



WOMONSPACE NEWS

our voice in the lesbian community



Lesbian
Partner
Abuse

March 1995

From the Editor

Lindy Pratch

In the last few years, we have become much more aware of the extent of the problem of battered women in Canada. Media reports and studies are nearly always restricted to abuse in heterosexual relationships, however. It is more hidden in the lesbian community, partly because we are already accustomed to living our lives in secrecy.

The personal experiences of some Edmonton lesbians are published in this issue of *Womonspace News*. A bibliography has been included for further reading.

This is not an easy topic to write about, read about, or discuss. Even so, it is a problem we must address. Women you know are being battered. Both the abuser and the victim need help in order to stop the cycle of violence.

The Gay and Lesbian Community Centre of Edmonton can give confidential referrals to women looking for professional help; call 488-3234.

Lesbians' silence about battering also reflects an acute awareness of societal homophobia. We fear feeling society's hatred and myths by speaking openly about lesbian battering. We fear hostile responses from police, courts, shelters, or therapists. Consequently, we are hesitant to call the police, seek counseling, or write articles.

*Mindy Benowitz, in Naming the Violence,
Kerry Lobel, ed. 1986.*

Contributors this issue:

Lindy Pratch, Catherine Gutwin,
Charity Laboucan, Jennifer, Ladi,
Alison, Heather, Gami, Kate, Rosa,
Amy Lee Cardufian

Submissions Are Welcome

Letters to the Editor and other submissions are always welcome.

Topics in upcoming issues:

April—Singles

May—Lesbians and the Law

June—Womanspace Dances

Womonspace News is a publication of Womonspace Social and Recreational Society of Edmonton. We are a nonprofit organization. The newsletter is produced by, for, and about lesbians in Edmonton and the surrounding areas. Our purpose is to inform and entertain our members and any other interested lesbians. The opinions expressed in any issue of *Womonspace News* do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the Directors or the Newsletter Committee. The events, organizations and establishments publicized are not necessarily supported by Womonspace. *Womonspace News* is produced on a volunteer basis by the Newsletter Committee. We welcome submissions. Material submitted becomes the property of Womonspace. We reserve the right to edit for length and content, and to refuse publication. Articles or letters to the editor may be sent to: Womonspace, Basement, 9930-106 Street, Edmonton, AB T5K 1C7. *Womonspace News* seeks advertising that is lesbian-positive to help defer publications costs. Womonspace does not necessarily endorse products or services offered. We reserve the right to refuse ads. For rate information, and to place an ad, please leave a message on the Lesbian Life Line: 425-0511.

Recognizing Abuse

Catherine Gutwin

What does abuse look like, sound like, feel like? Women need to recognize their own abuse, and our society needs to recognize and stop tolerating abuse of women.

Women are primarily abused by men, but this isn't the only scenario. Much as our community denies and ignores it, some lesbians also abuse their partners. Lesbian partner abuse does not look very different from straight partner abuse, and sadly, our rationalization and dismissal of it is not very different from the malestream's.

WOMAN Inc.'s Lesbian Domestic Violence Program in San Francisco defines partner abuse as follows:

Abuse is the use of or the threat of using physical, sexual, or verbal behaviour to coerce a partner ... or to gain/maintain control in the relationship.

Physical abuse: slapping, punching, kicking, pinching, pushing, wrestling, pulling hair, spitting, throwing someone bodily, throwing objects, denying one's physical needs (food, sleep), physically abusing someone or something important to the partner.

Sexual abuse: unwanted touch, degrading or sexually attacking comments or jokes, any sexual activity refused or not consented to (i.e., when she is sleeping, high, drunk, not asked, afraid to say no, manipulated, guilt-tripped).

Threats of abuse: threatening to punch, hit, kick, use a weapon, commit suicide if the partner leaves, hurt her children, hurt her pet, out her, defame her. Threats can be vague, such as, "I'm really going to let you have it..."

Psychological/Emotional abuse: continued attacks on her self-esteem, repeated harassment/interrogation/degradation, threats, insults, controlling or limiting her behaviour—or her contact with others, forcing to stay awake, blaming her for everything, forcing her to perform self-degrading acts or make self-degrading statements.

When one woman does these things to another, this is how we excuse it:

Denial: "Women don't batter other women physically or emotionally," "My friend wouldn't do that sort of thing to her partner," "I am not a victim of abuse; lesbian relationships are just more intense than straight ones," "Only butches abuse," "Butches only abuse femmes," "If she was being battered she would go to the shelter."

Rationalization: "I fought back, so I'm just as much to blame," "They're the same size, so the batterer can't really hurt her," "She's not economically dependent on the batterer, so she can't be coerced," "It's a homophobic world/workplace/family, and the batterer is under a lot of stress," "Lesbians don't have good models for healthy relationships," "This is small violence, not big violence," "The batterer's feminist activism in the

(Continued on page 4)

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community cancels out this behaviour at home."

Recognizing abuse in lesbian relationships is hard. We don't want to believe it happens at all, but if we do, then we want to be able to draw a clear line between abuse and the ordinary difficulties of working out a relationship. It's not that simple.

But we miss the point if we try to distinguish acceptable violence from unacceptable violence. If we are a community of lovers, as we so often say to the bigots who attack us, and if we are a "peaceful, loving people," then we will tolerate no violence. We will challenge ourselves, our friends, and our lovers whenever we/they perpetrate it, deny it, or rationalize it.

