



WOMONSPACE NEWS

our voice in the lesbian community



COMEDY

SEPTEMBER 1994

Editorial

Human Foibles = Humour

Lindy Pratch

The July issue of *The Comics Journal* generated a complaint at the Southgate Library. A patron felt that some of the material was offensive to women, and brought the matter to the attention of our manager.

The magazine in question featured an article on Roberta Gregory, a lesbian comic artist. Her humour is quite risqué. Our manager found that when the cartoons were viewed as stereotypes turned around, they gave no cause for concern.

That's how it is with comedy, though. What is funny to one person may affront someone else. Think about what makes you laugh. Often, what we find amusing are the shortcomings we have as human beings, just trying to live in this world. It's playing with the pain, and it helps us cope. But sometimes the pain may be too new, or too overwhelming, and then it's not funny.

Context is important, also. A joke about a bulldyke kickstarting her vibrator can be hurtful when heard in an unfriendly atmosphere. The same joke can release comfortable laughter when it is shared among lesbians. It's the difference between laughing *at*, and laughing *with* others.

Humor is such a strong weapon,
such a strong answer.

Agnes Varda, 1972.

Contributors in this issue:

Lindy Pratch, Catherine Gutwin, Rosa, T. Brooks, Coco, Charity Laboucan, Amy Lee Cardufian, S. Martin, Marcie

Submissions are welcome.

Topics of coming issues:

Women's Music (October)

Honouring our Bodies (November)

I Hate the Holidays (December)

Identity Politics (January)

Lesbian Teachers (February)

Partner Abuse (March)

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.

Queers Have More Fun

Catherine Gutwin

One of the most common and most patronizing responses I've gotten from people (mainly relatives) when I've come out to them goes something like this: "Oh, it's perfectly ok with me and I support you, but I just feel bad because life is going to be so much harder for you in this terribly homophobic world." Well, yeah ... no, wait a minute. There's something wrong here. This response focuses on the hatred of the phobes as if that's all there were to lesbian/gay life, and does it *passively* as if there was nothing we could do about it. They're missing all the joy and activism of queer life that isn't burdensome, but funny.

My well-meaning-but-completely-ignorant aunt is blind to the hilarity of friends so queer that the only straight male in the group *wants to be a lesbian*. Or this coming out story: A normally articulate and in-your-face dyke (not yet out to her parents) visits home and plays a game of scrabble with her mom. Fighting back a wicked case of "dyke-Tourette's syndrome" (the tendency to interject "I'm a dyke!" in otherwise unrelated conversation), her subconscious suddenly wriggles free from a temporary closet. Against her better judgment, she spells out d-y-k-e, meaning, of course, "an embankment, or long ridge against flooding." Only after

the word is on the board does her conscious mind kick into gear and then instantly go numb with horror.

Common usage being the house rules, Mom asks, "So, is this a word you would use in everyday conversation?" Silence. Then, the fatal shift into overdrive: "I mean ... I mean ... that thing in the *river* ... not that *other thing*! Let me make a new word!"

This is from a woman who has marched down the street yelling, "We're here, we're queer, fabulous, don't fuck with us." Her story has elicited shouts of laughter and recognition, but it is one, alas, my dear aunt would just not get.

At the movies, have you ever noticed how sometimes the dykes are the only ones in the theatre laughing? It's the same sensibility that came up with the t-shirt slogan, "I can't even think straight," or "shhhh, nobody knows I'm a lesbian." Normally mundane tasks such as asking directions becomes, in a car full of queers, a fit of giggles followed by the chorus, "NO! Not straight ahead! Gayly forward!"

So to the sorry but 'supportive' straight relatives and friends who in wishing for me a 'better life' are only trying to excuse their own apathy, let me just say this: *queers have more fun*! You don't know what you're missing.

Spelling it Out

Rosa

I don't think I'm 'slow'! In fact, my I.Q. tests bear testimony that I am an intelligent human being. Despite this great intelligence just oozing out of my cranium, certain things really stump me—like dating, for example. It is *so* confusing at times! I need to have things spelled out for me, letter by letter.

Life was much easier when I was a straight latent dyke! I knew what to expect in opposite sex dating, and it was so much easier to distinguish friends from lovers. To put it simply, anyone female was a potential friend and anyone male was a potential lover.

