

# Personal Perspectives

## A Different Life: What Names Love?

by Patricia J.

The first time I fell in love with a man took me by surprise, as I was already several years into a long-term relationship with a woman. It happened at my brother's wedding; Michael was the bride's brother and my partner during the entire event. We made a lovely couple, to all appearances, and I was caught up in the romance and music, the idea of being like other women who had a man to dance with and beside whom they identified themselves. (I was raised in the 50's in a suburb where all families were "intact," all couples were male/female.) And in fact I liked him and found myself amazed that the feelings were mutual.

In the following 48 hours I experienced both his family and mine encouraging and enjoying our relationship, including us in talk of their relationships as they never had before. Suddenly I had some-

thing very basic in common with them all, and the energy was irresistible. When he kissed me goodnight the rest of my life felt more than a state away -- which it was at that moment, where my housemate and dogs were waiting for me to return.

I felt I'd walked through a secret door into the world where everyone else lived... "Come to the party, Friday night." "Want to get together when you come back next month?" My parents and brother were obvious in their delight at the prospect that Michael and I were interested in each other, as was his family.

That momentum fed whatever flame of feeling there was between us for a couple of months. I lived with the profound tension between falling in love with a stranger (and man) and being in love with a friend (and woman). Fortunately, I lived at a distance, which provided me with some needed perspective.

At times it fed my fantasy of what life with him would be like, but ultimately it gave me time and space in which to hear the questions life was asking: Are you in love? With whom? Has it only been good with a woman because you never met the right man? If you take away all the other voices, the approval and encouragement, where do you really want to be?

After days of hearing the questions and being torn by my feelings, I walked along a favorite creek for hours attempting to find an answer, to hear my own heart. I can still see the colors of the fall landscape that September day as geese called over my head. "If you take away all the other voices..." and I knew. This was where I wanted to be, loving the woman with whom I'd made my home.

But how powerful the energy had been of doing what others could support and understand! Tempting enough to make me consider giving up a love I cherished for a life that wasn't truly my own.

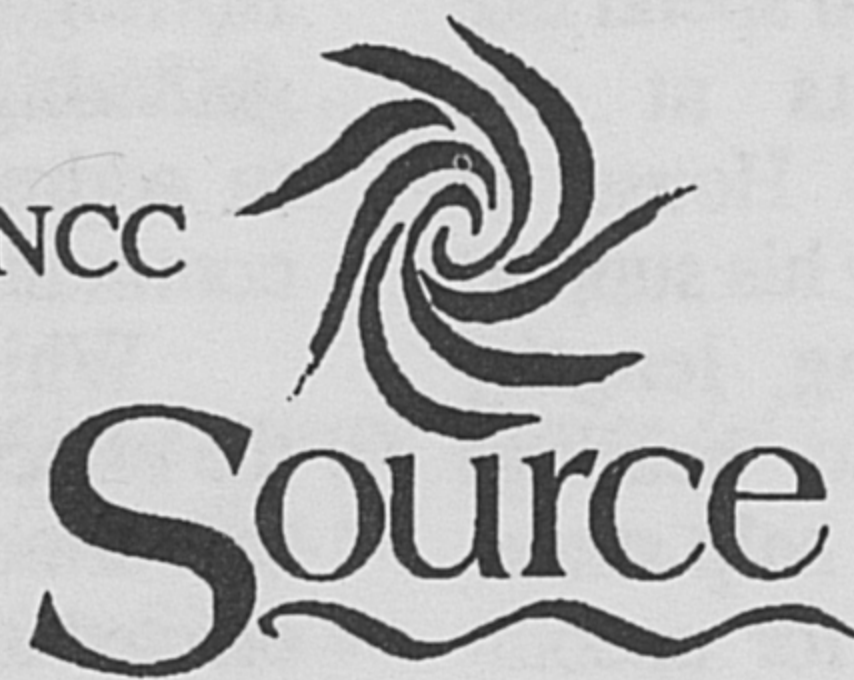
I went to another wedding recently and it brought memories as well as new feelings. I found myself angry at what I've never had -- no family celebration, no ritual to honor and give thanks for two lives promised to each other, no acknowledgment of the family and home we create together...not even the basic enthusiasm and warmth surrounding male/female couples in love.

There are many who would say I don't deserve it -- that's meant for men and women, and I'm not living by those rules. No, I'm living by my heart, which says put your life where your love is. And for me, that's still in response to the question asked at the creek over fifteen years ago.

But it now makes me sad to see how selective people can be about what they support and celebrate...which relationships they recognize. Caring commitment isn't easy, and the circle of family or friends around a couple can exert a powerful influence as it chooses to condemn or to celebrate, to isolate or include them.

In the end, I'm tempted to ask: is that choice based on custom and rules, or on concern and recognition?

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