Women's Building Collective

9930-106 Street

A partially furnished, windowless but cheery room is available for rent on a month-to-month basis. Shared meeting room. Kitchen facilities & smoking room. Good for short term projects or counsellor requiring an interview room. All offers accepted.

View and get details on International Women's Day Open House, March 8, between noon and 7 pm. Leave a message at Womonspace (425-0511) if you can't view that day. Someone will get back to you.



Two-Spirited

Each Native language has a word for gay people. Each translates roughly into English as two-spirited. It means we hold both the male and female essences within us.

Abuse

Charity Laboucan

Okay, Let's forget the clinical definitions of abuse. Let's forget about perpetuating the silence we have learned. Forget about skirting the issues. Abuse is harsh. It hurts. It destroys people. It kills people. I am tired of not talking about it. I am tired worrying about who I will offend with the grossness of it all.

What is abuse? Let me tell you... Abuse is the echoing childhood cries when I wasn't old enough to have language, other than calling for mommy when I watched and heard her get beaten.

Abuse is the boys and men who shoved my face into the bed so I wouldn't cry out as they mounted me. Abuse is their threats and making me promise silence and commanding me through fear. Abuse is being told to go wash. I didn't even know what I was washing from me.

Abuse is the perpetuation of ignorance. Abuse is violence and guns and fear and death and drugs and alcohol.

Abuse is the father figure who stole the nights from five years of my life. It's being thankful that he was sterile and didn't get me pregnant. Abuse is waking up with semen on my lips and hearing his scurrying footsteps fading into the darkness.

Abuse is the woman in my childhood who ran to our house in the middle of a cold winter night barefoot to escape from another beating. Abuse is not calling the police because she was afraid she would lose her children to social services.

Abuse is alcohol and losing family members in car accidents. Abuse is wondering every day what that baby cousin of mine could have brought to this world. Abuse is being thankful that she wasn't brought into my world of violence and rage and guns.

Abuse is all the women in my family that were beaten by my uncles and cousins. Abuse is purple and black swollen faces. It's clumps of hair missing from the scalp. It's broken beer bottles and blood on the floor when I wake up. It's watching my grandmother sitting on my cousin, choking and slapping her. Abuse is senseless anger inherited through countless generations.

Abuse is my cousin who jumped from the High Level Bridge. Abuse is my uncle who shot himself with a shotgun. Abuse is my aunt and cousins finding him on the couch dead with a blood-soaked pillow over his stomach.

Abuse is when my cousin made me eat the moldy tuna casserole, even after I had vomited in it. Abuse is all the times she pulled my hair, screamed at me, punched me. Abuse is all the times I have been hit.

Abuse is all the times I have watched people getting beaten. It's seeing my world in pieces around me.

Abuse is my mother's pain and rage and fists. It is leaving home young because I refused to be another destroyed and bitter woman of my family. I refused to be another link in the chain.

How much do you have to hear and see until you do something about it. I separated myself from my family. I didn't know any other reality, but I had to do something. I had no role models. All I knew was that I would not be what I had learned. Would not do all the things I had been taught.

Abuse meant finding myself alone when I needed help. Abuse meant accepting that I was alone and learning to be cold and hard and untouchable. It meant my escape to oblivion and drugs.

Abuse was a knife in my hand and blood and having nothing to hold onto. I did die that day. And I was reborn. The answer was found when I was at the bottom—truth. I will tell the truth. I will not be silent. My victory is my life and my love and my ability to see beauty... and being still here to write these words. Finally, after all this time, I can write them.

Black Eye & Bruises

Jennifer

I didn't see it coming. That was the worst of it. I trusted her, loved her, and didn't know what was happening to me, even as it happened.

It started out as a normal wedding shower, but it progressed into an evening of drunkenness as male relatives joined the festivities. I didn't know these people. They were my lover's straight friends.

Lorna and I sat behind the bar in the basement rumpus room. She held my hand so tightly it hurt, and I tried to pull it from her. She scraped my knuckles against the rough wood under the countertop until they bled, and then I finally pulled away from her. "Let's go home," I suggested.

Lorna followed me up the stairs. "We really *should* go home now..." her fist cut short my words. My head slammed back against the wall. I tasted blood on my lip. I worried that the people downstairs would wonder about the noise. Lorna was very drunk. I hoped her friends would think she had stumbled or something. I hadn't had any alcohol, but I felt confused. What had I done to deserve this violence?

Driving home, I was mostly quiet, concentrating on our destination rather than Lorna's ranting. I hoped everything would be okay once we were safe in our own rented house where we had loved each other happily for a year. Nothing had prepared me for this.

I didn't get more than a few steps inside the front door. I curled into a ball and did what I could to protect myself from her fists. Bewilderment became fear. Who was this stranger screaming at me and hurting me? When and how would it end?

Eventually, I locked myself in the bathroom. I didn't respond to Lorna when she pounded on the door, and later ignored her pleas that I come out.

After a long interval of silence—it could have been hours, I don't know—I came out of my refuge. I considered my options. Where could I go at this hour of the night? I had an aunt and uncle living in Edmonton, but I didn't want them to see me in my battered condition. I didn't have the money for a hotel. We didn't even have an extra blanket for the couch. So, I crept into our narrow bed to spend the rest of the night beside Lorna. She woke up briefly, tried to choke me with her hands around my throat, but I overpowered her and she passed out again. After a while, I fell into an exhausted sleep as well.