Despite the simplicity, however, I never really enjoyed dating. Perhaps it was because I didn't play baseball. Many of my straight friends did; even friends whom I suspected to be closet couch potatoes. (The permanent bum impressions in their couches was enough to 'out' them and confirm my suspicions.) Everyone talked about making it to first, second or third base, and considering all that ball playing exercise, I found it puzzling that some of my friends still looked like potatoes going to seed. Shouldn't they have been in better shape?

In opposite sex dating, there was little ambiguity. If a man told you that

you were like a sister to him (as *if* I needed more relatives), you could safely put your condoms away. If he starting talking baseball and bases, for some bizarre reason, that usually meant that he was interested. I would then excuse myself to go to the bathroom where I could check the expiry date on those condoms in the mangled packages that I carried in my purse. I would often have Fruit Rollups stuffed in my purse as well, and with the condoms sometimes slipping out of their protective packages and drying up, it was a real challenge distinguishing one from the other.

Thank Goddess that I'm a lesbian now! I gave up condoms, and I reluctantly gave up Fruit Rollups—it must have been Lent! (In fact, I sent a letter to the Fruit Rollup company in which I expressed my disappointment in the drastic decline in the quality of their product. They often tasted quite rubbery. I also don't recall being able to blow bubbles with them before.)

As a lesbian, I find this dating thing confusing. What do you do if you are not sure whether a woman wants to be friends or whether she wants to be your lover, especially if the signals are clearly ambiguous?

For example, last fall when I first came out, I met a lesbian to whom I was quite attracted. She was very

honest and told me that I was like a sister to her, (as if I needed more relatives)! We have continued to see each other socially and we are slowly getting to know one another. Not too long ago we were out for the evening with several other people and my friend and I 'danced.' I use the term loosely because the last time that I danced like that, I was still a straight latent dyke, and all that bumping and grinding could easily have resulted in an unwanted pregnancy. My friend and I didn't just 'dance.' At the end of the evening, we even *kissed!*

I was thrilled that my friend had finally changed her mind and wanted more than just a friendship. When she invited me over for dinner the next evening, I was prepared! I had honed my baseball vocabulary to perfection and was waiting to talk bases.

Imagine my surprise at the end of the evening when all I received was a simple hug! Had I totally misinterpreted what the dancing and the kissing had meant? Thinking that my friend was just too shy to initiate the first move, I decided to be the initiator. My friend

stopped me cold, saying that we had already discussed this matter and she gently pushed me out the door.

On the way home, I was upset! I am not one to violate someone's personal boundaries. As a child, my own boundaries were regularly violated



and I grew up being being very sensitive and respectful of other people's boundaries. How could I have been so wrong in my assumptions? In retrospect, I know how I could have handled this situation. I should have communicated my confusion to my friend and asked for a clarification about the mixed signals that I was getting. We did do this the next day, however, next time I won't risk upsetting myself and hurting a potential friend or lover by delaying clarification.

I learned from this experience. I don't intend to make the same mistake twice! The next time I find myself in a confusing dating situation I am going to be more direct and spell things out. "W-o-u-l-d y-o-u l-i-k-e t-o b-e m-y l-o-v-e-r o-r m-y s-i-s-t-e-r? (As if I need more relatives!)"

Greetings from Thailand!

Coco

Life in Bangkok is bizarre and getting used to Thai culture has been somewhat trying. I have never experienced culture shock like this in my life.

The first day that I was here I got an overdose of the infamous traffic jams. It took three hours to get from the airport to my apartment—a ride that usually takes twenty minutes.

The pollution is terrible. Open sewers along the side of the road show Bangkok's desperate need for civil engineers.

Not everything is bad here, though. The fruit, for example, is wonderful. Mangoes are large, sweet, and delicious. There's a delightful, refreshing fruit called mangosteen. The texture is like that of a skinless grape, but the taste is very unique. There is nothing on earth I can compare it to, but it is truly wonderful.

Nightlife in Bangkok is great fun, but can be expensive. I live quite far from the center of the action and so I don't go out much. The three places I have ventured to are NASA Discotheque, Hard Rock Cafe, and our friendly neighbourhood brothel.

No, I did not partake of the services. I didn't even know it was a brothel. I went with the other two teachers I work

with. The sign out front said Karaoke Bar. Carrie and Nicole like to sing, so we planned to stop in for drink and to sing a few songs. We should have known something was up when we walked in and we were the only customers. There were a lot of women dressed in black just lounging around. They treated us really well and gave us free food. A little after 11 pm, the men started coming in. That's when we figured it out. Since this is the only bar in our neighbourhood and they are so friendly, we continue to hang out there every so often.

