

# A Thousand Women Meeting Women

## NH Social Group & Founder Barbara McLean Celebrate 10 Years

BY EUAN BEAR

**“W**here are all the lesbians?” I get asked that question – usually via email – several times a month by women who are moving to Vermont or just visiting.

Even with the women’s social gatherings in Vermont – Cronos, Women of the Woods, Fried Green Tomatoes, and Womynetplay, among others – it’s not easy for newcomers to find social events where they’ll be comfortable.

The story is different in New Hampshire, where Women Meeting Women, the organization Barbara McLean founded 10 years ago, is going strong with over a thousand contacts from women.

Every month on the second Friday there’s a newcomers’ meeting in Nashua at the Unitarian Universalist church, the group’s home base. In 1993, membership cost \$8. A year later it was raised to \$10, and it hasn’t changed since. “I’m very inclusive,” says McLean, “I try to reach as many women as possible.”

She and the group are pretty successful. The typical attendance at a dance is about 300 women. Their very first meeting pulled in 53 women. “Hundreds of couples” have begun their relationships through Women Meeting Women, and many more friendships started there.

Their events don’t stop with the six or seven dances throughout the year and monthly get-acquainted meetings. Sporting events – both to play in and professional games to attend – biking, hiking, river tubing, skiing, shopping in New York City and vacations in Quebec, camping weekends, cookouts and more are on their agenda.

At least a dozen events every month are free, and others are very low cost. “We had six weeks of dance lessons for \$10! The whole six weeks!” McLean declares. At dances, women who



**“I got tired of politics.  
It’s a mean place to be.  
And a lot of political movements  
are created through social means.”**

cannot afford the admission price get in free or at a reduced rate. Free memberships can also be arranged.

Tickets for the 10-year anniversary Gay-La (November 14, with entertainment by Suzanne Westenhoefer) cost \$60 per person, McLean explains, “and we’ve had letters from women who can’t afford it. We made an appeal for donations through the newsletter. One couple sent \$500. Another woman said that if a woman would volunteer to work on the event, she would a buy her a seat.”

It hasn’t all been smooth and easy along the way, either for the organization or for its founder.

McLean was in nursing school in Chicago, in love with another student, when she was outed to the school, which expelled her, and to her parents.

In the Chicago of the late 1950s and early 1960s, the only places for lesbians to go were “Mafia-run bars where you paid three dollars a beer and you were glad there were no lights on because you didn’t want to see what was crawling around in the filth on the floor.”

By 1966, she was primed to found the Chicago chapter of Daughters of Bilitis. In an interview in the WMW newsletter, McLean recalls, “Running a lesbian organization in Chicago in the 60s was not a safe venture. We were beaten and had our homes broken into.”

She trained as a computer programmer. “I was out all the time, everywhere. I was never discriminated against as a lesbian, but I was as a woman.” McLean recounts a job interview at RCA where she was asked questions impermissible today: was she dat-

ing, did she have a boyfriend, was she planning to get married.

“Why are you asking me these questions?” I asked him. He said the company spent a lot of money on training employees, and if I was going to get married, they wouldn’t want to go to that expense. I told him, “I’m not getting married – I’m a lesbian!” And he said, “You’re hired.”

She moved to Los Angeles and was president of the DOB chapter there. She brought together the first national lesbian conference at UCLA, deejayed *The Lesbian Hour* on Thursday nights for KPFK radio, got involved in the lesbian music scene, and worked on Pride committees until she burned out.

She also worked full-time jobs, often in the corporate world. She’s been a marketer and marketing consultant, trained people on computers and been an

event planner (“I love doing commitment ceremonies!”). All those skills come in handy in running WMW.

She moved to New Hampshire in 1988, worked on Pride events as a talent coordinator and founded WMW five years later. Asked why she moved away from political organizations, McLean says, “I got tired of politics. It’s a mean place to be. And a lot of political movements are created through social means.

“WMW is not devoid of politics. But the community needed social events. Some of them live in very rural areas, and we bring them out of the woods and give them a rich social life,” she concluded.

All women are accepted at WMW events, whether they’re out or not, or bisexual, or transwomen. Accepting transwomen has generated controversy, including with a group in Ogunquit, Maine that is considering affiliating with WMW.

McLean envisions the future: “I’d like to open up the New England states” for more chapters of WMW. The existing group would work with local groups to set up a steering committee, provide assistance on organizing, publish information on the new group and its events in the WMW newsletter and use its email network for mailings. But perhaps most importantly, the parent group would “protect their events with our insurance.”

Barbara McLean, single again after a 5-year relationship, lives with a housemate, three cats and two mixed-breed dogs: “The dogs go everywhere with me.” She says she loves to work. “I love the challenge of it. My mother worked until she was 73. I have no interest in retiring.” ▼

For more information on Women Meeting Women, check out their website at [www.geocities.com/wmwomen](http://www.geocities.com/wmwomen).