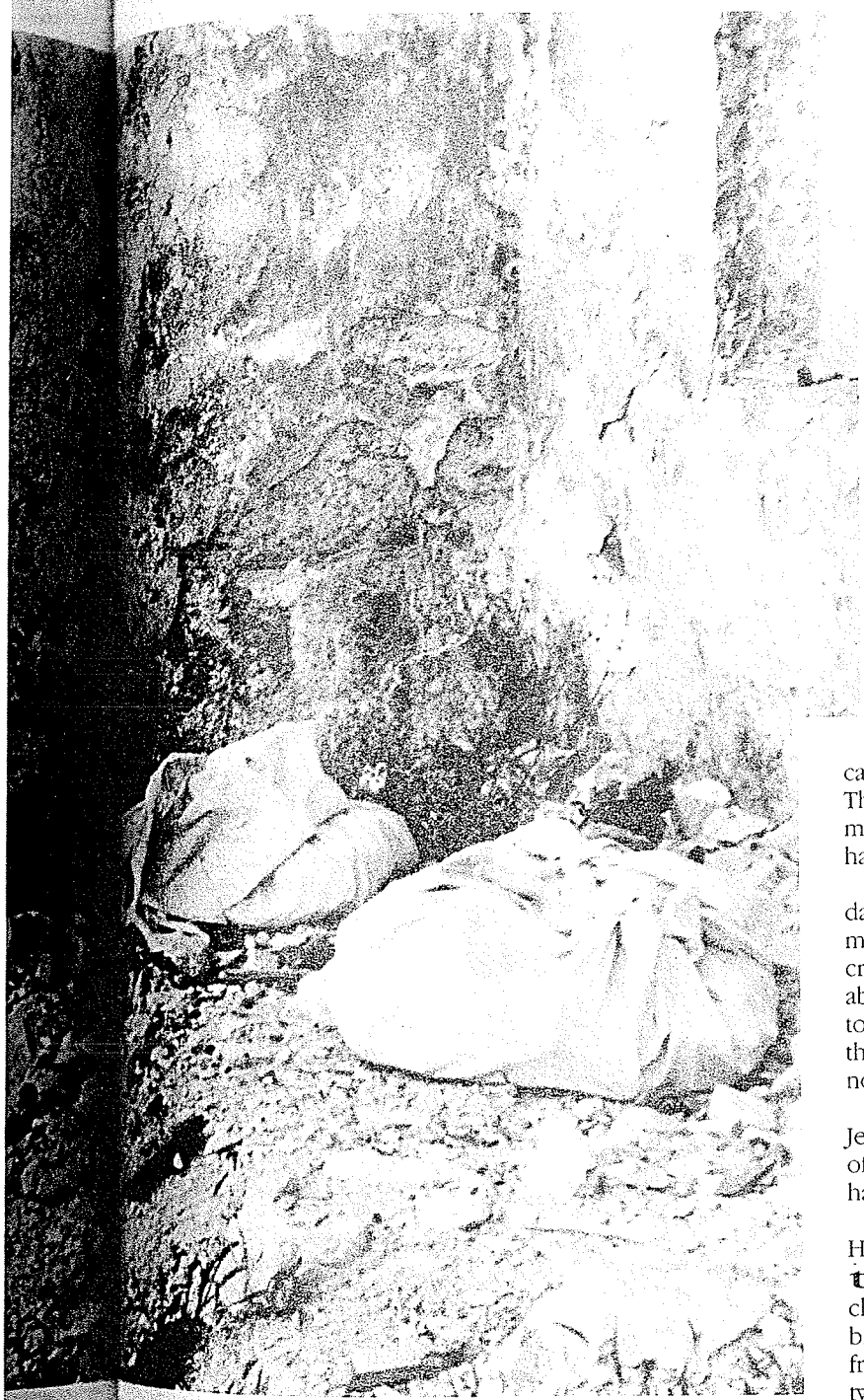
The Semite women would pair up, each one picking up two corners of a cloth, only five feet of muslin between them, between each Arabic and Jewish woman. They would lay the cloth on the ground in one gesture, that cloth that would receive the stones pulled out from under, out from under.

I imagined how they would place the stones upon their shared cloth. With gentle respect? No, they would probably drop them in frustration; an eternal Yiddish sigh might be heard: Oy, veyus meer. And the Arabic equivalent.

For six weeks I had looked for the women and for four weeks we had gathered for talks. I found them when I spoke at the Feminist Conference—the "Kenes." I found them in the Women's Centers in Haifa and Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. ("Kol Ha-eesha," the Voice of the Woman, had branches in all three cities—just a room for coffee and talk and women's books.) I spoke at WIZO University in Haifa and met Arab students there. I had an Arab neighbor. Those who were interested informed others. Hiam, Ha'Yas, Chedva, Rena, Dena, Neely, Serena, Ofnan, Rivka.

Can there be pacifism if the enemy lurks at the door? Can there be Shalom/Salaam if the big enemies have set up the little enemies for the big enemies? Can the women stop it, STOP IT, STOP IT, STOP IT, once and for all, for God's sake?

On the second meeting I passed around the photographs of the Sand Gatherings from the lands of California, the Sand Carrying out of the Women's Building. Sand is holy, "ze Kadosh," Hayas said, her dark eyes glistening with her own light. Of course, it struck me that the Hebrew word "Adama" (Earth), and the word "Adam," (human being) have the same root. We are part Earth, and to Earth we return. Chedva, Rena, Neely, Hiam, Serena, Hayas, Layla, Denee, Amiera, Ramonda, Yona, Wafa. I will bring my sister. She will take her daughter.



FROM ISRAEL TO HIROSHIMA – HELENE AYLON

On the third meeting, we talked above the sound of speeding cars in the hills of yore. Now Hiam showed me photographs. They were the ones she took of her sisters' Arabic weddings. "I, myself, will never marry," and I questioned why, holding her hand until she could answer.

"My sisters had to remove their pubic hair on their wedding day to appear more virginal to the groom. My own mother had to make the concoction, sticky as molasses. It hurt so." She saw me cringe, another woman. At that moment, the last thing she cared about was that I was Jewish. "You know, footbinding and clitorectomies were also executed by mothers who do not realized they do the work of the patriarchy," I said. "Just like here," she nodded. And we knew our common ground was feminism.

And so it came to pass that two by two, one Arabic and one Jewish woman did struggle to pull out stones from the dry crust of the Earth at Vadi Salib in July of 1981. They did pull until their hands became moist from the Earth beneath the crust.

"These stones were here before the Jew, before the Arab," Hiam noted.

Then their hands would meet as they tied the corners of the cloth together in double knots. And when they lifted the sac to bring it to the center of the archway, the stones did make a sound from within, clanging. A ten-year-old Jewish daughter and a twelve-year-old Arab daughter giggled at the solemnity of their mothers. "Do one yourselves!" Neely suggested to her daughter. And so it came to pass that the daughters of Sarah and the daughters of Hagar followed their mothers and their little brothers joined them gleefully, handing them the stones. At the end of the Gathering, the deserted village had two sacs of stones in every archway.

"Let us leave these sacs for the police to find," Chedva suggested. "They will think these are bombs, and when they pull apart the knots and look inside, they will discover women's unity."

For a second, I thought as an artist. In other performance ceremonials the artifact remains as art object. But Chedva's suggestion was perfect for the intent of this piece. "Yes Chedva, let's leave them here as they are and all go to the nearest cafe."

ACCEP IN SI

LOIS GRIFFITH

COMMENTARY: This all has to do with her faith in the Christian ethic that man must make God present on earth, that man is responsible for making the will of God known to all men.

This all has to do with interpretation.

This has to do with her interpretation of her difference and with her schizophrenic existence in two worlds: in a black world where she is an asset to her race, and in a white world where she is an asset to her race.

Lorna is a child.

Lord, she is not worthy. Lord, she is not worthy. Make her an instrument of truth, so that she may know more clearly, follow more nearly, love more dearly, day by day. God loves a cheerful giver.

VERSICLES: She is nine years old, and her father decides that she isn't learning to read well enough at the public school around the corner from their house.

The minister at St. George's Church tells Oliver that since there are Episcopalian day schools, and that since he is a member in good standing of the Episcopalian church, Oliver should be able to swing a scholarship for his bright little daughter, Lorna.

After Lorna and her parents have an interview with the headmaster, and he compliments the child on her good handwriting, she is admitted to the school. Her mother works in housekeeping for a big Fifth Avenue department store. Her mother gets an employee discount on any merchandise bought in the store. Her mother buys her some new clothes because Lorna is going to St. Luke's School down in Greenwich Village in New York City.

It's been a few years now since President Truman desegregated the U.S. Armed Forces, so there is no reason why the daughter of a black Episcopalian West Indian family should not be admitted to an all-white Christian school.

COMMENTARY: Things converge so that she is the medium through which experience expresses itself. She is too young to articulate details in such a way that their order gives meaning to existence. She has no power over abstract concepts that have been created to justify certain kinds of behavior. She celebrates small epiphanies in her heart and knows that God is eminently situated to put in an appearance at any time in any place.

VERSICLES: It is 1956, two years after the landmark Supreme Court decision on segregation. Lorna's mother sends her little brown-skinned girl to the hairdresser once a month to have the child's hair washed and pressed. When the girl's hair is ironed out and free from naps and tangles, her braids are long and hang halfway down her back.

The hairdressers in the beauty parlor think she is a beautiful child. They argue over the right words that best describe the color of her skin: pumpkin, but darker than pumpkin, with a copper tint to it, more like a raw sienna flushed with gold. Put some silver and turquoise on her and she looks like an Indian. Pure Indian with her hair all pressed straight and shiny.

COMMENTARY: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Turn the other cheek. Forgive them because they don't know what they do. Sticks and stones can hurt, but words can't harm, omissions are not wrong.

Oh God, I love you.

Oh God, I give myself to you today.

Oh God, I ask you to help me today.

VERSICLES: White buckskin shoes and bobby sox are in style along with dancing to "Tutti Frutti." Allen Ginsberg is writing *HOWL*, and everyone in Greenwich Village plays the guitar and dresses in black. Rock'n'roll is being born and Chuck Berry is singing "Good Golly Miss Molly."

Little Lorna is the only colored child in her class. Diedra isn't colored, although she is as brown-skinned as Lorna. Diedra is Hawaiian, and nobody would ever say she is a colored or a Negro. Marie is much more fair complected than both Lorna and Diedra, but nobody says she's not white, even though she has really kinky hair. Marie's father is a white doctor.

The children don't think much about racism, except that Megan is having a birthday party, and since she's inviting

TABLE YOUR GHT

only white boys, she has to invite only white girls, even though Lorna is her friend, even though Lorna was the only one to stand by her when everybody else in the class was calling her a monkey because she has so much hair on her arms.

When Megan tells Lorna that she can't come to the party, Lorna wants to cry, but holds back her tears because she doesn't want all of these white Christian children to see that she is wounded. They already know that she is different.