After a while, Bangkok, like most cities, got to me. I headed for the beach.

Ko Somet is a beautiful island only five hours away. I thoroughly enjoyed it. The sand is as fine and white as baby powder. It is amazing!

Apparently the Japanese thought so too. During the war, they removed tons of it by aircraft to make into glass.

Ko Somet is a sleepy little island; a perfect place to relax. I look forward to exploring more of the islands when I get a chance.



Two-Spirited

Charity Laboucan

Tansi! Tansi is a Cree word for hello. I am Charity Laboucan, a member of the Lubicon Lake Cree Nation. I am a Native lesbian and at times I have felt that my cultural and sexual identities are mutually exclusive.

Each month I will write a column in *Womonspace News*. This will be an exploration of many things: discovering my Native identity, spirituality, social issues, politics, and any other issues that may be part of being a Native lesbian.

Each Native language has a word for gay people. Each translates roughly into English as **two-spirited**. It means we as gay people hold both the male and female essences within us. I am proud to identify myself as two-spirited. It is a word Native gay peoples in North America have taken as our own to empower ourselves.

Journey

I sit in this truck feeling content
I think this is the name of this emotion
Haven't really felt life without anxiety
curdling and thickening my fluids
My father, with his thick long beautiful hair
naming all the animals I should know
Mountains jagged and layered
meeting to touch cloud
These rivers flow green - minerals he says
Magic this little girl thinks
My life once seemed like these mountains
which crumble and fall heavily to the earth
Gravity pulling me down down
Hands bleeding to grasp my own reality
Blood flowing from life rock
Always questioning whose blood poured from
these wounds
that have woke me in the night
with ancient knowledge of language on the tip of
my tongue
In the day I speak their language so well
Then I find myself following the lost staggering
indian man down the street just to catch slurred
words
that remind me of a home I never had
I am lost I am mute
The trees mountains water speak to my core
which aches to be heard
wants to speak
wants to learn



CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Weekly Events:

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

* **Adamant Eve.** Feminist radio program broadcast on CJSR, FM 88.5. Thursdays from 5-6 pm.

* **Gaywire.** A lesbian, bisexual and gay radio show from CJSR at the University of Alberta, FM 88.5. Thursdays, 6-7 pm.

* **Pink Triangle Youth Group** meets every Saturday, 7:30-10 pm at GLCCE, 104-11745 Jasper Ave. For lesbians and gays 16 to 21 years old.

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

 **Gay and Lesbian Infoline: 988-4018.**

 **Lesbian Life Line: 425-0511.**

Coming Events:

Thursday, September 1

* **Womonspace News Newsletter**

Meeting. Womonspace office, 9930-106 Street, 7:30 pm. Deadline for October issue.

* **Womonspace Drop-in.** Good conversation. Women's Building, basement, 9930-106 Street, 7:30-9 pm.

Tuesday, September 6

* **TUG meeting.** Connecting lesbigay groups for action. GLCCE, 7 pm.

Sunday, September 11

* **Team Edmonton BBQ.** Informal event at Emily Murphy Park, 4 pm.

* **Womonspace General Meeting.** Everyone is welcome to attend! Basement, 9930-106 Street, 7:30 pm.

Saturday, September 17

* **Womonspace Dance.** Bonnie Doon Hall, 9240-93 Street, 8 pm-1 am.

Sunday, September 18

* **Vocal Minority Choir** first practice for 94/95 season. Rm 123-Fine Arts, U of A, 2 - 4:30 pm. New singers are welcome! Rehearsals will continue every Sunday.

Saturday, September 24

* **Riverdale Women's Dance**— smoke free, no alcohol— at Riverdale Hall, 9231-100 Avenue, 8:30 pm-1 am.

* **Wine Tasting** social evening at John Walter Museum (by Kinsmen Sport Centre), 8 pm. Fundraiser for Delwin Vriend Fund; \$5 entrance fee.

Sunday, September 25

* **Women's Health Series** for lesbian and bisexual women only. *Finding a Physician*, bsmnt, 9930-106 Street, from 2:30-4:30 pm.

* **Wet & Wild #2!** Team Edmonton invites you to the GMCC downtown campus, where the pool's rented from 5 pm on; games, BBQ & water fun! \$4.

