

Personal Perspectives

Reflections on a Year Lived Alone

by Celia Hunter

It was almost exactly a year ago that Nikki and I broke up after more than three years together. "Together" in a manner of speaking. Throughout our relationship we lived in different states. Sometimes I think that part of the reason we broke up when we did was that the time was coming when we could finally choose to live together, or at least in the same town.

Even though I lived alone before the break-up, I was used to thinking of myself as a part of a couple, and there have been lots of adjustments. Suddenly I was spending my weekends in Vermont and not on the road; suddenly I had no one to spend vacations with, no one to talk to about the funny or frustrating things that happened every day, no one to whom I was special.

I've had to struggle with the fear that in being single I've simply reverted to my natural state, that I'm hard to get along with, and that no one else will take me on.

There is a lot of time in a year to run through a whole range of emotions – over and over again – and I have. I've been angry, hurt, and lonely plenty of times. I have sometimes felt left out of a lesbian world that seems to revolve around couples.

I hear how lesbians turn their ex-lovers into their best friends. That hasn't happened with Nikki and me, and I don't know if it ever will. Right now we have no contact at all. While I miss having her in my life, I'm not ready to be friends.

I could go on in this vein, but I don't want to. You get the picture. I'd rather talk about some of the satisfactions I've had being alone, and there have been many. In not having another person to consider, I've had the space to think and learn about

myself. I've learned to think about myself as a separate person again – to find out what I want and what I like. I've started to make plans for myself, rather than adjust to someone else's. I've had time to develop new interests and become involved in new activities.

Although I have definitely been single – I haven't even dated, whether out of fear of lack of opportunity I can't really say – I've hardly been a hermit. I've put lots of time and energy into forming new friendships and revitalizing old ones, time and energy that simply weren't available before.

These days my friends come in a variety of shapes, genders, ages, and sexual orientations. I have a few gay male friends for the first time, in addition to the women friends who have always been at the center of my life. I never had much to do with men in my younger days, and it's been weird and sometimes wonderful to show up at gay/lesbian functions with a male escort. I tell myself that I can live without a lover if I have to, but I would die without my friends.

While I was part of a lesbian couple, I was very closeted and constantly afraid of being found out. In the year that I've been alone, I haven't worried so much about what people think of me, both within and outside the community. I've let go to a great extent of thinking that being a lesbian means subscribing to a certain set of behaviors, attitudes, expectations, even appearance – the notion of "political correctness" that has never seemed to fit me very well. With this freedom, my delight and pride in being a lesbian has increased a hundredfold.

Simultaneously, I have come out in

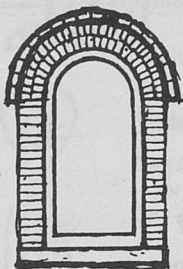
ways I never could have imagined a year ago – to co-workers, to strangers, politically, in print. This has been an incredibly liberating, at times terrifying process. I often don't recognize myself any more. It ought to be possible to grow individually while part of a couple. I hope that's true, but for me, for whatever reason, these changes would not have occurred if I had been in a relationship this past year.

Having so much freedom can be scary, but I kind of like it. I have spent my time alone, doing whatever I felt like – reading, thinking, sometimes just watching television or talking to the cats. I needed some blank spaces in my life, and I've been glad to have them back. I enjoy my own company again.

This is where I am right now. I wonder where I'll be in a year. To be honest, I hope I'll have moved on. The time, space and solitude to redefine myself and grow into this new definition have been precious.

I hope I've reached a point where I can take this new knowledge and use it within a relationship, and that I'll be brave enough to try if and when the opportunity comes. In the meantime I've learned that I don't have to fear being single, and that sometimes it's necessary.

Having now survived the break-up of two long-term, serious relationships, I realize I can't count on going through life with one other person, no matter how romantic that sounds. The only person I can count on going through life with is me, and the journey will be better if I like my traveling companion.



Patricia J. Noll
Psychotherapist

Individual and Group
Counseling

(802) 388-0933

66 Main St. (Upstairs)

Middlebury, VT 05753

Lesbian therapy group beginning in June

INDIVIDUAL, COUPLE AND
FAMILY COUNSELING

(802) 348-7225

MICHAEL FERNANDES, M.Ed.

MAIN STREET · P.O. BOX 63

WILLIAMSVILLE, VT 05362