COMMENTARY: Questions start coming to her mind about why some people are included in the warm friendship circle of a group of girls skipping rope in the schoolyard at recess. What makes some people acceptable and others not? Who decides this? There are the haves and the have-nots. Everybody has something of his own. Aren't we all children of God? Why do the have-nots want what belongs to the haves? Envy and treachery grow in the hearts of those who have nothing else to plant there.

VERSICLES: The headmaster of the school tells all the children at morning prayer that bravery is something that is required of all truly Christian people.

Lorna is in love with the idea of being a devout Christian person. She wants a cross tattooed on her chest. Every martyr, she is told, has undergone some kind of suffering. She wants to know God and have him talk to her. With her rollerskates on, she sits under the big tree in back of the school and tries to still all the talking going on inside her head, but she can't hear the voice of God.

It is after school and most of the children in her class are inside the rectory for catechism in preparation for their confirmation, that day when the bishop comes to the parish church and lays his hands on the heads of those who are to be initiated. After that happens, you are allowed to take holy communion with the adults. You become a full-fledged member of the Episcopalian church, and your name gets written down in the ledger of the parish in which you are confirmed.

Her parents have noticed a change in her since she started going to the new school. She has become distant. They don't want to lose touch with their only child. They don't want her to forget that she is a colored child, even though she spends most of her days in an all-white world. They don't want her confirmed in the white church. They don't want her name written in the ledger book of St. Luke's Church.

Lorna wants to be part of that warm circle of children at school who learn their catechism and are treated to cocoa and doughnuts afterwards. She wants her classmates to see that the same bishop who will put his hands on their heads will put his hands on hers. Then they can all go to the communion rail and share in the holy supper.

On Saturday afternoons her father puts her on the number fifty-two bus that stops in front of St. George's Church on the corner of Marcy and Gates Avenues in Brooklyn. It is an Episcopalian church with a large black West Indian congregation. St. George was the hero who slew the dragon. She goes there for religious instruction in preparation for her confirmation.

The other children there all seem to know each other. She is a stranger. She doesn't want to memorize the Ten Commandments. She wants to read *Alice in Wonderland*. Little girls whisper behind her back that she is stuck up because she has a scholarship to a white school. They all go to public school. They pull her braids and pinch her on the sly when the priest isn't looking. They hide her coat behind one of the radiators in the parish hall. She finds it wrinkled and dirty. She knows her mother will scold her for getting it messed up. She know her mother will cross-examine her about how it happened, but Lorna vows to say nothing.

She is standing in front of the church waiting for the bus to take her home. A group of the girls from the confirmation class come along and try to start a fight with her. She has no reason to fight with them. They call her names and tell her they think that she acts like she's better than they are. They tell her just because her braids are long and straight is no reason to be so uppity in her manners. One of these girls, a big, black, ugly one, has scissors and cuts Lorna's braids while the other girls hold her. The ugly girl throws the hair in the gutter, then all the girls run away, leaving Lorna alone, still waiting for the bus. She knows there will really be hell to pay now when she gets home. Her parents have spent a lot of money over the years sending her to the hairdresser, but she doesn't cry. She is brave.

lois griffith has written plays that were produced at the nuyotican theatre festival, the public theatre and theatre for the new city. she's currently at work on an novel, accomplices.

HEADLESS WOMAN - HELENE BRANDT

RACHEL ROSENTHAL

GENESIS

I am the smug fulfillment of light-years of dogged morphogenesis. Why can we see 170,000 years back, on the cosmological stage, the star bursting its heavy metal now, NOW! See how bright! Immensities of space like a lens, a magic lantern through the eons. But here, so close, under our very nose—Olduvai, Choukoutien, Les Eyzies. We see nothing but the infinitesimal remnant, if lucky, not then but now—a petrified femur, skull fragment like a piece of eggshell tinted by acid soil and preserved in a stratum like an Easter treasure.

Who is the lucky finder? A jubilant paleontologist or a bulldozer?

All that sleuthing! These old bone shards are not loquacious. But our mind reels out a silver cord over the vast distances of linked chromosomes, like a chain, "we are the world," hand in hand, brain to brain, putting back the vertebrae, the molars, the sockets, filling in the cartilage, dressing the wounds.

Flesh is squirted into the tentative skeletons like shampoo mousse, lightly. Sketching silhouettes with overhanging brows, but erect, walking, one two, striding with their bare feet leaving us a precious print in the tacky lava bed.

170,000 years. Most of them B.C., of course.

We were "wise" then, they tell us, but not "wise wise" as we later became.

It was us but without history. We had no past, no future. We attended to the present—a neat trick if you can do it and most of us have forgotten how.

We already had all our marbles, idling there, and for an eternity of Time, there was no time.

What was Time then?

The Time it didn't rain.

The Time of the Big River Fight.

The Time all the babies died. The Time the Great Mother shook with anger.

And then tales. And the gestures. And then dance.

The Great Events.

But not progressive, cumulative, I don't think. Not for a long time.

But one day it happened.

How did it creep up on us? One day there were beads, and body paint, and carved ivory, and counting moons, and flower burials, and anthropophagy was magic. We turned around and it was everywhere, every which way. And Time took on a linearity with the new evidence. Like: the time before and since tailored clothes; like before and after Magdelenian shafts; and the time when people didn't yet paint spirits on the rocks, and now, our caverns ablaze with the captured spirits frozen in mid-gallop...

And then we knew we were no longer beasts.

For we, alone among all creatures, could trap an animal spirit and imprison it in a flat image, animated and fleshed out by our perceptual skills until we saw, not ochre on granite surface but the sinews, bristle and hooves of the thundering, fleeing prey, our Mother Bison, our teacher, our life.

And our foreheads were high, flat, clean, childlike and deadly.

rachel rosenthal is a performance artist who lives in los angeles.
helene brandt is a drawing sculptor who lives and works in new york city.

Julia Alvarez

Pink Clay

julia alvarez is a writer who lives in new york city.

When we were growing up, my cousin Ique and I were inseparable. Everyone in the family was paired up with a best friend in the family. My older sister Mariana and my cousin Lucinda, the two oldest cousins, had a giggly, gossipy girl friendship that made everyone feel left out. My younger sister Elsa and my sweet-natured cousin Teresita were everyone's favorites, a helpful little pair, good for errands, turning jumpropes, and being captured when the large communal yard we played in was transformed into the old west by cowboy Ique and cowgirl me. We galloped our invisible palominos past all the hands that were trying to hold us.

As we grew older, Mother and my aunts tried to encourage a separation between us. The extended family lived side by side in neighboring houses on a piece of property which belonged to my grandparents. There was no keeping anyone from anyone else. When one cousin caught the measles or mumps, we were all quarantined together to get that childhood illness over and done with. Ique and I lived in each other's houses, staying for meals at whatever table we were closest to when dinner was put out, going home only to take our baths and go to bed or to get punished when the report reached our mothers' ears that Julia and Ique had shattered Aunt Titi's crystal-ball garden decoration with their slingshots. ("That's a lie," we defended ourselves, "we broke it with the rake, trying to knock down some guavas!") Or that Julia and Ique had used Lucinda's and Mariana's nail polish to paint blood on their wounds. Or that Julia and Ique had tied up sister Elsa and tiny cousin Teresita to the water tower near the maids' shacks at the back of the property and forgotten them there.

Beyond those shacks, through a guava orchard Aunt Titi had planted, lived my grandparents, in a great big house we went to for Sunday dinners whenever they were home. Mostly, they were far away in New York City, where my grandmother was always recuperating from some illness or other under the supervision of expensive specialists. The illnesses—so the underground family gossip went—were caused by the fact that Mamita had been a very beautiful young woman, and she had never fully recovered from losing her looks. My grandfather, whom everyone called a saint, pampered her in everything and tolerated her willfulness, so that the saying among the family was that Papito was so good, "he peed holy water." Mamita was furious at hearing her husband canonized at her expense, and she took her revenge, bringing home a large jar of holy water from the cathedral with the explanation that she liked having it around the house in case of spiritual emergencies. Since she was not in the least bit religious, the family grew suspicious.

One Sunday during the weekly family dinner, Mother caught Mamita preparing my grandfather's whiskey and water with holy water from the jar. "Damn it!" my grandmother gloated. "You all say he pees holy water, well he's been peeing it all right!"

In New York, my grandfather developed stomach ailments and from then on all the foods in the world were divided into those which agreed and those which did not agree with him. My grandmother supervised this menu religiously, feeling perhaps guilty about earlier things she had run through his system.

When they did return from their New York City trips, Mamita brought back duffle bags full of toys for her grandchildren. Once she honored me with a magnificent noisy drum and once with a watercolor set and paintbrushes of different thicknesses for expressing the grand and fine things in the world. My American cowgirl outfit was an exact duplicate—except for the skirt—of Ique's cowboy one.

My mother disapproved. The outfit would only encourage my playing with Ique and the boys. It was high time I got over my tomboy phase and started acting like a young lady. "But it is for girls," I pointed out. "Boys don't wear skirts." Mamita threw her head back and laughed. "This one is no fool. She's as smart as her Aunt Titi even if she doesn't get it from books."

On her latest trip to New York City, my grandmother had taken her unmarried daughter Titi along. Titi was known as "the genius in the family" because she read books and knew Latin and had attended an American college for two years before my grandparents pulled her out because too much education might spoil her for marriage. The two years seemed to have done sufficient harm,

however, for at twenty-eight, Titi was an "old maid."

"The day Titi marries, cows will fly," we cousins teased. I did not think any less of my aunt for being single. In fact, as a tomboy, I had every intention of following in her footsteps. But Titi used her free time so poorly, she might as well have been married. She read and read, and for breaks, she tended an incredible Eden of a garden, then read again.

"She reads tons and tons of books!" My mother rolled her eyes, for her sister's accomplishments could only be measured by weight, not specifics. Poor, helpful Titi. I hoped soon she'd be able to rope someone into marrying her. I was not in the least bit interested in acquiring a new uncle or in wearing a dress for the occasion, but it would be worth putting up with both inconveniences to see a cow fly.

As we cousins feared, Mamita came back from this latest trip with my Aunt Titi's idea of fun. Instead of the usual oversized, cheap, gaudy, noisemaking, spoiling-your-clothes, wasting-your-mind toys, that duffle bag was lined with school supplies and flashcards and workbooks and puzzle-size boxes whose covers boasted: MASTERING ARABIC NUMERALS; THINKING, READING, DOING; THE WONDERS OF NATURE; A-B-C OF READING; MORE SOUNDS TO SAY. Ique and I exchanged a grim biting-the-bullet look as our gifts were handed to us.