Monday, September 26

* **Team Edmonton Gay & Lesbian Sports & Leisure Association General Meeting** at GLCCE, 7 pm.

September 30 — October 2

* **Alberta Summit** in Red Deer for gays and lesbians across Alberta. \$25 reg: Workshops, Trade Fair, Dinner and Dance. Phone Hilary (343-6239) or Michael (347-2174).

Sunday, October 2

* **Womonspace News Newsletter Meeting**, Boystown, 10116-124 Street, noon.
Submissions deadline for Nov. issue;
Honouring Our Bodies.

Thursday, October 6

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

Sunday, October 9

* **Womonspace General Meeting** 9930-106 Street, 7:30 pm.

Sunday, October 23

* **Womonspace Annual General Meeting**, Shakespear's Darts, 2nd floor, 10306 112 St, 6 pm. Food and entertainment provided! All members are encouraged to attend.

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CONFIDENTIALITY ASSURED

Meet Lisa Austin...

Lesbian Comic

Amy Lee Cardufian

She who laughs, lasts.

Edmonton's Lisa Austin can vouch for that. And while she'll be the first to tell you it's too early to bill her as the next great lesbian comic, she's certainly taken the first few steps.

"I'd always been the class clown, and entertained at friends' parties," says Austin, explaining how she ended up doing stand-up comedy. "I also had really funny parents. My dad was sort of a clown, and my mom was very witty, very clever. So I come by it honestly."

Austin's first public appearance was the result of some arm-twisting by her friend Holly Wright of the local band Triphoria, who asked her to consider introducing the trio at St. Albert's Arden Theatre.

"I was very nervous and timid at the prospect of doing five minutes ... then they asked me to do twenty minutes," Austin recalls. "If I had known how much material is required to fill twenty minutes, I probably never would've done it."

"I sweated and sweated over that. It was my first gig, and I was very unsure about it. The Arden was very profes-



sional—with a real stage manager, dressing rooms and everything. I can honestly say I have never been so terrified. Ever. I remember looking for a way out of the theatre, but there was no escape.

"I got out there and the audience was in total darkness; I was blinded by the spotlight. I had no idea how to use a mike—I kept wandering away from it. But the people were very supportive, and the material went over well. I didn't know for sure if I'd ever do it again, but the gay and lesbian community asked me to be MC for the opening of the 1993 Pride Week Film Festival."

She returned for the 1994 Queer Sightings film festival in June, and has also appeared at the City Media Club and Catalyst Theatre's Loud 'N Queer Cabaret. (You can catch her next performance at the Edmonton Vocal Minority fundraiser cabaret scheduled for October 29 at the Catalyst.)

Though she now has plenty of material suitable for mainstream audiences, Austin says performing for gay crowds is particularly rewarding.

"It gives me the opportunity to be 'out' in public. I don't have any particular agenda, in terms of being a lesbian comic, but the Film Fest gig gave me a chance to see what kind of

material I could come up with," she says. "And the subject of lesbianism is very fertile ground for material.

"Coming out is wonderful comedic material. My own coming out story is hilarious. Everyone says coming out is a process, but for me it took ten minutes.

"There are all sorts of opportunities for humour in being closeted and having everyone assume you're straight. And a lot of my humour comes from taking personal experiences in which I've been humiliated or embarrassed—like dating, the first kiss, meeting my lover's parents. Every part of human experience is potential for humour."

Families are a bottomless pit of humour waiting for a place to happen. One of my favourite Lisa Austin lines is actually a direct quote from her mother, who, when she finally found the courage to confront her daughter about her sexual orientation, had a slight problem with the terminology.

"You're not a ... heterosexual, are you?" Mom spits out, anxiously.

"No," replies Lisa, in all honesty.

"Oh, thank god!" blurts Mom, relieved.

"I couldn't have made that up," Austin says with a smile. "Being able to laugh at ourselves is really important. It keeps me humble, and I think it keeps things in perspective. Familiarity is a lot of the time what makes people

laugh, because they're laughing at themselves."

In the case of lesbians, that means laughing at our own granola reputations, and sharing a conspiratory giggle over the knowledge that many of us own one dress—one and *only one* dress—to be

worn, reluctantly, for job interviews.

What's ahead? "I think I'm at a crossroads," she confesses. "I never really had a plan; this all just sort of happened. But I got confident with it very quickly, and had very good experiences with it.