The next morning, the Lorna that I loved was back. Her eyes widened in horror and concern when she woke up. "What *happened* to you?" She did not remember anything of the previous evening.

We worked at the same minimum wage job, and our co-workers knew we were lovers. For Lorna's sake, I pretended that my black eye and cut lip were the result of a scuffle with my

cousins. I tried not to betray the hurt I felt from bruises all over my body. I hated the lie, but I didn't know what else to say. I really didn't want them to know the truth. I was so ashamed of what had happened to me. I didn't want them to get the wrong idea about lesbians, either.

It occurred to me that there might be someone I could talk to about the battering, but I didn't know how to find someone like that. And I wanted to protect Lorna. She vowed to cut down on her drinking, and mostly kept that promise, too. Even so, we broke up about six months later.

With hindsight and maturity, I recognized that Lorna and I played subtle abuser/victim roles all the while we were together. The scars stayed with me for a long time. Not those from the night of physical violence, which wasn't what hurt the most, but rather the battering of my sense of self-worth. I doubted my lovability. I didn't trust my ability to make decisions.

I'm still embarrassed to talk about it, but I want other battered lesbians to know that they are not alone. You don't need to see it coming, but if it happens, we need to deal with it.

Team Edmonton is Alive and Well

Ladi

There's more to Team Edmonton than you may have thought. Since banding together to support local participants in Gay Games IV, this sport and leisure organization has taken root in our community and continues to grow.

The success of Team Edmonton's first endeavor, when Edmonton athletes came home from the Games with 7 medals, convinced the group to stay intact and continue supporting community needs. Making contacts and organizing sport and leisure activities has become a high priority for team Edmonton while continuing its efforts to raise funds for Games V in Amsterdam.

Recreational activities enhance our lives and Team Edmonton believes the men and womyn in Edmonton's gay community deserve it! How about you? Team Edmonton is looking for groups and individuals who'd like to get involved. Contact Ladi at 467-0733. We need you.



Classified Advertising:

Anyone interested in joining a **women's touch football team**—shiftwork can be accommodated—call Roz at 468-2579.

Looking for a weight-training buddy 3 times per week at Kinsmen. Call Rosa at 455-1573.

Wrenching Free

Anonymous

His fingers curled tenaciously around my wrist in a grip that spoke of hunger for power. There was no escape. I could feel his other hand gathering momentum. I held my breath only to have it forced out of my body by the impact of his blows with his fist, his belt, or whatever else was handy. I was no match for his brute strength. I tried desperately to wrench my wrist out of his grip, to break free. But it was all in vain.

I never knew if one day his rage would snuff out my life forever. I was *five years old*. My father was a rageaholic. I was fourteen before the physical abuse stopped. In my final year of university, I ended the emotional abuse by moving out.

As I grew up, I acquired enough emotional baggage to fill an airport: low self-esteem, self-hatred, poor communications skills—the list goes on. I had many relationships with men. Surprisingly, none of them were abusive. But then again, I rarely hung around long enough to really find out what these men were like. I was too scared.

When I became involved with a woman, I couldn't believe how safe I felt with her. We would go to sleep in each other's arms at night and I couldn't recall a time when I had ever felt so loved. My lover became my universe and I was willing to do anything for her. I compromised

myself, often putting my partner's needs ahead of my own. I took the blame for everything that went wrong in our relationship. I was an expert on toxic relationships. That was all that I had ever known. I had no idea of what was needed in a healthy, intimate relationship. As a result, our relationship ended five months later.

We did, however, continue to live together for another year and a half at *my insistence*. My partner wisely offered to move out, but I convinced her not to. I could not imagine my life without her.

They say that what you resist, persists. Since I had resisted dealing with the original issue of abuse in my life, the problems that had evolved from it still remained and I continued to allow very unhealthy situations to take place. I didn't need someone else to abuse me. I had learned from a master and was now very adept at conducting my own symphony of abuse. Why else would I have discouraged my ex from moving out? She tried to convince me that it would be emotionally healthier for both of us to live apart, but I refused to listen. One night she brought a new lover home to spend the night and I made an odyssey into hell. The pain of beatings was mild compared to the anguish that I felt as I tried to sleep all alone while someone else slept with my ex-lover.

When my lover moved away, I was devastated. I was so lonely and suffered excruciating emotional pain. I was

finally willing to do *anything* to change because it hurt too much to continue living my life in the same way.

The ending of this relationship was the catalyst that I needed to help me to deal with the past. I went to a psychologist for a time, spent some time in support groups with people who came from dysfunctional homes and began to heal my wounds. One poignant moment came when the group had to go around to each member and say, "I'm glad you're alive!" A woman in her fifties started to cry, saying, "No one has ever said that to me before!" I felt so much compassion for her and for the first time in my life, I allowed myself to feel some compassion for myself. I began to be gentle with myself, to listen to my inner voices, to figure out who I was.