I got a book of stories in English I could barely read, with interesting pictures, though, of a girl in a bra and long slip with a little cap on her head that had a tassel dangling down. "That's Scheherazade," Titi explained. "She's telling the sultan one of her thousand stories to keep herself alive." I knew, of course, that the book was meant to encourage me to read, just as I had been sent to the American school in hopes that they might make a scholar out of me. In a world full of interesting people and all kinds of interesting things, to sit down and read about them rather than experience them! No one could convince me that that was a smart thing to do.

Ique fared much better, I thought, with a see-through doll, whose top half lifted off, and inside were blue and pink and light brown tubes and coils and odd-shaped pellets which all fit snugly together like a puzzle. Titi explained the toy was called THE HUMAN BODY. She had picked it out for Ique because recently, in one of those after-dinner sessions in which aunts and uncles polled the children on what they were planning to do with themselves when they grew up, Ique had expressed an interest in the medical profession. Everyone thought that was very good of him and proved he had a good heart after all, but Ique had confided in me later that he was mostly interested in giving needles and cutting people open on the operating table.

We examined the Human Body doll while Titi read out loud from a little booklet that came with it about the different organs and what each was good for. After we'd learned to put them together so the heart wasn't tangled in the intestines and the lungs didn't face the spine, Ique began to grumble. "A doll, why'd she get me a stupid doll?"

I disliked them too, but this doll was better than a reading book and you could own it with self-respect, seeing as it was a boy with guts. But I was surprised that along with his other organs, this boy didn't have what in those days I called "a pe-er." I'd seen them on little naked beggar boys at the market and once on the same grandfather who peed holy water when I walked in on him in the bathroom ministering to his need. But this doll was as smooth between his legs as a baby girl.

Mamita, who yearned for her youth again, must have remembered what it was like to be young and dumb and fun-loving. She had snuck back for us—when Titi's back was turned—little nonsense presents. I got a paddle with a little ball attached on an elastic string which I whacked and whammed as if it were my reading book, and Ique got a big packet of bright pink modeling clay.

At first, neither of us knew what the packet was. My cousin's eyes blazed like shiny coins. "Bubble gum!" he cried out. But my grandmother explained that no, this was a new kind of modeling clay that was easy to work with. She demonstrated. Pulling off a handful, she molded a ball, bunched little ears side by side, dotted two eyes with a bobby pin she took out of her hair and finished it off with a tiny ball of a tail. She held her hand out to me.

"Ah," I cried, for in her palm was the likeness of a tiny rabbit.

But Ique was not impressed. Bunny or not, he still could not blow bubbles with it.

Then the rabbit was rolled back into a pink ball in Grandmother's palm. Next came a small basket with a braided handle in which you could actually insert a penny, and then a many-petaled flower, not one you'd ever seen in Titi's garden. I marveled at this pink clay. At school, the clay was gray and tough to handle. This must have been the very stuff God had used to make people in the Garden of Eden, or how else could He have worked the fine detail of earlobes and eyelids and newborn babies' fingernails?

All morning, I tagged behind Ique, imploring him to trade me that packet of clay. But he was not in the least bit tempted by my reading book, though he did linger a moment over the pictures of the girl in her underwear before handing the book back. My paddle ball was no good to him either. He was liable to ruin his batting swing by striking at a little jacks ball. "A girl's ball," he called it.

At that, I drew myself up with wounded pride and strode off to "our" side of the property. Ique followed me through a path in the hedges and then lingered by my side as I sat on a patio lawn chair pretending great interest in my book. He paced by me several times, tossing his big ball of clay from hand to hand like a baseball. "What nice clay," he observed. "Very nice clay." I kept my eyes on my book.

A strange thing began to happen. I actually became interested in those dark, dense paragraphs of print. The story was not half bad: Once upon a time, a sultan was killing all the girls in his kingdom,

Roads

Among the Gros Ventes, the word
for a woman's bleeding is power.
I will not need to brood
over that much longer,
and if I were a Lakota
—one hundred years ago?
no, two hundred—woman,
before the white man came,
before his roads crossed ours,
—if I were that woman, I
would soon be allowed to begin
my own vision quest: the young
man's privilege. As I left
the long black road of everyone
else's lives, as I looked
to the very edge of the four
Holy directions, and took
the red road north, I could
chant the two words for power.

None of the men do that.

Sally Allen McNall

Notes: The Gros Ventes are a Lakota tribe of the Northern Plains. The black and red roads are those of life and its troubles and the spirit, respectively.

decapitating them, running swords through them, hanging them. But Scheherazade, the girl pictured in her bra and slip, had escaped the sultan's sword because she had been reading in her father's library thousands of books on history and science and arithmetic and geography. She was smarter than anyone else in the whole kingdom and could recite verses and say jokes and sayings and figure out riddles so that everyone was enchanted and entertained by her presence. She'd gotten so smart that when at last she was captured by the sultan, she figured out a way to trick him. Just as he was about to cut off her head, she asked him if he wouldn't like to hear a story before she died. The sultan agreed and gave her until dawn. But when the sun rose, Scheherazade hadn't yet finished her fascinating story. "I guess it's time to die," she interrupted herself. "Too bad. The ending is very good."

"By Allah," the sultan swore. "You're not dying until I hear the rest of the story."

And this went on for a thousand and one nights of storytelling until the sultan had fallen head over heels in love with Scheherazade on account of her stories. He swore never to kill another woman again.

A shadow fell across the page I was reading. I glanced up, keeping my place in the text with an index finger. I would have given my cousin a dirty look and gone on with my reading if it hadn't been for the magnificent creature he had created. He must have rolled all of the clay into one long pink coil and looped it once, twice around his shoulders like a circus performer's boa. Raising his chin, he passed within inches of me, through the hedges to his own side of the large yard. I knew he was ready to negotiate. I set my book face down on the chair and followed after him.

But beyond the hedge, Ique had run into a captive audience. Little sister Elsa and Teresita watched while Ique wrapped the snake around and around his neck, rolled his eyes, and made awful throwing-up sounds. "Help! Help!" he cried. "I'm being strangled—Ugh!"

In a panic, little Teresita reached out to rescue her older brother. But just then, Ique unwound one end and poked it at her. The small girl screamed and scampered across the yard with Ique at her heels, dangling the snake before him. They crossed the patio of their house, and then Teresita fled indoors. In a minute, we could hear Ique's mother calling out, "Manuel Enrique Rodriguez Tavares!" But Ique fled out of view of the house to where my sister and I stood watching.

As soon as Teresita was safely indoors, Elsa, who could not be long without her other half, headed towards the house. Ique blocked her path. He pinched off a bit of clay from the coil in his hands. "Want some?" he offered.

I was beside myself. He wouldn't even trade with me, his best buddy, and here he was giving it away to a little sister for nothing. "No fair!" I cried, hurrying towards him and pushing little Elsa aside.

"Okay, okay." He motioned for me to lower my voice. He wadded the snake back into a ball and held it out to me. "Trade you." My heart soared. I began bargaining indiscriminately. At last, he asked, "You got any gum?"

I shook my head. Now I saw what worm had been gnawing at him all morning. He had never recovered from the clay not being the Bazooka he had set his heart on. His desire was as deep as mine for his clay, and I knew I would have to satisfy it in order to get that clay.

I made one last desperate offer. "You can have anything you want."

Ique considered for a moment. A dirty little smile spread across his lips. It was a like a liquid spilling and staining something it mustn't. "Anything?" I nodded. He lowered his voice. "Show me you're a girl?"

"Huh?" I said.

His eyes came to rest on the lap of my cowboy skirt. "You know," he urged. I shook my head. "Pull down your panties, that's how," he explained.

I looked around, stalling. My eyes fell on little Elsa, who was following the transaction closely. "Here?"

He jerked his head, indicating the back of the property where there was a deserted chicken coop. I followed, turning every so often and glowering at Elsa. At the door of the shed I gave her a little push to go away.

"Oh, let her in," Ique argued. "She'll go tell."

"I'll tell," Elsa agreed.

I wanted to pounce on her right then and there, but I didn't dare ruin my chances at acquiring the packet of clay. Instead, I narrowed my eyes and gave

MIRROR IMAGE—CYNTHIA SMITH

her little knowing nods before entering the shed. I'll get you later, Little Sister! the nods said. Just you wait.

It was dark and damp inside. A faint light fell through the dirty wire-mesh windows. The air smelled of rich black soil brought down from the mountains to make Aunt Titi's giant ferns grow tall. In a corner, hoses lay coiled like a family of dormant snakes.

Elsa and I lined up against a far wall. Ique faced us, his hands nervously worked the ball of clay into a rounder and rounder ball. "Go on," he said. "Take them down."

Immediately, little Elsa pulled down her pants and panties in one wad to her hips, exposing what she thought was in question, her belly button. But I was older and knew better.

"Go on," Ique ordered impatiently. By now, Elsa had caught on and lowered her pants and panties to her ankles. I gave my cousin a proud, defiant look as I lifted up my cowboy skirt, tucked it under my chin, and yanked my panties down. I steeled myself against his intrusive glances. But all Ique did was shrug his shoulders with disappointment. "You're just like dolls," he observed and divided his ball of clay equally between Elsa and me.

I was dressed in a minute and lit into him. "You promised me the clay!" I cried. "You let her come along, but you didn't say she'd be part of the deal."

Ique tried hushing my angry yelling. He reached over to take back Elsita's half, but she too started bawling. "Come on, please," he pleaded with me. "Please. I'll let you have my Human Body doll, okay?"

I considered a moment, then nodded, and he fled out of the shed in search of his toy.

Elsa sniffled as she patted her half into a small clay ball. She looked over at the half in my hands and asked, "How much you got?"

I glared at Elsa. She was still standing in a puddle of fabric at her ankles. She had a smear of breakfast egg on her chin and the blurry eyes of someone who has just stopped crying. I reached over and pulled her pants back up. She swayed with the force of my lifting. "How much you got?" she persisted. In her eyes was a gleam of material interest I hadn't noticed before.

I held up my half to hers. "Same as you, Silly."

Soon after this pink clay incident, Ique and the boys were settling teams for a baseball game. There was an odd number of boys in the family, so I usually was picked up at the end to round out the teams.

Today, there was an even number of boys—one or another cousin was home with a fever, a sure sign we'd all be bedridden within the week. Back and forth, Captain Ique and Captain Jongi selected from best to worst of the boy players, until only I was left.

"What about me?" I reminded Ique, sure he'd make a case for me. After all, I was a good hitter, an excellent catcher, and had strong lungs for cheering on my team. Ique hesitated, and the group sensed his divided loyalties. A larger number than usual echoed that first cry of "Girls! We don't want to play with stupid girls."

I looked at Ique, my eyes pleading with him, but he merely shrugged and held his empty hands out, palms up.

