

## = feature =

## CROW'S CAWS

by crow cohen



## Reflections on Israel

I am so dismayed by the recent violence in the Middle East! I have a special affinity to the area, not only because I'm Jewish, but because I spent three and a half years living in Israel from 1981-1985. I decided to move there after I had reached an emotional dead-end in the Burlington Women's Community around the time Reagan was elected.

Part of that despair was due to personal issues—my family splitting up, my insecure friendships, drug addiction—but part of my leaving the country was due to a major shift in the lesbian feminist movement from the heyday of the '70s. Many of us downwardly mobile dykes were getting sick of shit jobs and ratty apartments. John Kennedy's "new frontier" was buried along with him, his brother and Martin Luther King, and we were worried about the impending economic slump. The country was headed toward backlash—against feminists, the hippies, the queers, the Blacks—you name it. The reign of the demented Hollywood cowboy was launched.

As a matter of fact, there was a noticeable "exodus" of Jewish dykes from the Burlington area in the early '80s. A lot of that may have been due to the rise of "identity politics." We were starting to realize that flying under the banner of "sisterhood" was not so simple. We may have been dykes, but some of us were also Black, poor, Jewish, disabled, or just plain different. We needed those parts of us validated, since every day we expended a lot of invisible energy coping with feeling left out let alone, trying to ignore unconscious prejudice from our sisters due to ignorance. It was in the early '80s we began confronting one another about those differences, sometimes quite viciously. Many of us

didn't feel as safe in our communities anymore. Since there was (and still is) a substantial amount of anti-Semitism in the women's movement, many Jewish lesbians left predominately non-Jewish Vermont in search of more diversity in bigger cities.

I had an ex-husband and an 11-year-old daughter living in Israel at that time. Like many Jews either fleeing political persecution or just trying to "find themselves," emigrating to Israel became an option for us since the establishment of the Jewish homeland in 1948 after the Holocaust. I was often confused about how to express my Jewish culture in the women's community.

On the one hand, I have noticeably Semitic features, a common Jewish last name, and was brought up within the Jewish tradition. As a lesbian feminist, however, it was considered politically incorrect to be too attached to patriarchal religions at that time. In addition, a lot of folks from the Left, where the women's movement emerged, were virulently anti-Zionist, because the Jews were displacing Palestinians to establish Israel, and over the years became repressive occupiers. Also, being Jewish was not often acknowledged by the movement as an oppressed minority the way being Black, Hispanic, or native American was. Too many of us Jews in America were middle class, which clouded the issue. Few political activists were (are) willing to study how anti-Semitism plays out in our society, since historically, money never protected us from being rounded up and massacred throughout the centuries.

Actually, I loved Burlington. As I tried to pull myself out of the depths of a debilitating depression, I couldn't think of one place in the U.S. I would have rather been than in my

beloved Vermont. But I felt stuck. I was grieving for my heterosexual life (another no-no in the movement), felt shunned because I was brought up as a middle-class Jew, and felt inadequate as a mother. I didn't have a job because I cornered myself with downward mobility. In short, I was a wreck, so I took a geographical cure.

Moving to Israel was a phenomenal experience. It was excruciatingly lonely at first. My ex-husband had taken a job as a spy (although he lied to us about that), so he was never around. My oldest daughter was living on a kibbutz on the Mediterranean coast, and my youngest daughter and I were living in Jerusalem in essentially one room in immigrant housing beyond the "green line," in occupied territory.

But then I found the Jerusalem women's community. It was ironic that the feminist movement in Israel was 10 years behind the States, so I found myself back in the pioneering role of radical lesbian feminist revolutionary on the other side of the world. Not only was the women's community intensely diverse (we were Israeli, American, French, Scottish, South African, Moroccan, you name it), but for the first time in my life, I felt what it was like to be in a Jewish country, where Jerusalem shut down on Saturdays (the Sabbath) as well as all major Jewish holidays, where Jewish rye was sold in all the neighborhood mom and pop stores, and where so many of those third-world faces I'd

see from all over the world were actually Jews!

Suddenly, being Jewish meant a whole lot more than bagel and lox. Just as I benefited from a period of separatism as a lesbian to explore how oppression played out in my life as a woman, I was able to affirm myself as a Jew in ways I never could in Christian-dominated America.

Back in the early '80s, the lesbian-feminist movement in Israel did not focus on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Many of us felt that there were plenty of straight Leftists to work on that issue. We felt we needed to focus on women's issues—we figured if we didn't confront society on sexism, nobody else would.

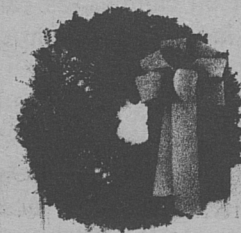
But we were naïve. The Middle East conflict reached such a boiling point, we felt we could no longer put the problem on a back burner. We

began making the connections between the domination of women and the domination of Palestinians, claiming that all oppressions are linked. Within a few years, "Women in Black" was launched—a women's protest movement to stop the Israeli occupation that caught on worldwide. Now women from many warring countries adopt "Women In Black" tactics (silent vigils all over the country on Friday afternoons) to protest oppressive governments—in Bosnia, for example.

And yet... and yet. The war rages in Israel. The peace process has probably been knocked off the map for several more years. Despite my love for Israel, my heart is sinking fast.

*Crow Cohen is a lesbian feminist who lives in Winooski. ▼*

## QUALITY VERMONT EVERGREEN WREATHS



The original 22" Balsam Wreath decorated with a large red velvet bow, pine cones & berries \$27.95

Unique Dried Flower Wreaths, Centerpieces, Swags & Garlands (indoor use) available.

**NEW:** Our "Breakfast in Bed" Gift Pkgs.

Choose from different combinations of VT Maple Syrup, VT Smoked Hams, Bacon, Cheese, VT Mustards, Green Mt. Coffees, etc.

Call for prices & free brochure.

1-800-552-3747

VISA, MasterCard & Discover Accepted

All orders  
UPS delivered  
ppd.

## Nature...by Design of Vermont

PO Box 466 • 2627 Barton-Orleans Rd • Barton, VT 05822 Fax: 1-802-754-2626  
www.naturebydesign.com e-mail: peternbd@together.net

P.O. Box 875

90 Main Street



**BLACKWOOD  
ASSOCIATES, PC**  
attorneys

blackwylaw@aol.com

fax: 802-863-0262

*Employment and Special Education Law,  
Civil Rights Law, Wills and Mediation,  
LGBT Adoptions and Domestic Issues,  
Personal Injury Law and other litigation*

Burlington, VT 05402  
802-863-2517

The chances of an HIV positive mother passing HIV on to her child, without medical intervention, is now approximately 1 in 5. With full medical intervention—medications during pregnancy, C-section, not breastfeeding—the chances drop as low as 2%.



## Elizabeth C. Campbell, CPA, PC

Certified Public Accountants

15 East Washington Street, Rutland 05701

802-773-4030 / liz@rallyCPA.com

Tax specialists serving individuals  
and small businesses

## Schoenberg &amp; Associates

ATTORNEYS AT LAW

matrimonial and family law

131 CHURCH STREET

BURLINGTON, VERMONT

05401

P. 802.864.3120

F. 802.864.3635

www.vermontfamilylaw.com

info@vermontfamilylaw.com