I no longer bear much resemblance to the person that I was five or six years ago. None of the changes I've undergone would have been possible had I not learned to love and accept myself first. I am no longer afraid of communicating my thoughts or feelings to someone else. I am assertive when I need to be. I take more risks than before, because now I look at mistakes as feedback as to what I should do next. In a relationship, I try to see that both my partner's and my needs are met. I realize that there has to be a certain amount of compromise within the context of an intimate relationship but I will never totally compromise myself to be with someone else or to make another person

the centre of my universe. Nor would I want someone to do that for me.

My father almost convinced me that I was unlovable, and that I deserved to be treated like shit. A small, invincible part of me could not accept that. Had I not worked on my past issues, I would have continued to attract abusive people into my life or I would have continued to tolerate and even to create situations that were emotionally abusive and unhealthy for me.

I last saw that innocent five-year-old child a few years back. Terror filled her eyes as she ran past me with her determined rageaholic father in pursuit. He caught up to her, grabbed her tiny wrist in his large, angry hand and trapped her callously in his grip. She struggled courageously against him as he released a torrent of blows that came raining down on her little body and caught her in an unchecked hurricane of rage. I could hear her screams, I could feel the impact of each blow, I could feel her emotional despair. I had to get to her somehow! She couldn't hear me above the din of her father's thunderous rage and as he raised his fist one more time, she *finally* noticed me. I held out my arms to her. A glimmer of hope lit her big brown eyes and with the last shred of energy that was left in her, she gave one last jerk and wrenched free from his vice-like grip. Big sobs of relief racked her body as I held her protectively in my arms. No one would ever hurt her again. She was finally free!

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Weekly Events:

GLCCE (Gay and Lesbian Community Centre), 104-11745 Jasper Avenue is open Monday to Friday from 7-10 pm and Wednesday from 1-4 pm. Peer counselling, drop-in, lesbian coming out group and library. Phone 488-3234.

Les/Bi/Gay (formerly GALOC); social & political student group on the University of Alberta campus, meets Mondays, 6-7 pm at Heritage Lounge in Athabasca Hall. 988-4166.

Adamant Eve Feminist radio program broadcast on CJSR, FM 88.5, at the University of Alberta. Thursdays from 5-6 pm.

Gaywire A lesbian and gay radio show on FM 88.5. Thursdays from 6-7 pm.

Lesbian and Gay Badminton Thursdays, 7-9 pm at Oliver School, 10210-117 St.; \$1.

Northern Titans (bowling for lesbians and gays) Saturdays, 5:15 pm at Lynnwood Bowl, 16127-118 Ave.

Pink Triangle Youth Group meets every Saturday, 7:30-10 pm at GLCCE. For lesbians and gays 16 to 21 years old.

Metropolitan Community Church weekly worship, 10086 MacDonald Drive, Sundays at 7:15 pm.

SOLO (Singles Only Lesbian Organization) Social club for lesbians and bisexual women (over 18) meets every week for a variety of social functions. Call Linda at 447-4776.

Gay & Lesbian Infoline: 988-4018.

Lesbian Life Line: 425-0511.

March Events:

February 24 to March 12

The Search for Intelligent Signs of Life in the Universe

Jane Wagner's comedy produced by the Phoenix Theatre. Phone 429-4015.

Thursday, March 2

Womonspace Drop-In.

Lesbians and bisexual women are invited for refreshments and talk, 9930-106 Street, 7:30-9 pm.

Friday, March 3

Sacred Circle Dancing

Open to any woman who wants to dance. Riverdale Hall, 9231-100 Ave 7-9 pm. Donations toward hall rental welcomed.

Saturday, March 4

International Women's Day Rally

City Hall, 12 pm-4 pm; Speakers, performers, display tables, child care, march to Canada Place. Keynote speaker: Nettie Wiebe, president National Farmers' Union.

Country Jamboree

First Saturday every month, advance tickets only; open to all women. Contact SOLO members or Linda at 447-4776.

Sunday, March 5

Womonspace News Meeting

Boystown, 10116-124 Street, at noon. Deadline for April submissions.

Edmonton Vocal Minority Practice

U of A, 1-23 Fine Arts Bldg, 2-4:30 pm. New singing members welcome during the month of March.

Wednesday, March 8

International Women's Day

3rd Annual Open House of the Women's Building Collective. Basement, 9930—106 Street, noon to 7 pm. Drop in for refreshments. (ASWAC, Edmonton Working Women, Canadian Union of Educational Workers, and Womonspace make up the Collective.)

Sunday, March 12

Womonspace General Meeting

Basement, 9930—106 Street, 7:30 pm. Womonspace members are encouraged to attend in order to have a say in our society's decisions.

Friday, March 17

Sacred Circle Dancing

Spring Equinox dancing open to all women at Riverdale Hall, 7pm sharp.

Saturday, March 11

Magnolias at Muttart Conservatory

Liatris Society tours the conservatory together at 11 am. 9626—96A Street; \$4 admission fee. Bring your friends!

Saturday, March 18

Womonspace Dancel

Bonnie Doon Hall, 9240—93 Street, 8 pm-1 am. Admission is \$4 for members and \$8 for non-members. (If you'd like to get in free by becoming a volunteer, phone Rosa at 455-1573.)

Wayward Daughters

Women sharing their spirituality (an interfaith ministry of MCC Edmonton). Celebrate Persephone, 7pm. For more info, contact Karen at 431-2128.

Friday, March 31

Sacred Circle Dancing

at Riverdale Hall, 7 pm sharp. No experience necessary; all women welcome. Donations toward hall rental gratefully accepted.