Off they went, even-Stevens, not one longing or repentant look over his shoulder from my cousin Ique. I stood awhile in that yard, around the bend from where the group was playing, so I could not see the progress of their game or have my tears remarked. I heard scores being shouted; one or another player urged to strike or not strike. I wanted to wreak a terrible revenge on boys, and especially on my cousin Ique. But I could think of nothing that would equal the pain I felt at that moment. I turned towards the house, looking for someone sympathetic who might listen to my side of the story.

poem, page 80: sally allen mcnall has lived and travelled on the great plains since 1976. she teaches writing and american literature at the university of kansas.

cynthia smith is an artist living in vancouver, british columbia. she has an mfa from the maryland institute, college of art in baltimore, md.

TERMS OF ENTRAPMENT – CYNTHIA SMITH

BLOOD & MILK

KATE SINGER

katie singer is a writer in residence at south boston high school and editor of mosaic, *an annual anthology of her students' stories and photographs.*

We are four women soaking
in my great grandmother's pot: Mom,
my grandmother's sister Sadie, Sadie's daughter Ellen, me.
Everyone is sauce: butter, diced onion, warm
milk. We are sleeping in our own
breasts. Nothing will curdle.
This milk is translucent

as amniotic fluid. I see Gramma Esther
and Great-Gramma Katie
staring at us like raw meat.
They think we are too tender.
Esther raises the flame. Her mother
cuts each woman into chunks, helping
us to get done. Get

done. Blood dyes
the milk. My great-grandmother's
knife cuts through cartilage, scrapes the pot.
I keep my nose high to breathe.
My tongue is in locked lips.
I think
I want my body back. Heart,

feet, hips, I move toward sizzling
parts. Breasts, fingers,
fists. Sadie and my mother want to kill
each other. Sadie wants
to get out of the pot. My mother tells me
there's nothing for us

to say to each other. I ask Ellen to come close.
She brings blank paper
and pens, and the diamond from her mother's wedding
ring. She pierces her own head. Sadie
is dead now too. Only my mother
and I are left, her grandmother and mine still
looking in. I figure this is love.

Great Gramma Katie nods, takes her knife
away. She tells her daughter, my grandmother, to turn
down the flame. My mother sees the burns
on my face, feels sick, turns away. I turn
to Katie and Esther. Katie scoops my head
onto the blade of her knife, takes me
to my body and says, "There's nothing to do
about mixed blood."

WONDER CALAVERA –CAREL MOISEIWITSCH

This piece is based on an interview between Maria Meneses and Avis Lang taped in New York City in June 1987. Simultaneous translation is by Gloria Nazario and Yadira Ortiz, with additional translation by Thiago de Mello and assistance from Marta Meneses-Avelar.

I was born in 1933 and brought up near La India mines in central Nicaragua, in the Department of Leon. The mines were the property of North Americans. It was a small town; everybody knew each other and everybody understood what was going on. The life I lived there was an important factor, a determinant of my political awareness of Nicaragua as a whole, because in seeing the injustices and the poverty I saw as a girl, I came to understand much later—between thirty-eight and forty years of age—that there were profound political reasons for this, that it was a necessity for the government to keep people under conditions of poverty in order to control them.

The workers in the mines made only three cordobas a day, which at that time was like five cents. My father was not a miner, but one of my uncles was. I saw a lot of people sick with silicosis, their lungs almost covered by dirt and dust. Every time one of these miners died, some money was given to the family as a pension, but half of it went to Somoza. I never understood the reason that happened—why half went to Somoza and the other half to the miner's family.

There was a lot of poverty for the majority of the miners' children, and the only moments of happiness were during Christmas. Sometimes the North Ameri-

As The Process Advances: WOMEN Emerging Within a REVOLUTIONARY SOCIETY

MARIA LOURDES MENESES

can bosses would have parties for the children and give them presents. But it wasn't any luxury they were being given; it was toys made by the carpenters of their own factories—a present from the people back to their own people.

The school in my town had only first and second grades, so I was taken to Leon, where an aunt of mine lived, in order to continue my education. A lot of the children couldn't go to school, because the parents were ignorant or didn't have the resources to buy clothes for the children so that they could send them. But my own mother did understand that by having an education I would be better off. She didn't want me to be just a housekeeper like herself. She always wanted me to learn a skill that eventually would permit me to have a life that was a little more decent.

So at the age of fifteen I became a dressmaker. I began learning the skill at fourteen, and the next year I started making my own living. At eighteen I got married and my husband and I went to Managua, where I worked in a private shop owned by a rich family, though I also worked in a more familiar shop in my own neighborhood in the evenings. The clothes were made for the rich people, and while working in that environment I began to listen to these ladies' conversations and heard everything they would discuss about the workers.

Living in Managua in a poor marginal barrio during 1967-68 after all my children had been born, I began to integrate myself into the community of San Pablo Apostol. We would meet there in a clandestine way to discuss politics; some priests from Spain had arrived to begin working with people at the grass-roots level within the church. However, this experiment in the parish came to the knowledge of Monsignor Obando y Bravo, who then tried to expel these priests from the country.

I learned a lot of things by being part of the religious community, and I began to raise my political consciousness. I was thirty-seven, thirty-eight when I began to realize that all the poverty that had been with me since childhood was a consequence of the political system in Nicaragua.

Between 1970 and 1971 the youth started taking over churches, and we began to help them. The young men would go in the church, and once inside, they would just close the door. Then we would go out and send them back food and drinks. Under Somoza it was very difficult to get everyone in the religious community involved in this movement. We would have meetings of political groups. We studied the Bible and lots of people went, but when they began to utilize Biblical teachings to refer to the contemporary political situation, the people would become afraid and leave, because in Somoza's time you couldn't use those words, you couldn't talk about those things in those terms, you couldn't have groups meeting. So we would do it clandestinely—underground. Sometimes we met at our own houses and sometimes in the church. Not many people would know about it. What we did was to study the Bible and try to compare it with the reality of our lives.

Already, by 1972, my more mature children—I have four sons and two daughters—were involved in the community-based political groups. I wanted my children to study a profession, but I knew that, in Nicaragua as it was under Somoza, they wouldn't have any scholarships, and we had no money to put them in universities. So, because of the economic situation, we came to the United States, and here I began working with the church of Santa Barbara in Brooklyn. For four years I gave religious instruction and taught the Bible and catechism. It was in doing this—because I had to visit women living alone, women living on welfare, and single women with children—that I started seeing all the misery, the poverty, and the alienation of the people who lived in this country. I always kept in communication with the people in my communities in Nicaragua and kept up with what was happening there, and in 1978 we started doing solidarity work with Nicaragua.

When my family and I came here, we found it much more difficult than we had thought it would be. We didn't know the language, and we didn't understand the laws. We did have a son already at Cornell who was a very good student and was lucky enough to have a scholarship, and his living here made it easier for the rest of us to come and be residents. The universities here had told us that with what my husband and I were making, we would be able to pay for the education of our other children. But this was not the reality. Both of us together were making only $14,000 a year after income tax.

I worked at a factory on 28th Street between 7th and 8th, making pants. I was able to do everything, all the parts—zippers, all of it—but it was always a misery what I earned. They would pay 24 cents to sew one pair of pants. In order to make at least $30, I would have to make at least two hundred pairs of pants.

I came from my country with a political consciousness, but when I really became much more politically conscious was as part of the working class in this country. I started talking with people from Puerto Rico, Santo Domingo, and elsewhere in Central America and started asking questions about their countries. I never understood why it was that the people from Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic were so much more conscious than the others. Maybe the conditions there allowed that to happen, as opposed to Nicaragua, where there had been so much repression.

My children would work during the day and study in the evenings. Most of them are now back in Nicaragua. One son left the U.S. right after the Triumph to participate in the literacy campaign. He and our son who had studied philosophy and literature at Cornell and Yale are both part of the international-relations department of the Nicaraguan government. Another son is now mobilized with the army, which I just found out yesterday. The youngest son is here studying aviation mechanics. One daughter is here, married, and the other is working in Nicaragua with the Ministry of the Exterior.

What I am doing now is working with Casa Nicaragua in New York, where I am part of the coordinating committee and am responsible for finances as a bookkeeper. Casa Nicaragua is a cultural organization, and through it I'm keeping up with the work that Nicaragua needs now, which is work that I feel is also part of myself.

It was after the triumph of the Revolution that women began to have opportunities for participation. Before, they were not integrated into Nicaraguan society, and now all women—at all social levels—participate within the revolutionary government. For myself, I feel very positive about taking on these new kinds of responsibilities. I feel that through the revolutionary process women began to fulfill themselves and to achieve a little emancipation. Logically it can't yet be total, but as the process advances, women also advance with it.

Of course, changing into the "new woman" is difficult. For me, for example, the experience of this change didn't happen from one day to the next. Many women have experienced this phase in Nicaragua. For many of them, their children—who were already integrated into the struggle—went to fight, and at a given time, they backed up their children and began to get involved in the revolutionary process themselves. They began to feel that they too have the right to be free, to be creative, to demonstrate that they have talent and that they could contribute a lot to the society. Many women entered into the revolution as mothers, but others fought in a different aspect, as when AMPRUNACS began.

REVOLUTION – NORMA HOLT

norma holt is a photographer living in new york city.

AMPRUNACS was the first women's association to fight against the disappeared (*los desaparecidos*) and all the peasants' deaths and all the barbaric things committed by Somoza. At the time AMPRUNACS sprang up, it was made up of professional women belonging to the petit bourgeoisie. These were the women that Somoza feared the most, because they were of his own class level. Many of these women were mothers, but others were young professionals who saw the great injustices which were happening, the daily disappearances of our youngsters and of the peasants. At first they started protesting against so many disappearances, and afterwards they began to nourish the women from the grass-roots base. That's when they began to work as couriers, as nurses, as grass-roots organizers to raise consciousness. They worked in the "safe houses" mainly during the insurrection, but at the same time, women began to take part in the process as a whole and began to gain consciousness. They began to work on all the aspects needed during the insurrection, which touched the life of the entire nation. It was definitely very important, the women's participation.

Others integrated into the struggle only to die young, fighting, like Luisa Amanda Espinosa, like Arlen Siu, like Claudia Chamorro, like so many, many others. Many others were raped, tortured, massacred, and jailed for a long time—like Dora Maria, like Doris Tijerino (now head of the Sandinista police), who many times was jailed, tortured, and everything. We began to see that the Nicaraguan woman, by fighting in the forefront of combat, gained her rights to participate in all aspects of society.

And all this goes on supporting the revolutionary process, because in Nicaragua there is a "new man" who is evolving, but at the same time the "new woman" is evolving also—a woman with a different perspective on life, not merely the woman who had been only the instrument for the man, a woman doubly exploited. Now there is a new woman who can make her own decisions, a woman who can decide whatever she wants in life.

Many women are going out for military training and to fight or to work, and some men are now staying home. There is now a "responsible paternity" law under which women can make decisions about the lives of their children, where before it was the case that permission had to be asked of the father. Another part of this law is that if a man ends the relationship with a woman, he has to give economic support for the children, and this is changing a lot of things in the ways that they relate to each other.

