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## It's better to know



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\* The Vermont AIDS Hotline is open weekdays, 8:30-4:30. (For information 24/7, call the National AIDS Hotline 800-342-2437.)

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ALYSON ADVENTURES

# Culture Vulture: Manifest Destiny

So both of the hippie doctors I go to (my acupuncturist and my chiropractor) are vocal proponents of the idea of "manifestation" — that we can call things into being by thinking about them. For instance, if I really want to move into a new house, the most important thing I can do is imagine myself in that house making breakfast and doing yard work; if I act as if I've already gotten what I want, then I will get it. Frankly, I'm not so sure about this. After all, "manifesting" the house might help me get it, it's true, but the material help I could count on from my rich parents shouldn't be ignored. Similarly, the idea that someone can think herself out of poverty seems to ignore the realities of unequal opportunity.

That being said, it can't hurt to imagine yourself getting what you want, right? One of my favorite things about the end of the year is those lists you always find in the entertainment section of the paper that contain the ten best and ten worst things of whatever category for the year. So I was thinking that I'd do a little preemptive tenting. You know — manifest them. So here goes:

*Imagine yourself eleven months in the future. You've had a good year — avoided the things you didn't want, and received those you did. You're sitting down in a comfortable chair to read the December issue of Out in the Mountains (whose readership has tripled over the course of the year!)...*

It's hard to narrow my list of the best things of this tumultuous year down to five, but I'll do my best.

**5) The Feminist Pop Idol:** Maybe the least expected event this year was the feminist co-op started by pop stars Lindsay Lohan, Ashlee Simpson and Avril Lavigne. After Lohan's highly publicized nervous breakdown following her split with *That 70's Show* star Wilmer Valderramma, she emerged from the hospital with newfound political consciousness. In a now-infamous TRL appearance in March, she showed up with no makeup on, told Carson Daly he was "irrelevant except maybe as, like, a mannequin for designers" and launched into a screeching cover of John Lennon's "Oh Yoko."



Surprisingly, Lohan's shift gained followers rather than alienating them, and she and the other aforementioned pop icons have fired their managers and formed a co-op, and now donate over half their profits to pro-choice and global justice nonprofits. Their collective manifesta, *Revolution is the New Black* is *de rigeur* at the high school where I work, even nine months after Lohan's breakdown.

**4) The Oscars Sweep:** In an upset of the last five years of the best actress Oscar going to women who are "normally" pretty, but have uglified themselves up in term of class or gender in blatant Oscar ploys (Julia Roberts as Erin Brockovitch, Hilary Swank as Brandon Teena and Charlize Theron as Aileen Wuornos), the only likely contenders for Best Actress this year are women who have never fit into the traditional Hollywood mold. I like to call it "Year of the Fat Old Ladies."

Tyne Daly, for instance, is generating massive Oscar buzz for her portrayal of Bella Abzug in Jane Campion's biopic of the boundary-testing politician and women's rights advocate. Similarly, Imelda Staunton is hoping to follow last year's Oscar win with another for her role in Mike Leigh's *Notes from East London*. An Academy insider, when questioned about perennial favorite Nicole Kidman's absence from consideration this year, responded, "that girl really needs a sandwich."

**3) Nancy Zerg's Jeopardy Reign:** After ousting Ken Jennings last December, Zerg has gone on to beat his record, winning over \$3 million. In a press conference after she surpassed Jennings' \$2 million mark, Zerg said that she plans to use her winnings to found a

nonprofit that will help struggling progressive grassroots organizations find real estate where they can base operations.

### 2) The New Queer

**Cinema:** Forever, it seems, there have been only two kinds of queer films — the tragic tale of the queer martyr or the romantic comedy. Don't get me wrong, these are great genres, and there's definitely something that feels affirming in seeing same-gender couples find happiness. But I hadn't realized how limited this offering was until this year saw an explosion of queer-themed movies in previously untouched genres like the action movie (Sylvester Stallone in *Queen City*), sports movie (Queen Latifah and Holly Hunter in the LPGA tour movie *Bogey*) and what seems to be a new genre, the "buddy-with-benefits" movie (I'm thinking of the Josh Hartnett / Tom Cruise vehicle *Two for the Road*).

**1) The Ascendancy of Independent Media and Breakdown of Fox News:** After Bill O'Reilly's public breakdown in March when he punched Howard Dean in the face and then began weeping inconsolably, the bloom has faded from this corporate giant. The network attempted to revitalize itself with new graphics and countdowns, but when they declared a new level of terror alert (mauve), it finally pushed them to the level of self-parody, and their ratings have been steadily slipping all year, even in stalwart red states like Alabama. As a result, people are turning more and more to independent media outlets like local (non-Gannett) papers and considering the source of their news information a bit more carefully.

There you have it — now, if only my fantasy would manifest, our world would be so-o-o much better off! ▼

*Anne Moore lives in Winooski and plans to spend 2005 manifesting her own personal revolution.*