April Events:

Saturday, April 1

Nature Walk

Join the Liatris Society outdoor & gardening group on a walk through Kinnaird Ravine. Meet at 10936—81 Street, 1:30 pm. Everyone welcome.

Women's Equinox Dance

at Riverdale Hall, 9231—100 Avenue, 8:30 pm-1 am. Smoke-free and alcohol-free. Woman to Woman Books will be there.

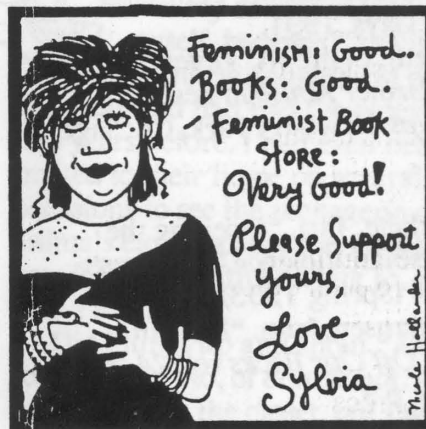
SOLO Country Jamboree

Advance tickets only; contact SOLO members or call Linda at 447-4776. All women are welcome.

Sunday, April 2

Womonspace News Meeting

Boystown, 10116—124 Street, at noon. Deadline for submissions for May issue on the topic "Lesbians & the Law."



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Further Reading on Partner Abuse

Compiled by Alison

Books, Booklets, and Book Chapters:

⇒ Lobel, Kerry, ed. *Naming the Violence: Speaking Out About Lesbian Battering*. Seattle, WA: Seal, 1986.*

⇒ London Battered Women's Advocacy Centre. *Confronting Lesbian Battering*. London, ON: BWAC, 1993.

⇒ McClure, Regan, and Anne Vespry, eds. "Abuse in Lesbian Relationships." Chap. in *The Lesbian Health Guide*. Toronto, ON: Queer Press, 1994.

⇒ Olesley, Laurie C., Donna MacAulay, and Janice L. Ristock. *Abuse in Lesbian Relationships: A Handbook of Information and Resources*. Toronto, ON: Toronto Counselling Centre for Lesbians & Gays, 1991.

⇒ Renzetti, Claire M. *Violent Betrayal: Partner Abuse in Lesbian Relationships*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1992. **

Articles:

⇒ Akpodiete, Tari. "Opening the Door on Lesbian Violence." *Herizons* vol. 7, no. 1 (Spring 1993): p. 13.

⇒ Christiansen, Jenn. "Lesbian Battering." *Off Our Backs* vol. 24, no. 1 (Jan. 1994): p.9.

⇒ King, Patricia. "Not So Different, After All." *Newsweek* vol. 122, no. 14 (4 Oct. 1993): p. 75.

* Available at Grant MacEwan Community College Library

** Available at Alberta Health Library, 9th Floor, 10025 Jasper Ave., Mon-Fri, 9-4, Phone 427-8720.

President's Message

Heather

We are now well into the New Year and we have truly "Come Alive in '95," beginning with a successful New Year's Dance. The mixed dance in January, co-sponsored by the Edmonton Vocal Minority, was another success. We thank all of you who attended. The next co-ed dance will be the Pride Dance in June, co-sponsored by GLCCE.

The new year has brought new challenges for the Womonspace board members. We regret Sunhita is leaving us for a career advancement in Calgary. She is our current public relations officer and one of our long-time volunteers. We'd like to thank Sunhita for her faithful hosting of the Womonspace Drop-Ins, and wish her all the best in her new pursuits.

Board members have received comments from some lesbians who think our organization is making "tons of money." As a non-profit group, we can't do that. We return our receipts to our community through special events, sponsorship of other organizations, and distribution of the newsletter. Any member interested in seeing our dance receipts and disbursements can leave a message at our office, and one will be mailed out.

The board members of Womonspace welcome your questions and concerns. We will try to address them as quickly as possible.

The View From A TEACHER'S CLOSET

Gami

"Why would the Liberal Party want to get involved with gay rights? There aren't many around here anyway, if there are any at all. Let Toronto or Vancouver handle *THEM*..."

So goes a typical lunchtime conversation in the staff room of an enlightened generation of educators. Some will protest mildly. I'm usually left speechless; so careful that my possible reply won't incriminate me, that I blow it. The perfect opportunity to set the masses on the right track and... nothing.

From other closeted colleagues, I hear the same story. Some teachers are okay with homosexuality—some don't even see it as an issue—but the ones to worry about are the teachers who profess to be non-judgmental to all races, religions and beliefs. All except gays, because "they choose to be abnormal." Working around that one can be pretty dicey.

We can make the occasional gay-positive comment while being ever so careful not to let on that we are actually speaking from within, for that would be career suicide. We are working with children, young minds so easily moulded to our "depraved ways." And worse yet is the fear of the physical or sexual assault that is just waiting to happen if a gay teacher is ever 'allowed' in the classroom. Such thinking from

people who say their child just adores his/her teacher. They do not seem to realize that most assaults are done by the hetero male!