In my own personal example, my husband and I have been married for thirty-five years. If I have a problem with my husband, I am now free to tell him to leave. Before, he used to say, "From the door of the house out, I am a totally free human being. I am married from the door in." When I became involved with the Nicaraguan women's association AMNLAE and all the other groups, he used to comment that there was a change in me. Now he accepts it, even in cases where I have to go to another state to give a talk and stay overnight.

He never understood how much care a child needed; he never assumed that that was something you had to do. Now he says, "How much work! How could you do it? Six children!" In other times, if I would leave, he would never cook anything for himself, but now he just fixes whatever he can when I'm not around. It's all new for him, but he understands perfectly well that these changes are for the well-being of the people.

maria lourdes meneses is a member of the coordinating committee of casa nicaragua in new york city.

Olive Distressed

helen duberstein

helen duberstein's plays have been produced off-broadway and her poems and short stories have been published in many literary magazines and anthologies. she is working on a novel.

Olive was the victim of a push-in mugging. A neighbor called Barnaby and Andrea before the police did.

"Your mother is fine, doing just fine."

Andrea worried, but Olive did well. Olive would not be budged from her place, her turf, her beautiful home, though the neighborhood was a shambles about her. Her husband's ghost remained in that apartment. His essence. She walked the streets, hunched over, in silence, shy now because of her slight distortion of speech, her slight limp, which did not interfere with the agility of her conversation nor her enjoyment of her Friday nights with her daughter and son-in-law.

Meredith, too, was glad to visit with her grandmother. She found Olive an excellent subject for the camera. Olive told her stories by the hour and posed impishly. Meredith watched over Olive as she did her exercises. Even when the therapist did not come, Olive made sure to exercise.

Olive fired the homemakers the agency sent. It was no joke, yet Barnaby and Andrea joked about it. Rosetta lasted two days? Joanna, one? Two hours! If they sent a man to wash the windows, Olive panicked. The smell...

"Do you suppose Olive was raped when she was mugged?" asked Meredith.

"Nonsense," said Barnaby.

"Still," insisted Meredith, "You read about these things in the newspapers. Besides, Grandma's behavior, her nastiness towards the helpers, perhaps it all has to do with her defense of herself, the pushing off of the offense of men invading the internal regions of her being?"

"Nonsense," said Barnaby. He read the article and looked at the pictures in *The New York Times* that Meredith shoved under his eyes.

Nonsense, Barnaby thought. All Olive ever thinks of is herself. It's still the same. She wants Andrea back and all to herself.

Still... "Where is it? The money?" The hoarseness of the visitation was in Olive's voice as she described the abruptness of the attack. "Two nice-looking men, who would have thought? Just followed me in through the door I unlocked downstairs, just followed me down the hall, then, right behind me, pushed the door behind me, strong-armed their way into my interior, the interior of my rooms, my home..." As Olive shakily put the key in her lock, the hoods simply swung the door open behind her and entered her... "the smell, always the odor, remains..."

"Yes," said Meredith, "I think there is the distinct possibility of rape. It sounds to me..."

"Nonsense," said Barnaby, "Nonsense. And I wish you would stop talking about such things. It's pretty annoying. What do you know about rapes, anyway?"

"I couldn't breathe. The mattress was pushed over me. The heaviness, the smells, the strong smells, the intensity. They ripped my brassiere, where I kept ten ten-dollar bills secured with a safety pin. Threats. Threats. Where is more? More? More money?"

Olive phoned. The phone rang in Andrea's dark loft. She was deep at work in her studio on a new canvas while carnival music and sounds permeated the household from the hi-fi, permeated the loft as well as her psyche. The canvas burst forth with that hidden force and spilled over into the dark loft pierced by the telephone's ring.

"Barnaby?" she yelled, but Barnaby was out. "Damn!"

Andrea tripped over a misplaced chair and the long wire which she had to trace by hand in the dark to reach the receiver.

Olive was in pain. "I hear music, Andrea, that keeps sifting in. It is a carnival. I hear a calliope in the distance."

Andrea freaked out. By some strange set of vibes was Olive tuned into her psychic wavelength? Her own reality of the empty space? Her own real world of the canvas and the wild display of color that vibrated into the sound and was picked up by the music? Her own real world and the forms and shapes that Andrea conceived seemed part and parcel of what Olive described over the telephone wires from her place miles uptown. Olive was frightened. Andrea freaked out.

"Don't be frightened, Mom," she managed to say. "Don't be frightened, Mom. In some strange way, I think I know just what is happening, just what you are going through. It's okay Just take it easy, Mom. I'll be up tomorrow, Mom."

Olive wandered off into the hallway of her apartment house. She knocked on all the doors for company in the middle of the night, someone to hold her close. The aura of carnival music going on in the loft downtown on the flat surface of the canvas went on at Olive's head, between her eardrums.

The next morning Olive called frantically. The neighbor called, also. Olive was still in pain, pains all over. When Barnaby and Meredith arrived in Olive's apartment Olive was dressed and waiting, stretched out on the davenport in her livingroom. Olive kept up a strong conversation, particularly about the smells, the smells, the smells.

2

On a Saturday at the beginning of December, Olive entered Hertzl Hospital through the emergency room. The snow drifts melted with a sudden show of sunshine. It was difficult getting her admitted. No one in the emergency room was in authority. No one wanted to admit Olive to the hospital, even though the symptoms persisted. The attendant suggested that Andrea take Olive home. Andrea, stranded by the taxi driver, stranded by Barnaby, with Meredith, felt stranded even by the rows of benches, mostly unfilled.

"Take your mother home. Take her home."

"Golda Meier, I know, wants to get married, and is only waiting to get out of that job to do so. She has a friend." Olive winked roguishly at Andrea.

"Golda Meier has a friend?"

"Yes! A good friend, boyfriend, a man who has loved her and waited for her until she should be free, and soon she is free and she will marry him and they will settle down and she will be a balabusta, believe me."

"Mom keeps a good home," Meredith said.

Olive was in obvious undifferentiated pain that seemed to be everywhere and that originated nowhere. She swayed to the carnival sounds. She hummed.

"Take her home," the attendant suggested. "A little tender loving care, perhaps, of the aged, is all that is needed."

"She is in pain," Andrea insisted.

"Can't you see she needs help?" asked Meredith. Tears streamed from Meredith's eyes. "What should we do? Mom, what should we do?"

Andrea and Meredith walked out on Olive that Saturday night. They left her. Olive was not yet admitted but lay stretched out on the table, her belongings piled like rags, a body unidentified, left there like on a slab, asleep and feverish.

"You did right to leave her," soothed Barnaby.

"I felt so bad."

"Of course you did."

The fever persisted. No one knew what Olive suffered from. All the tests proved negative. She was deemed to have nothing, only the fever that fluctuated, came and went for no reason that any doctor could fathom.

"My family is taking me home," claimed Olive.

Olive went off to the nursing home with no one from the family in attendance. She was placed in a wheelchair when a room became available. All her possessions dumped into a paper bag were heaped on her lap. She was wheeled down the corridor. Her hat was placed precariously atop her head.

"You know I always use a hat pin," she complained as she rested quietly in her bed when Andrea went to see her. The bed was covered with a pretty white blanket with rosebuds. The walls of the room were painted a soft orange and green. When Olive opened her eyes again, she smiled at her daughter and grinned at the blanket. Both Olive and Andrea seemed pacified by the rosebud-print blanket. Olive smiled and went back to sleep. Andrea left her.

Andrea brought her mother clothing and a magic marker to keep in the drawer in the side table in her room so that all her possessions could be marked.

"Just like when you went to camp, darling. Remember? But aren't you taking me home?"

"Soon. Later. Some other time."

Olive rocked herself in her wheelchair. Back and forth, back and forth she moved her bulk on the pivot of her hip. Davenning? Prayer? She pulled on her shawl.

"Exercising," said Olive. She pulled on her fingers one at a time as she attempted to spread them fanlike. "Exercise," said Olive as she rolled her head and massaged her hands, continuing to pull out her fingers, cracking her bones.

"I won't cost much," she promised, "if you take me home. I know I will get better once I have something to do. The bed rises during the night. The bed rises during the night and a band plays under it. All the loud sounds. All the old loud tunes, a carousel. *Comos, comos,*" she whispered, "this place is full of *comos.*"

"Comos?" Andrea asked.

"Comos," Olive whispered, indicating the pale white forms that slid or slumped in their wheelchairs, inertly paying attention to the vitality of Andrea.

A color TV blared. The square table covers on the square tables were set up for dinner. The aluminum refrigerated cart rolled into the room with the trays prepared for the patients.

They moved Olive to the second floor where people were more active. Olive screamed out, "Take me back. There are

PHOTOS OF THE AUTHOR'S MOTHER: CHRIS BOLTON

comos in the diningroom. Take me back. Upstairs they know about my proper medication. Take me back."

She swayed to the music she heard.

"I hope Barnaby forgives me. Andrea, I know why you did not visit me all those years. It was because I was not cheerful. I was always complaining. I won't complain anymore. My grandmother lived to be ninety-nine. When she was 104 she still came to visit. Climbed the five high flights and the front stoop to our apartment, with her Bible under her arm. When she was 104 she looked out of our window on the top floor and said, 'It's such a beautiful world.' I never want to leave it. I never want to leave you." Olive's eyes shone with the brightness of being alive.

3

"They use hot water where I urinate and cold water everywhere else. They don't wipe me," complained Olive. She had a bruise on her nose on which the dried blood caked.

"I hit them. I hit them before they can hit me. The *comos*. Some people are born that way," she whispered, "into the best families, into the best of families, come these *comos*. You never know. Look. There's a *como*. Or, that person there... is not a *como*, yet. They work on you to become a *como*. I'm going to write a book. It will be a best seller, a tremendous book, a best seller, the biggest and best book ever written, a money-maker, a best seller, about the *comos*, the world of the *comos*."

Barnaby stopped off in the diner at the corner to have a cup of coffee while Andrea went on to see Olive. Olive said, "Go to the diner and meet Barnaby. Tell him not to come."

"This is the happiest day of my life," Olive said when she saw Barnaby come through the door. "This is the happiest I've been for the ten months I've been here. Thank you, Andrea, for all the beautiful clothes you bought me. This is the happiest I've been in the ten days, ten weeks since I've been here. I think I will die within two days." She got into the bed when it was time for dinner. The attendants came to take her out of bed. They wheeled her into the diningroom. She smiled as she was wheeled briskly past Andrea and Barnaby.

4

Olive's shoulder was twisted. She could not move her arm, her right arm. Her leg swelled. There were sores on her buttocks. She was getting an experimental drug, Haldoran.

"It won't affect her memory, just her nerves. Calm her down. Haldoran calms the nerves," the doctor explained to Andrea.

Olive sat huddled in her wheelchair, hugging herself, rocking, rocking, looking out with keen eyes at the *comos*.