I've never bombed, not even once. So in some ways, I think I should keep ascending this ladder, but that involves getting a manager, doing the Yuk-Yuks circuit ... and that's a real male bastion.



Travelling through redneck Alberta and talking about itchy breasts doesn't strike me as a real good time! But, if I'm gonna do this, I guess I don't have to do it the way the boys tell me. Maybe I'll borrow a page out of kathy lang's book, and invent my own route."

The issue, concludes Austin, is "deciding what I'm willing—and not willing—to do.

"I really believe that everyone has something they do better anybody else. Unfortunately, many people go through life taking their gifts for granted and not acting on them—especially women. But fear is just a lack of faith. I would encourage everyone to take risks with their talents.

"And if their talent is particularly good sex, they can just leave me their phone number."

Lesbian Limerick

Jane rode around on a Harley-bike.
To strangers she looked just like a
bull dyke.
But at home in bed,
To her lover she pled:
"Get the ribbons. You know what I
like."

Karen Winter
(Common Lives, Lesbian Lives, Summer
1986.)

URBANgraffiti

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Between the Covers

At the Edmonton Public Library

The Butterfly Effect : A Helen Keremos Dective Novel by Eve

Zaremba, Second Story Press, 1994.

Lindy Pratch

Private investigator Helen Keremos travels to Japan where a missing person, a murder, and local gangsters start her on the trail of international art smugglers. We follow Helen to Hong Kong, Toronto, Los Angeles and Las Vegas. Curiosity gets her into some difficult situations, but this is all a part of the attraction Helen has for her profession.

This is the fifth novel featuring Helen Keremos. The first, *A Reason to Kill*, was published in 1978. The entire series is available at the library. It isn't necessary

to read them in order, although it is reassuring to find that Helen ages along with the rest of us.

Helen may be going grey at the temples, and her knees may cause her some pain, but she's as game as ever for a challenge. Usually, she works alone, but Helen has an unwitting partner in her latest escapade. Wayne Tillion compares Helen Keremos to a witch or a raven, and admires her inspite of his disdain for lesbians.

The title refers to a phenomenon based on Chaos Theory, in which complex outcomes can result from simple causes. Events start to unfold from the opening paragraph, evolving into a convoluted plot.

The result is both entertaining and satisfying.



Queer Comedy To Watch Out For

Catherine Gutwin

Stand-Up:

Lea Delaria

Kate Clinton

Lynn Lavner

Elvira Kurt

Sheila Gostick

(and I'm guessing here):

Ellen deGeneres

Paula Poundstone

Rosie O'Donnell



Music:

Venus Envy (especially the Christmas album, "*I'll Be a Homo for Christmas*")

Romanovsky and Phillips (who have written such brilliant songs as "*Don't Use Your Penis (for a Brain)*")

The Lost Dakotas ("Cowboys are frequently, secretly fond of each other")

Movies:

The Wedding Banquet — One partner in a gay couple agrees to a paper marriage so that a struggling performance artist can get her green card and so that his family will stop badgering him to get married. The wedding arrangements get entirely out of control and mayhem ensues. You can just imagine. (Out on video in September.)

Go Fish — Just out; a story of five lesbians that is realistic and funny enough to warrant "first official good dyke movie" from someone who's been to see them all.

Calamity Jane — For those of you into musicals and lesbian subtext, this ultra-Hollywood production leaves the man out of the picture and the women happily together until the very last second. Just hokey enough to be funny.

Quotes

"I don't care how anyone identifies me as long as I can do my work."

Lily Tomlin, on how she feels about being identified as a lesbian, 1984.

"There hasn't been a studio head I've worked for who hasn't come out and asked me if I'm a lesbian. I say, 'Normally, this would be none of your business. However, I will answer you ... It's possible. I'm not *practicing* at the moment, but I will not say it will never happen or hasn't happened in my past.'"

Whoopi Goldberg, 1988.

Quotations from: Lesbian Quotations, compiled by Rosemary Silva, Alyson Publications, 1993.

OKAY, SO IT'S A LITTLE TIGHT, BUT THIS DRESS HAS SEEN ME THROUGH THREE WEDDINGS, ONE FUNERAL AND SEVERAL JOB INTERVIEWS — I'M NOT BUYING ANOTHER ONE!



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★ **DANCE**

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