One amusing incident had to do with a co-worker venting her spleen about the gay issue. We had been teaching in the same school for about 6 years, sometimes at the same grade level. (My age, similar background, etc.) I overheard her discussion with

another teacher about how open-minded she was in this modern world. She might even talk to gays, BUT if she ever found out the teacher of one of her children was homo, she would speak to the principal and quietly have her child transferred to another room. I sat in my corner chuckling to myself, because I had her youngest daughter in my room

that year and had had the older one two years before. I had even been invited to their home on several occasions to see the menagerie of animals etc... because the girls said I was fun to be with and talk to, even if I was a teacher.

Did I jump up and shout "Aha! I fooled you!" No, of course not. Life goes on. I'm still in the closet, but I'm not claustrophobic so there's hope.

Hey, no one's asked me if I was gay so I just haven't had the chance to enlighten them, okay.



"Baby, I love you. That's why I'm leavin'..."

(ani difranco)

Kate

Most of us don't talk about abusive relationships between lesbians, and though I've wanted to share my story for a while, I too have been quiet. By telling it now, I hope to show, at the very least, that emotional/physical battering is happening amongst us, and perhaps also show a little of *how* battering relationships operate.

I was twenty-four and just starting to consider women romantically. I'd always been a feminist and I knew about male violence, double standards, and the lie of traditional family values. I wanted to share my life with someone who also shared my struggles, and so women were the obvious choice.

Still, when T started to pursue me, I was hesitant. She said she would wait and give me time to think, but nonetheless continued to try to persuade me that we were star-crossed lovers. Before long, I thought so too!

In domestic battering...the victim is taken prisoner gradually, by courtship... The woman who becomes emotionally involved with a batterer interprets his possessive attention as a sign of passionate love. (82)*

I had everything I wanted in a partner: commitment, beauty, brains, and similar tastes and politics. She laughed at my jokes and the sex was great! What more would I ask for?

A perpetrator's most consistent feature...is his apparent normality... This idea is deeply disturbing to most people. How much more comforting it would be if the perpetrator were easily recognizable, obviously deviant or disturbed. But he is not... [T]he perpetrator is...exquisitely sensitive to

the realities of power and to social norms. ...he seeks out situations where his tyrannical behavior will be tolerated, condoned, or admired. (75)

It was us against homophobia right from the start. A mutual friend had been uncomfortable with our lovey-dovey behaviour in her home and rejected us. It was a devastating blow, but it drew us closer to each other and to T's lesbian friends. I was dealing with coming out to my family: unwilling to hide, but afraid of losing them. I wrote in my journal, "By cleaving to you, I'm afraid I also necessarily break all the other ties in my life. If I lose you, I'll have no one." That fall, T was in a car accident, and I wrote:

*The sudden shock of thought:
a vain frenzy to re-calculate
my worth in a world without you.
My seeds fall all in your basket,
shuck the memory of one,
and creep viny to your heart
as shoots to light,
roots to water,
forsaking all others,
praying gods take us both at once.*

I had chosen my allegiance.

I thought, "if only we lived in the same city..." but then, for true love, no river is too deep, no mountain too high. We undertook eight hour commutes to spend weekends together, and marked the time until holidays. I looked forward to our time together as much as she did, but the separation seemed harder for her. She missed me so much, couldn't I stay for just another day? a week? My work was portable and I didn't have to punch a time-clock, so what was the problem? Didn't I care about her?

We had our first big fight on the phone. It was about scheduling, about my lack of commitment, about not enough time together. T exploded. She started screaming at me, saying I was just opposing her for fun—"I say white, you say black!"—that I didn't love her, that I didn't respect her years and experience (4 more than mine), that I was not giving as much as she was in terms of money, time, planning...

Fear is...increased by inconsistent and unpredictable outbursts of violence... The ultimate effect of these techniques is to convince the victim that the perpetrator is omnipotent, that resistance is futile, and that her life depends upon winning his indulgence through absolute compliance. (77)

The fight went on through phone calls until I went to see a counselor who asked me what my bottom line was. "That I love her, and I want to work it out," I replied. So I phoned and said, "I'm sorry. Let's just forget this and start over."

...a victim may minimize or excuse her partner's behavior, not only because she fears him but also because she cares for him. [To resist,] she will...have to suppress the affection she already feels. (83) At the beginning of the relationship,...[a victim persuades herself that she is] making only a small symbolic concession. The accounts of battered women are filled with such sacrifices, reluctantly made, which slowly and imperceptibly destroy their ties to others. Many women in hindsight describe themselves as walking into a trap. (80)

I wrote,

oh it makes me wonder, it makes me worry
this distance that nibbles,
this wall of work
and time constraints
that sneers
and rears its ugly head
just inches past the point of no return,
just seconds since the leap of love/
faith/
hope's been made
without a net.

the stunt coordinator says that fear of falling
is more than half the thrill
but I see the thread fray,
wall rise—
my feet kicking as I whistle past.

After that, long phone calls, late, late at night were just as likely to be fights as conversations. They dragged into the wee hours. Fights about anything.

...long periods of sleep deprivation during sessions of jealous interrogation...(78)

In the midst of it, she screamed, "I'm out here in the middle of a lake drowning, and you're standing on the shore telling me to save myself!" The next day I wrote saying this wasn't healthy and that I had to leave even though I loved her. She called. Explained it away. She said she had some problems, but didn't everyone? She was working on it. She was changing.