"I won't be a *como*. They will never make me into a *como*. I won't go to the physical therapy room. I won't. I won't. I won't."

Olive was dehydrated. They took her off the drug.

"How dare you?" yelled the doctor.

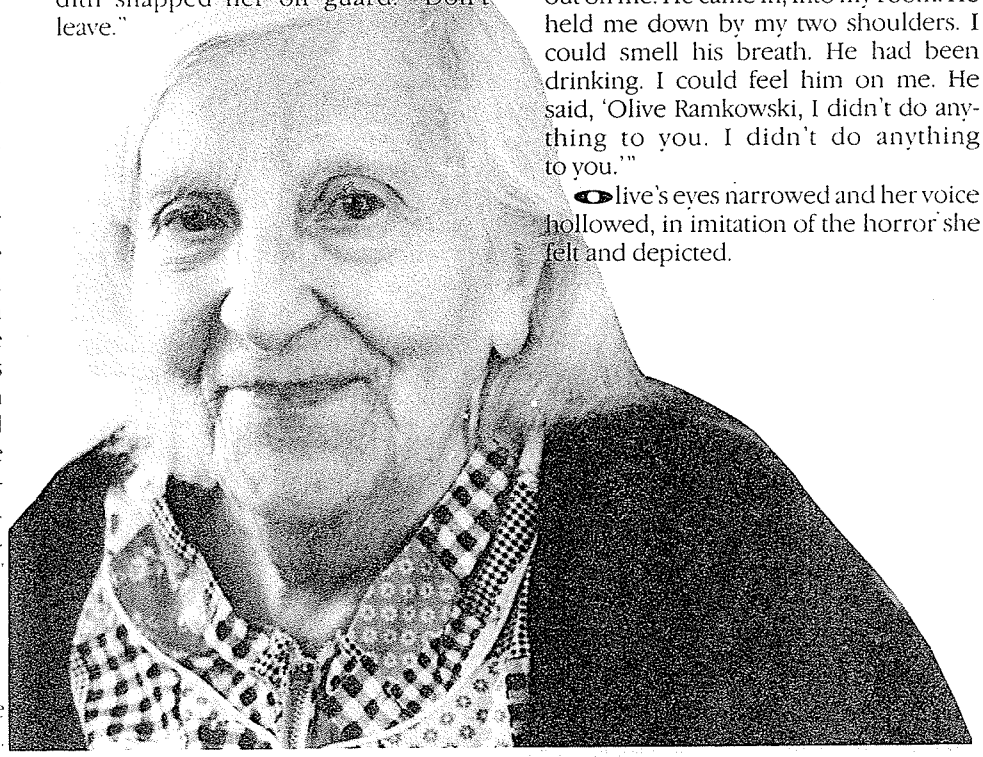
Olive was in a private room. Meredith took her camera to the nursing home. She took pictures of her grandmother. Olive posed. She had a sweet, pleased smile. Meredith wanted candid shots, but Olive loved to strike poses.

"It's all right, Olive." The nurses tried to calm Olive. "Don't rock so. It sets the wheelchair to move... Come, now, Grammie, eat."

Off the Haldoran, Olive felt good. "I want to go home with Andrea for one day and have a doctor in to see me and then go home to my house."

5

Olive panicked. Holding court with her son-in-law, her grandchild, her daughter, how fine. She laughed. Meredith snapped her off guard. "Don't leave."



6

"Olive has come... I have come," Olive said, "to rely on Dr. Hertzl, a resident here like myself, but disguised as one of two doctors who look over me."

"The man is not a doctor but a patient like yourself," insisted Barnaby.

Olive responded, "I know." Then, she called out, "Dr. Hertzl, Dr. Hertzl..."

The man ignored Olive.

Olive said, "Those two men look over me in my pain. They watch over me. What would I do without them?"

Olive's fever persisted.

"Maybe we will have to transfer her to the hospital..."

Olive rallied. The snows continued. A bitter winter. Olive sat in her wheelchair. One morning she got up and walked with the walker.

"I fired over twenty maids."

"Why, Mom, why?"

"They stink. They smoke marijuana. I have a pain in my right side," complained Olive. She gained weight. "I know it is the weather that keeps you away and not that you don't want to see me. I want lighter nightgowns and more underwear. I will stay on, providing I get put in a room on the second floor. The reason is as follows: the room is fine but not the help. The help has it in for me. The reason the help has it in for me is that I was influential with the head nurse in having a male attendant fired and the others resent it and therefore take things out on me. He came in, into my room. He held me down by my two shoulders. I could smell his breath. He had been drinking. I could feel him on me. He said, 'Olive Ramkowski, I didn't do anything to you. I didn't do anything to you.'"

Olive's eyes narrowed and her voice hollowed, in imitation of the horror she felt and depicted.

WINE FOR LUNCH

mary lukanuski has been writing short fiction for a short time. she holds the position of librarian at columbia university health sciences library.

MARY LUKANUSKI

"What school did you go to?"

Kate wrapped the tie around one wrist and passed it through the headboard. Holding onto the tie with one hand and reaching for the other wrist, she glanced at the man beneath her.

"What school did you go to?"

David stared at the soft spot underneath Kate's left breast and somehow was provoked to reply, "Wesleyan."

She returned to the headboard, placing David's right arm over his head along with his left. David's view of Kate's breast was limited now, so he concentrated on the concentric almond rings leading to her left nipple. Having tied both wrists, Kate finished with a firm square knot. David's fingers reached for her—the way her breasts hung almost into his face exasperated him—but he only felt the silk hold on his hands. It was a blue tie, a deep blue tie with tiny red dots. A gift from his aunt. He had never particularly cared for it. The colors were too familiar, and most of his co-workers had similar ones. It was a very safe, conservative tie, fitting for the securely employed, recently arrived.

Kate's hand passed over his right arm, the soft, pink, fleshy inner arm with streaks of obscured blue showing the paleness of his skin. David looked up.

He felt her hand slowly slip to the nape of his neck and saw her put her thighs outside of his.

Their bellies nearly touching, Kate began to kiss the side of his neck, her breath hard.

It started several weeks ago. They agreed to meet for lunch and quickly developed an easy flirtation that neither demanded nor expected further fuel. In their banter they didn't bother with the particulars of their lives. This afternoon, they had a bottle of wine with lunch. Not very daring, but certainly provoking. When they left it was mid-afternoon and cloudy. They felt no uneasiness standing outside the restaurant, on a side street, kissing, entwining fingers; they made all the gestures that urged immediate satisfaction. They waved a cab down and David gave out his address, which was, conveniently, nearby.

The elevator was their first opportunity for unobserved intimacy. When the car stopped, and the doors had not yet opened, David brushed his mouth over Kate's right ear saying, "the right." She wasn't sure what he was referring to and when the elevator opened she lurched to the right, but not before leaving a lasting impression on David's upper right thigh.

Once in his apartment, they began to undress each other, leaving a trail of scattered clothing. David steered Kate into the bedroom and switched on the stereo as he passed it. The radio was on and as Kate pushed David's trousers over his hips, she heard "Whites off earth now." They removed the last of their clothing. On her way to the bed, Kate skirted the dresser and saw a blue tie, silk maybe, nestled in tissue. Continuing to fondle David, she grabbed the tie and began to think what she could do with a blue silk tie.

"You've done this before, haven't you?" David asked, still looking up, hands tied above his head. His fingers played with the metal spokes of the headboard. Kate bent over the wide-eyed David and she kissed him on the mouth. The kiss ended; the room was cold and she wanted something to cover her bare rump. Turning around for the comforter, she saw the view out the window and went to it. David could only look at how her back arched as she left the bed and went toward the window. She pressed her palm to the pane, feeling the cool of the glass. It was late afternoon now. Traffic was picking up by the river, and if she twisted her head to the right she could follow the river almost to the bridge. The brick overhang of the corner blocked the rest of the view. Kate felt colder standing by the window. She wrapped her arms around her belly, her hands tucked into the niches of her elbows, and looked down at the streetlights.

David tried to decide what to do. He thought this was a joint venture, but maybe the idea of being tied up like this was surrender. Maybe he was supposed to do nothing, or be able to do nothing. Just then, Kate returned to the bed, smiled and gave David, who had resolved that he would do nothing, a small, pressing kiss. Raising herself off the bed, she reached to the floor for her stockings and left the room. On her way to the door Kate dressed, gathering lingerie, her skirt and blouse from where they were tossed. Her coat and shoes were by the door, and when she was assembled, she turned the lock and walked out, shutting the door behind her.

David heard the lock turn and door shut. "Well," he thought, "perhaps this is part of it."

When Kate got to the street she turned around, looked up, counted five stories, three windows to the right and saw David's bedroom was dark. Silk is supple, she remembered, and her knots almost always loosened. She went on to the corner and waited for the traffic light to change. Putting one gloved hand into a coat pocket, the other pushing blond hair behind her left ear, she thought that would be the last time she would have wine for lunch.

BIG SECRETS

BARBARA FRIEDMAN

barbara friedman is an artist living in new york city.

This morning I asked my mother if I could go visit Boris and she said that she had forgotten to tell me that he had passed away. Then, I asked my nurse, Johanna, where Boris had passed away to, and Johanna told me that meant that he was dead. Leslie's father died when we were in third grade, but he's the only other dead person I know. Boris was *much* older than Leslie's father. Boris told me he was seventy-two, but he wasn't any taller than I am and I just turned eleven. Last summer I was ten, and when he took his baseball cap off, the tops of our heads lined up. Now I'm eleven, and if he weren't dead, maybe I'd be as tall as he is even with his baseball cap on.

I wish Boris wasn't dead. Leslie is in Nantucket. Christopher is in camp. Jean-Louis and Nicole think I'm a sissy because Mommy worries I'll get run over if I play in the street with them. The old ladies in black that knit by the little chapel give me the creeps. I don't have many other people to talk to here in France. Often, I talk to Johanna but if I giggle with her too much, Mommy gets mad. Mommy gets jealous or something. Like yesterday, when Johanna was telling me a story about being eleven years old in Germany, and Mommy came in and made that clicking noise with her tongue and asked why, since it was already eight o'clock, I hadn't been sent to her room to say good-night.

Now, I wish Boris was still alive. I guess, for a while, I *did* sort of wish he was dead. I mean, I told Leslie, my winter best friend, that I wished Boris was dead. I should never have said that. I hope Leslie never, ever tells anyone. When I get back I'll make her promise not to. It'll have to be my Big Secret.

Johanna told me that everyone has a Big Secret. Her Big Secret is that, though she loves me very much, she would rather have been an actress than a little girl's governess.

