

we spy

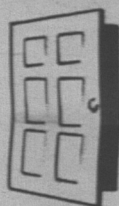
You: queer-identified, hetero or homo orientated, 23 or older Vermonter, looking to volunteer to hang out and support queer youth from around the green mtns.

Us: ONLY queer youth agency in Vermont: Outright Vermont.

Interested? Interview & background check required. Contact: lluvia@outrightvt.org or 802.865-9677

Hurry! Volunteer Training set for Sat. December 11th in Burlington.

outrightvt.org



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Listening to Cris

Poet Lynn Martin shares her appreciation for Cris Williamson and the role of Women's Music in her life.

It happened when I was 50. I stepped out of life as I knew it. I walked off without money or job into the wilderness of modern living. I moved into a lesbian life, carried there on the sound of Cris Williamson's voice: "Lean on me, I am your sister; lean on me, I am your friend." The longing for such a community was overwhelming. Within the notes of this song nestled the joy of coming home. It was 1985, in the midst of the feminist movement, and I was a single leaf afloat on a river hellbent for the sea.

It's 19 years later. It's many relationships and a whole story of survival later. I have found good friends. I've also found one or two sisters. Life provides loss and hurt, joy and redemption no matter what ground you place under your feet. Whatever life is, is your life. Acknowledging myself as lesbian may be fate, genes or accident, or all of the above. All I know is I am.

But here was Cris, performing in a small town in Vermont called Dummerston. Someone gave me a ticket, so off I went. I couldn't imagine a woman who sold out Carnegie Hall performing in this small, white Grange Hall that held less than 100 people. It was of course sold out. Like few other events, the predominance was a white haired audience. Cris has kept her audience for 30 years.

That's how old her album *The Changer and the Changed* is this year. It is still her best selling album. When I listen to it today, I can still hear and feel the joy that went into its making. When I first saw her in Burlington, the performance contained many of the songs from this album. When I first saw her, she was a symbol of all I wanted to be. I still

have that same awe of Cris and her ability to write songs that reflect my life. But in Dummerston, 19 years later, she was not a symbol, but a real woman, vulnerable, gracious, scarred by life, growing older, but still singing.

That, as I sat in the audience and watched the play of emotions on her oh so expressive face, brought tears to my eyes in grateful response.

She began the evening acknowledging her fatigue.

Like a blue heron under a wide sky

Sometimes / like when the blue heron stands so still the world stops, and contracts to / a blue cascade of feathers, so concentrated in intent / everything holds its breath,

I meet someone / dressed in a blue skirt and I hesitate / asking where have I met her before, where have I seen her / standing quiet and centered on her feet, familiar in the way her body / leans toward something I can't see?

Just as the heron / will open its wings and suddenly double its size, / so, also, does she step forward, turn to an audience, lean into song, / doubled with the weight of us all, who yearn to fly.

How vulnerable are the creatures of the sky. Visible against a blue so wide, they have no choice but to be who they are, mysterious and connected to the unseen pull of whatever god had the imagination to create / a woman at once so herself, and so much more.

Dummerston was close to the end of her fall tour. Initially her voice reflected this fatigue, but she got stronger and stronger the longer she sang. A brand new song, "Songbird," has four lines from Emily Dickinson in it, and if that was all I heard that evening, it would have been worth a full-price ticket.

Cris talked to the audience between songs: about growing up on the prairie, about getting

older. Her sense of humor spoke to all of us growing-olders with our bones beginning to creak and our memories failing. Again, she was breaking the silence. Have you noticed, there is always one more silence to break? Now it's as an aging woman.

As I listened, I was completely captivated, just as I had been earlier in my life. The predominant emotions evoked in me were joy and sadness. Joy because Cris was herself, or as much of herself as I can know of any performer, and not a mirror of all I wanted for myself. Sad because I was older, more battered, less hopeful than that 50-year-old adolescent I once was. Someone once told me that when you change your love to another gender, your first relationship will echo all your teen hopes and fears. It did. Sad because we were still talking about politics that threaten to disempower us once again. Cris, however,

told us to keep doing the grassroots work, because that's what it's always been about, and still is. And as I said, she is still singing. I knew I couldn't do any less. This poem is my tribute to Cris, Holly, Margie, Damaris and all. ▼

Lynn Martin is a poet and AIDS prevention worker in Brattleboro.