The use of intermittent rewards to bind the victim to the perpetrator reaches its most elaborate form in domestic battery... [The victim] is often persuaded to return, not by further threats but by apologies, expressions of love, promises of reform, and appeals to loyalty and compassion. For a moment, the balance of power in the relationship appears to be reversed, as the batterer does everything in his power to win over his victim. The intensity of his possessive attention is unchanged, but its quality is dramatically transformed. He insists that his domineering behavior simply proves his desperate need and love for her. He may himself believe this. Further, he pleads that his fate is in her hands, and that she has the power to end the violence by offering ever greater proofs of her love for him. ...the "reconciliation" phase is a crucial step in breaking down the psychological resistance of the battered woman. (79)

I wrote, "What good am I if I cannot examine my own ways of seeing?" and went back.

Since most women derive pride and self-esteem from their capacity to sustain relationships, the batterer is often able to entrap his victim by appealing to her most cherished values. (83)

I heard more and more that I was betraying my commitment. Every at-

tempt I made to define my own mind or space became to her a symbolic betrayal: leaving the room, or not sounding like I meant it when I said "I love you." She said, "I love you more than you love me, and so you have power over me. If you ever leave me you will be abusing your power. When you oppose me in any way you are, in fact, emotionally abusing me."

We fought about everything. I didn't pack my suitcase correctly. I didn't wash my hair the right way. I ate the wrong things for breakfast. I took the wrong attitude in every social situation. She insisted she was only trying to help me.

The desire for total control over another person is the common denominator of all forms of tyranny... The methods that enable one human being to enslave another are remarkably consistent... They are the organized techniques of disempowerment and disconnection. Methods of psychological control are designed to instill terror and helplessness and to destroy the victim's sense of self in relation to others. (77)

She said I was crazy, emotionally disturbed, juvenile, basically flawed, and an intellectual snob. I did things expressly to hurt her. I didn't listen. I was stupid: "How many times do I have to explain this to you?" She felt bad and I made her feel worse. I was hypersensitive. I made bad decisions. I was forgetful, absentminded, anxious. I vowed I would try to be more positive, more spontaneous. I cried all the time. But I wrote on April 5, "A good talk with T. Sorted some things out, came to some new understanding, I think. *Remember* this when things get rough! *Choose* to believe in this." At T's insistence, and with much reluctance, I went spend

some weeks at her place. I wanted to demonstrate my faith.

...perpetrators universally seek to isolate their victims from any other source of information, material aid, or emotional support... [T]he batterer demands that his victim prove her loyalty to him by giving up her work...her friendships, and even her ties to her family. (79-80)

On my birthday I wrote, "I have become a creature who is afraid, groveling, and constantly apologetic." For every decision I planned a defense. I acted covertly. I felt crazy. Trapped.

When we fought, T crowded me physically. Leaving the room was no longer an option—against the rules. I backed away from into corners, into closets. She restrained me there, holding me against the wall, the couch, the floor...to calm me down, she said.

As the victim is isolated, she becomes increasingly dependent on the perpetrator... The more frightened she is, the more she is tempted to cling to the one relationship that is permitted: the relationship with the perpetrator. (81)

Driving on the highway, we fought endlessly. I banged my head on the glass. I dreamed of throwing myself out of the moving car.

...people in captivity live constantly with the fantasy of suicide, and occasional suicide attempts are not inconsistent with a general determination to survive. (85)

Now when we fought, I always became hysterical immediately. This time, after I had exhausted myself with screaming and crying, laid down on the bed, turned to the wall, and shut my eyes, she did not restrain me. Instead she grabs me and hefts me off the bed, wrestles me into a headlock, but this time I get away and run for the door. Stop. Hear her crying in the bedroom. Go back. Hold her 'til she falls asleep.

I don't leave until two days later.

If she reads this now, she will say, as she has before, that I am insane, that she was the victim, or that the abuse was mutual, and I used to worry that she would fool everyone. But lately, I've started to believe that some of you know better.

*Judith Lewis Herman. *Trauma and Recovery*. NY: HarperCollins, 1992.

Sniffilus

Rosa

A friend phoned in the middle of the afternoon. She was desperate and needed someone to help her move. I wasn't really feeling well, as I had a cold, but I *had* offered to help her and I'm not one to go back on my word.

We spent all afternoon hauling things out of the apartment and impressing each other with how butch we both could be. My friend set the tone by taking out five heavy boxes at one time. I was impressed! Especially since I'm the weight trainer and runner and all around sports jock who devotes her life to fitness.

I looked around the apartment for something equally as heavy and chose two large pillows. I took these out to the van, then sat down to eat a juicy, red apple. My friend asked for a bite.

"Sure," I said, blowing loudly into my dry, environmentally friendly cotton handkerchief, "Why not? After all I don't have any sexually transmitted

diseases!" My friend finished off the apple in three bites, belched loudly, (she so butch!) and took off for the next load.

When I walked into the apartment, my friend was leaving with a heavy bike in her left hand, her night table under her right arm and a knapsack on her back.

I looked around for something equally as heavy and decided to tackle an incredibly heavy-looking toaster that taunted me from the counter. I grabbed it with both hands, and huffing and puffing, I managed to get it into the van. I then sat down to eat a pear. My friend asked for a bite.

"Sure," I said, blowing loudly into my moist cotton handkerchief, "Why not? I don't have any S.T.D.'s!" My friend finished off the pear in two bites, belched loudly, (she so butch!) and took off for the next load.