I don't know why Boris died. I asked Johanna why, and she said, "He was old, liebchen." 'Liebchen' sort of means 'darling' in German and that is what Johanna likes to call me when she feels sorry for me. She wouldn't feel so sorry for me if she'd heard what I told Leslie, but I don't think that's what made Boris die. I mean, he couldn't have died just because I told Leslie that I kind of wished he was dead. I wonder if he had his baseball cap on when he died. I think he wore it all the time. Once he asked me if I wanted it. I said yes, and wore it at his house while I drank my grenadine, but then I gave it back to him when Johanna picked me up because I knew Mommy wouldn't let me wear it at home.

I won't get to wear his cap and drink grenadine with him anymore. I won't get to hear him read the stories that he wrote for me and about me—like the one he called "Rebecca and the Lion," where I save a gentle lion from a mean lion-tamer—and I won't be able to read him the stories I make up—like the one called "Annette and Alicia," where a family adopts an orphaned girl because their daughter is an only child and lonely, or "Annette and Alicia Run Away," where the two girls run away to the circus because they don't like their mother. He'll never call me "My poetess, Rebecca" again. Johanna told me that a poetess was a girl poet and that the name should make me very proud. Boris started calling me that when I was about seven and a half, and I showed him a poem about a hamster that Dariel Dodge had given me for my seventh birthday but that Mommy had said was dirty and made me give back to Dariel. You know, he shouldn't really have continued to call me "My poetess, Rebecca" because I didn't write many more poems. I guess he could have called me his painter, Rebecca, since it's already been a long time since he started letting me use his paints.

Last summer and the summer before and the summer before and the summer before and even before that, Boris and I painted together. I'd make up something and paint it, like a faraway hilly place where it rained pink rain or a stupid-looking blue goose with green and orange feet, and Boris would return to an oil painting he'd begun before I'd arrived. Usually a painting of a naked lady. Now my mother has those kinds of pictures at home, so I guess a lot of people like painting them. Still, Leslie told me it was gross to have naked people on the wall. I asked Mommy if that was true and she said, "Not if it's art." Then I told Boris what Mommy had said, and he laughed and answered, "Who cares about art? I like having pretty models around." I asked him what he meant. He said he needed them around so he could see what he was painting. I was really surprised when he said that. I guess I'd always figured that he made those ladies up.

I can't believe that I can't go paint with Boris this summer. When I told Leslie I hated him now and wanted him to die, I really didn't mean it. I don't know anyone else who likes to paint. I wonder if Mommy cried when she found out Boris was dead. I know she's known him forever. That's why she lets him give me what she calls "art classes." Johanna told

me that Mommy's known Boris since she was a little girl, since he first left Russia for France. It's funny that Boris is Russian and wears a baseball cap.

When I told Leslie that my best friend during the summer was named Boris Smirnoff, that he was Russian, that he was very old, that he wasn't much taller than I am, that he wore a baseball cap, that he painted naked ladies, and that he let me drink as much grenadine as I wanted, Leslie said that he must be a Communist. I asked Mommy if Leslie was right, and she said no, he's a White Russian. It was Johanna's day off so I couldn't ask her what a White Russian was. Instead, I asked daddy when he got home. He said a White Russian was a drink. Mommy made that clicking noise with her tongue and said he wasn't funny. I didn't think he was funny either except that Mommy never thinks he's funny and I usually do.

Mommy doesn't think much is funny. She's French and that's why we go to France every summer. Daddy's American, and that's why we live in New York most of the year. Boris is Russian but he lives in France instead of Russia because he's a White Russian. I finally told Leslie that Boris wasn't a Communist, and she said, "So what? Johanna is a Nazi. She's German, isn't she?" I asked Johanna if she was a Nazi, and she started crying. I told Leslie about it and Leslie said she didn't care, all Germans were Jew-haters. Once when Johanna screamed at me I called her a Jew-hater. She cried again and I felt bad.

I guess I miss Leslie. But she thinks she knows everything and sometimes she's wrong. Like, in first grade when Leslie said that Mommy was divorced because she wasn't American. Johanna told me that Leslie was definitely wrong. Mommy wasn't American but she wasn't divorced either. She was married to Daddy.

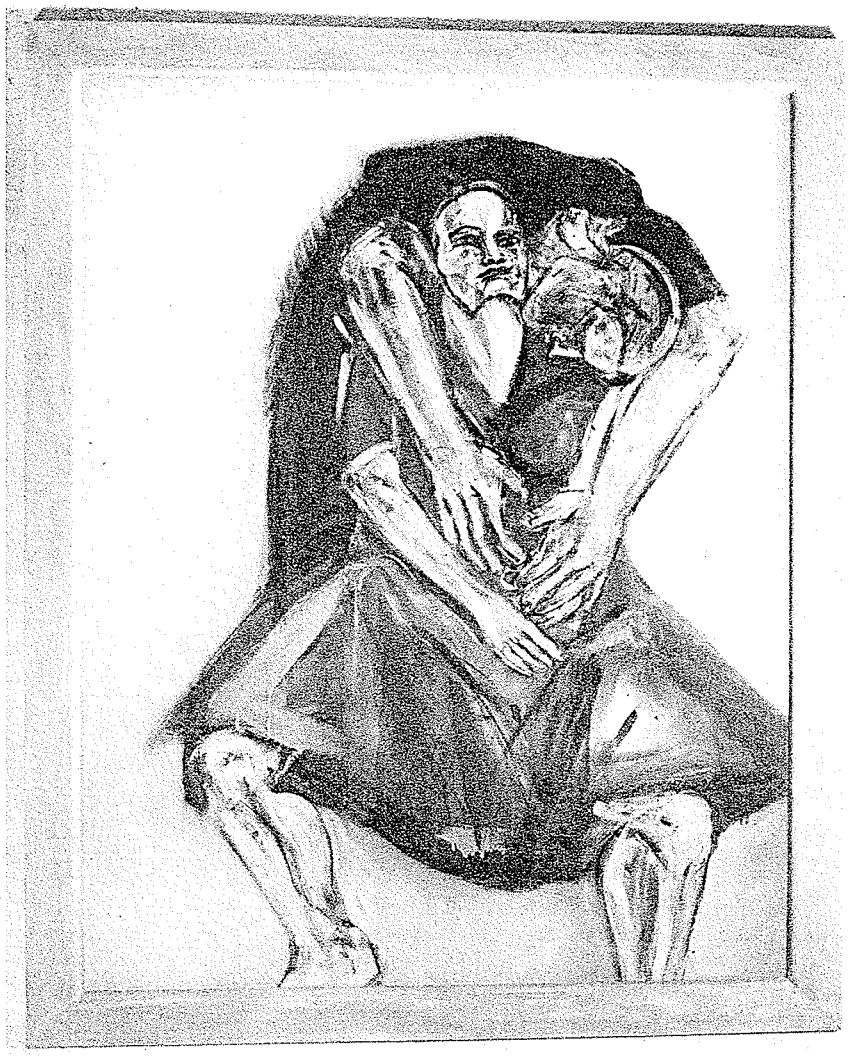
Now, I know that Leslie wasn't all wrong. Mommy isn't divorced, she *is* married to Daddy, but she *did* have another husband before Daddy, before me. I found that out last summer from Christopher. I found out a lot of things last summer. Christopher is my age and he's English, but he lives here in France with his grandparents. They live down the street from Boris. He's my second-best summer friend, after Boris. I'm talking about when Boris was still my summer best friend, before I stopped liking him and, of course, before he died. Anyway, Christopher is in camp this summer and that's one of the reasons I'm so lonely. So, here's what happened. Christopher had

UNTITLED – JUDY GLANTZMAN

come over for lunch or something—this was early last summer—and he pointed to those red geraniums, the ones planted right in the middle of the garden, and said real loud that that was where my mother had buried her first husband. The one she'd set fire to. The one she'd burned to death. I told Christopher that he was stupid, that his mother was fat and didn't want him, and that's why she gave him to his grandparents. Christopher hit me kind of hard and left. I asked Mommy if she had had another husband and, if so, had she burned him to death? Mommy didn't cry or get mad or say it wasn't true. She didn't even make that clicking sound with her tongue. She just said something like, where does that child get such wild ideas? I asked Johanna if that was Mommy's Big Secret. Johanna said she wasn't sure if it was her Big Secret, but that Mommy had *not* burned her first husband, he'd been cremated and his ashes were in a box in the garden. Then Johanna told me what being cremated was and how many people prefer that to letting their corpse rot away. I don't know how I'll feel. I don't want worms to eat my body but I don't really want to be burned either. I do know, though, that if I had *my* husband's ashes in a box in *my* garden it would be my Big Secret.

I know Boris' Big Secret. The last time I saw him, he said, "Now, Rebecca, let's keep this our Big Secret." I didn't exactly know why it was supposed to be our Big Secret, but I agreed to keep it. I think I know more now and that's why I told Leslie in school this year that I sort of wished Boris would die. And now he has.

I'm back in France and he's not here. It's the beginning of another summer va-



UNTITLED – JUDY GLANTZMAN

judy glantzman has exhibited widely in the united states and europe.

cation, and the very last time I saw him was two days before the end of last summer's vacation. Johanna had dropped me off at his house before lunchtime. He had salami and peaches ready. I drank lots of grenadine and started to complain about stuff to him. I always loved to complain about things to Boris. When I was eight, I complained that my nose was too wide—a little broad, Mommy had said—and Boris told me to sleep with a clothespin on it for a month. Johanna found out pretty soon and wouldn't let me do it anymore. Mommy never found out. But I think it worked, I think my nose *is* thinner. Anyway, that day I told Boris about how Jean-Louis and Nicole got to drink wine and coffee and play in the village streets 'til it got dark outside, and how, of course, I didn't get to do any of those things. Boris told me that their wine was mostly water, their coffee was filled with milk and that, anyway, they were French and I wasn't. I said, so what, Mommy's French, isn't she? Then, Boris said, yes she is, but their mother is more relaxed than yours. He said that my mother was never very relaxed, even when she was young, and that if she had been, she and he might have had a good time together. I asked him what he meant by a good time and he smiled and, instead of answering my question, said that I sort of looked like Mommy. Then, I asked him if he'd ever painted Mommy. He said, "Sure, many times." He asked me if I wanted to see a painting of Mommy when she was a lot younger and I said, "Yes, I'd love to." So, he went to his back room and came back with a painting of a lady that sort of looked like Mommy. Except the lady was naked. Boris asked me if I liked it. I said I didn't know. He'd told me before that the human body was wonderful to paint, and to paint it well you had to look at it hard. And that you couldn't paint someone with clothes on if you didn't understand what they looked like with their clothes off. But this was Mommy with her clothes off. I think that then Boris asked me if I thought that Mommy had had a pretty body. I said I guessed so. He said, "Would you look at those great breasts and that wonderful mound between her legs!" I asked him what he meant by a wonderful mound, and he said that when little girls became women they grow a triangle of hair between their legs. I said I didn't have any hair there. He said, oh, are you sure, can I take a look? I said I guessed so. I pulled my shorts and underpants off and he bent way down to look. He looked very closely—like he'd told me you have to look at something when you're going to paint it—and said, no, you don't have any hair there yet. But you will. Then I felt him lick me where he said I would get hair and I felt very strange. He asked me if I knew how children were made and I told him that Leslie had said you put two seeds in a lady's stomach. Boris said, no, that wasn't really it. I said that actually Christopher had said something about going to the bathroom together a few years ago, but his grandmother had walked in right away. Boris said that Christopher was quite a little man, and I put on my shorts, and he went to get me some more grenadine. Then we sat down to paint and he said, this will be our secret, Okay?

I kept our secret, but last fall, after I got back to New York and to school and to Leslie, I stopped liking Boris as much. I felt weird about his painting Mommy naked and I felt weird about his licking me there.

One day at recess, I told Leslie that Boris wasn't my summer best friend anymore. I didn't tell her why, and she said it was because he was a Communist. That shows how much she knows! I didn't bother to tell her how dumb she is sometimes, I just said that I sort of wished that Boris would get sick and drop dead. And then Leslie—Leslie, of all people—looked shocked and said that you should never, ever say that about anyone, not even about Communists or Nazis. I guess she had a point because, now, Boris *is* dead, and it's really, really important that no one ever know what I said to Leslie. I must remember first thing when I get back to tell her that it's our Big Secret and that she absolutely has to keep it.

ACTING Our Age

The 60-minute film ACTING OUR AGE is the result of a collaboration among several Bay Area women filmmakers: Director/Producer Michal Aviad, Editor Deborah Hoffman, Cinematographer Frances Reid, Associate Producer Debra Chasnoff and Co-Writer Deborah Rosenfelt.

Why

DID WE MAKE A FILM ABOUT OLDER WOMEN?

• Sixteen million women in the United States are over the age of 64. By the year 2005, there will be 25 million.

• Eighty percent of people over the age of 65 who live alone are women. In this age group, there are five times more widows than widowers.

• Over half of all women over the age of 65 live on $550 a month or less.

• Over two million people are providing unpaid care for frail elderly at home; 75% of these caretakers are women.

(Sources: Census Bureau and The Older Women's League)

Besides the alarming economic reality and increasing isolation they face, older women also struggle for personal dignity against demeaning stereotypes. In our culture, older women are usually portrayed as ugly, wicked, miserable, or pathetic. From fairy tales to advertising, our society projects anxieties about aging and death onto older women.

COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Over 200 women in the Bay Area were interviewed to help crystallize the focus of ACTING OUR AGE and to find the six women who are featured in the film. Organizations such as The Gray Panthers, The Older Women's League, Options for Women over 40, and many local senior centers helped make the contacts for these interviews.

Funding for ACTING OUR AGE came from more than fourteen foundations, and from several hundred individuals who contributed to the film at different work-in-progress screenings in the community.

A SYNOPSIS

The six women in *Acting Our Age* come from diverse racial, ethnic, and class backgrounds, and have varied kinds of relationships with mates, family, and community. They speak candidly about topics rarely discussed openly by any of us but which are especially taboo for older women in our culture: changes in their looks, aloneness, sexuality, money, death.

The film opens with a sequence of old women dancing. We see full shots of the group intercut with close-ups of faces, hands, arms, and feet. This scene dissolves into illustrations of old hags from fairy tales. We hear a mother's voice reading fairy tales about ugly, wicked old witches. After this opening, we move into the first section of the film which deals with *Appearance and Self-Image*. The participants in the film are introduced and shed light on the relationships between changes in their looks and their sense of self.

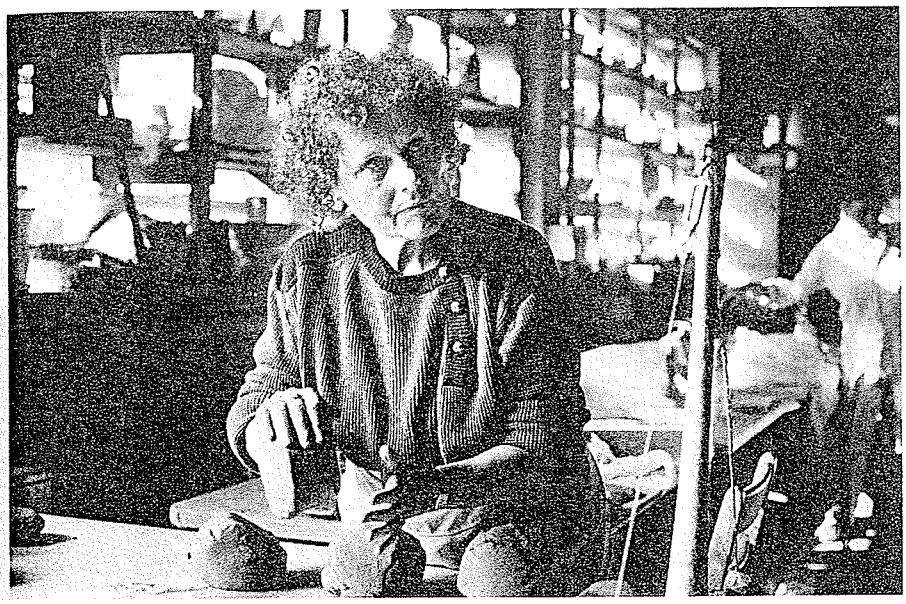
The next section concentrates on *Relationships and Familial*

director/producer michal aviad is a 32-year-old filmmaker from israel who now lives in san francisco. she has worked on social-issue documentaries for 10 years.

editor deborah hoffman has been working in film production and post-production for the last eight years. her credits as an editor include the times of harvey milk.

cinematographer frances reid has been involved in film production and distribution for the past sixteen years. she was the cinematographer for the times of harvey milk.

CARMEN MORALES, 67, CARING FOR HER HUSBAND.



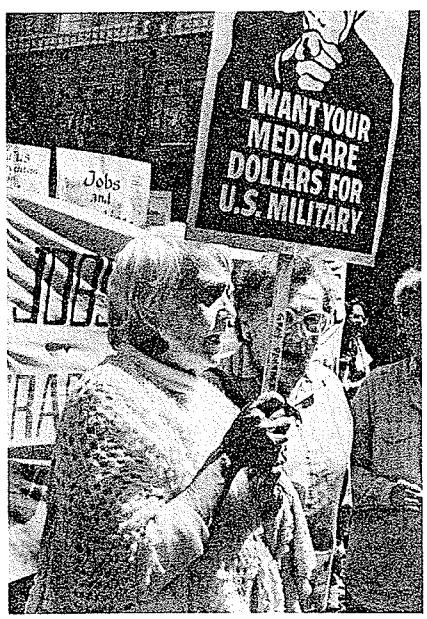
PHYLLIS METAL, 70, THROWS POTTERY DESPITE HER ARTHRITIS.

associate producer debra chasnoff has worked in film, radio, and publishing for the last ten years. she co-produced, directed, and edited the award-winning choosing children.

co-writer deborah rosenfelt is professor of women studies at san francisco state university, coordinator of the women studies program, an editor of feminist studies, *and contributing editor to the* women's studies quarterly.

Roles. It looks at the changes in ideas and identities the participants in the film experience as they age. The film explores both the loneliness some of the women face as well as the relationships through which they do find intimacy—with a partner, family members and friends. The third theme that the film explores has to do with the *Struggle for Survival.* It explores housing, economic, and health issues faced by participants in the film. The final part of the film looks at the options and needs the women in the film have for *Community* and vocational outlets. The film ends with the raucous 65th birthday party of one of the participants.

The film interweaves the insights of the six women with footage of everyday life: eating alone, having a picnic on the roof with a New Wave granddaughter, stretching in the morning to ward off the pain of arthritis. It also captures some poignant milestones: a widow's move from an upper-class neighborhood to low income senior housing; another woman canceling an appointment to have a facelift; a third woman's decision to participate in a march protesting federal budget cuts. Though very different from each other, they share a commitment to stay connected with others and to continue the quest for meaning in their lives.



IRJA FRIEND, 74, MARCHING WITH THE GRAY PANTHERS.

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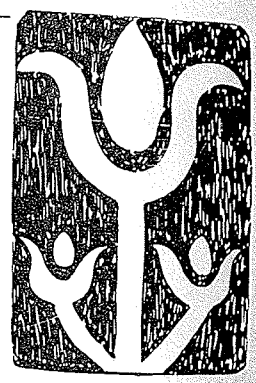

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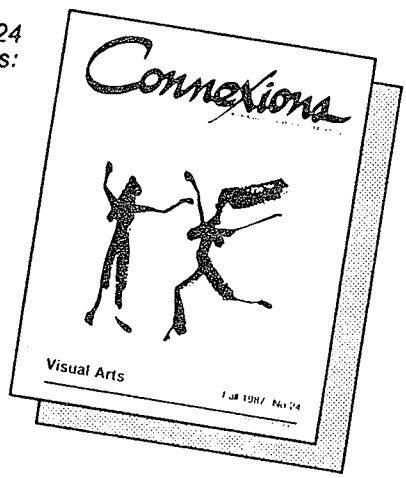

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Alice Falk	"Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Her Prometheuses: Self-Will and a Woman Poet"
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JOAN BRADERMAN

UPCOMING ISSUES

10th Anniversary Issue

What is feminist art? Or, maybe, what is post-feminist art, if there is such a thing. The 10th Anniversary collective is taking a look at the issues that won't go away, from women's art (and place in the art world) to The Goddess to racism to international politics to women's bodies and nurturing. Replies to our question, "what is feminist art," will be published and plenty of art by old friends and new contributors.

Women on Men

Women have always had plenty to say on the subject of the other. WOMEN ON MEN will deal with male/female concerns as they relate to the '80s and beyond. Topics will address such broad issues as race, culture, politics, power and the arts. Focused topics might include families, AIDS, fantasies, feminist theory, sports, sex, childcare, men on the job, and the new conservatism.

Myth-Educated Woman

How has school changed your life? Why do so many women study art (and so many men end up showing, publishing, performing)? Do you have to go to school to make it? What's it like being the only woman teacher, student, married woman, mother in your class? Did you ever have an influential woman professor (or primary school teacher)? What about education in general?

GUIDELINES FOR CONTRIBUTORS

Each issue of HERESIES has a specific theme and all material submitted to a particular issue must relate to its theme. Manuscripts should be typed double-spaced and submitted in duplicate. Visual material should be submitted in the form of a slide, xerox, or photograph with title, medium, and date noted; however, HERESIES must have a black-and-white photograph or equivalent to publish the work. We will not be responsible for original art. Those submitting either written or visual material must accompany their contribution with a two or three line biography. All material must be accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope in order for it to be returned. We do not publish reviews or monographs on contemporary women. We do not commission articles and cannot guarantee acceptance of submitted material. HERESIES pays a small fee for published material. Send all submissions to: HERESIES, PO Box 1306, Canal Street Station, New York, NY 10013.