This time, my friend had the love seat in her right hand, a dresser in her left and she was balancing a laundry hamper on her head. She must have learned that trick while working overseas in Africa. She went out to load this into the van.

I looked around the apartment but it was empty so I sat down to eat a kiwi. My friend came in and asked for a bite. "Sure," I said, blowing loudly into my now wet handkerchief. She finished off the kiwi in one bite, belched loudly, (she so—well, you know) and then stood up. She looked fondly around her old apartment, wished it well and then

we left.

The next day, my friend phoned. She desperately needed someone to help organize her new apartment as she wasn't feeling very well and was expecting company in a few days. Since I was feeling much better, I offered to help her out.

When I arrived at her new apartment, I could see that she had a real bad cold. Her nose was raw and she had twisted Kleenex plugs fashioned for each nasal cavity. My friend headed for the kitchen as I picked up her futon with one hand and her dresser with the other. I was just setting up her bed when my friend walked in eating a juicy, red apple and carrying two large pillows. That apple sure looked good...

Picks and Pans

Amy Lee Cardufian

JEERS: To *Out* magazine, for its description of the movie *Higher Learning* as a college lesbian's coming out story. Imagine our surprise when my partner and I attended a local screening expecting a sapphic treat and were subjected, instead, to a campus nightmare rife with racism, sexism and homophobia.

Everybody pretty much hates everybody at this 'typical' American college. Date rape, bloodshed and white supremacist bullshit are all in a day's curriculum. And as far as the coming

out story goes, the producers of this alleged 'message' movie don't let the cute, young, naïve PQ (potential queer) take even a baby step out of the closet. Her attraction to a strong, independent, pamphlet-distributing feminist (rumour all over campus is that she's a dyke) is served up as a 'normal' response to having been mauled by a testosterone-driven pig at her first frat party.

Unfortunately, our little Miss Lezzie Wannabe can't seem to decide between the dyke and a long-haired, patently sensitive, new-age slob of a guy, so she hits the sheets with both of them. (Not at the same time, thankfully.) Yeccccch!

Out should have its poetic licence revoked for promoting this as anything but a colossal waste of time.

CHEERS: While we're on the subject of movies, one chick flick not to be missed is *Go Fish*. It's got some priceless dyke dialogue, a lesbian pasta-and-wine dinner party, and a lively romp on the couch between the ball cap-wearing Max and the nerdy, bespectacled object of her friends' matchmaking efforts. Who could ask for anything more? Okay, since you asked, a confrontation with the long-distance ex might have added some nice fireworks, but generally speaking, it's a fun night out. There are worse ways to pass a cold winter evening. (See above.)

AMY LEE'S QUEER JOKE OF THE MONTH: What do lesbians do on their second date? (Rent a U-Haul.) What do gay men do on their second date? (What second date?!)

JUST WONDERING: Why does anyone give Camille (I'm Not A Lesbian, Yes I Am, No I'm Not) Paglia the time of day? Still waiting for Madonna to return your calls Camille? Dream on... Best answer I've seen to Paglia the Draglia is Genoa Hallerstein, the "feminist author" bull dyke character played by Mary Walsh of *This Hour Has 22 Minutes*. Her Genoa is a self-described "second generation lesbian—the product of a diesel dyke and a turkey baster."

"You're so butch, Camille," she rants, wearing black jeans, sleeveless shirt and white bra. "Take a number, darling. I'm obnoxious, I'm an ego-maniac, and I even talk faster than she does." Take that, Paglia!

Speaking of *This Hour*, I nominate hard-boiled sexual affairs correspondent Babe Bennett for prime minister. "Christmas is just another day ... up around noon, drinks around 3, and then a hamburger on the way to the crime scene, if you're lucky..." Babe, you're my kinda woman!

WHILE I'M AT IT: Two words best describe the new Women's Television Network: French and Saunders. They're the best thing to hit Canada's small screens since ... well, since Babe Bennett and Genoa Hallerstein. These two British comic geniuses are so refreshingly irreverent (not to mention irreverantly refreshing) they make Roseanne seem about as funny as Senator Jesse Helms. Dawn and Jennifer aren't afraid to laugh at themselves, but

are at their clever best when spoofing movies and other TV shows. Recent takes on *Misery*, *The Exorcist*, *Gone With the Wind*, and *Whatever Happened to Baby Dawn (Jane)* proved deliciously demented. Our household gives them six thumbs and two paws up. High praise indeed, when you consider we rarely agree on anything.

Whether they're taking aim at culture, modern art, talk shows, social climbing, the Sixties, the royals, the BBC, birth control or weight control, these two are totally out of control. (They're also the best part of WTN's not-quite-as-funny sitcom, *Girls On Top*, which features the usually-hilarious Tracey Ullman overplaying the role of a blonde bimbo almost to the point of irritation.)

THE LAST WORD: WTN's Shameless Shorts frequently serves up snippets of notable cinematic works by dyke writers/directors/producers. Some are even worth staying up past midnight for. Which brings me to my biggest beef about WTN: most of the best stuff is on so late, its target audience literally sleeps through it.

And while it's great that WTN is showcasing women artists of all types, the kinds of people most likely to appreciate a network where the daytime offerings include women reading poems (in monotone voices, while standing in front of walls... zzzzz) are the kinds of women who probably don't own television sets.

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