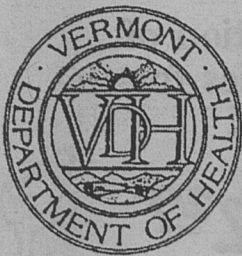


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**CROW'S CAWS
by Crow Cohen**

I had a fascinating conversation with a dear friend recently - a woman in her forties who was married to a man for several years and then fell in love with a woman. She said when she was straight, she delighted in her lesbian friends, prided herself in her openness, was completely drawn to lesbian energy. However, once she stepped over that invisible line and began coming to terms with her own lesbian identity, the picture changed for her. Her internalized homophobia began to give her a run for her money. Suddenly she looked around at the lesbian community (such as it is) and thought: "They're all crazy. What am I doing to my children? Aren't I insecure enough after a painful divorce without adding this complication to my life? Maybe my divorce was less about needing to come out then it was about ending a bad marriage..." and several other variations of self-doubt.

She also became a little suspicious. "If I, as an enlightened liberal, was sitting on all that disdain for dykes just below the surface, what about the rest of my straight friends who claim they're so supportive of my decision?" Her therapist tells her it's up to her, of course, which way she chooses. No judgment there, god forbid. I'd venture to guess that the only message she gets from her buddies is, "Follow your heart. We just want you to be happy."

Enter a dyke who was "trained" in the '70's (me, to be exact). "Of course, follow your heart, but our desires are socially constructed. Our hearts will often lead us towards what we're used to. Our hearts are often best friends with our fears. Coming out as a dyke is potentially the most profound act of self-love a woman can choose. Not only that, by devoting yourself to building lesbian culture you can keep yourself stimulated (intellectually and otherwise) for the rest of your life. We are forging a Revolution out here. Come join!"

Now I really love this woman. She definitely has a heart of gold; and if she follows it, I trust she will make a significant contribution to whatever community she's a part of. She already has. But she's not the only middle-aged woman I've had this conversation with who finds themselves grappling with the "lesbian question" in the '90's.

I remember how I felt the first time I heard one of these truly kind-hearted sisters say, "Just because I'm in a roomful of lesbians doesn't mean that it's automatically special. It

depends on who they are. I feel just as trusting of my straight friends." My spirits sank. My anger rose. "Why you ungrateful wretch!" I thought. "Don't you realize what a miracle of freedom it is to be in the company of dykes? Don't you appreciate the solidarity, strength and pride we've achieved in three decades of struggle since Stonewall?" And then I cried.

After a few confrontations along these lines, I had to step back and pull myself together since I was on an old familiar track - alienating everyone in sight. Is it possible for me to maintain abiding friendships with lesbians who really don't consciously identify as radical lesbian feminists? My separatist soul was a sick puppy. I really haven't identified as a separatist in years, but when it sank in how so few of my friends ever entertain the label Revolutionary as applied to themselves, I got scared. What's happening? Why don't these women "get it" (from my perspective, that is)?

Then it dawned on me that times have changed. (Brilliant deduction, Crow.) These women did not have the "benefit" of coming out during a period of herstory when gangs of us roamed the streets in stances of constant confrontation with the patriarchy. We had "uniforms" (short hair, plaid shirts, no make-up, jeans) so we were readily identifiable. We had slogans: "Sisterhood is powerful! Dyke power! Dismantle the patriarchy!" which we shouted out loud. We had endless meetings, frequent wimmin-only dances, our own newspaper where we gathered and argued and attempted to extricate the dominant culture from every little corner of our lives.

Granted, we often trapped ourselves in pretty simplistic thinking. And of course we were quite intolerant back then of women who found themselves on the fringes of our community inevitably questioning their sexual identities, class status, race, attachment to their religions of origin, families of origin, ex-husbands.

I've been reading a book that has been a great source of comfort to me lately as I attempt to sort out what part of that era I still hold dear and what part I acknowledge did considerable damage where 20 years later we still find ourselves in pain. It's called *Are We There Yet?: A Continuing History of Lavender Woman, A Chicago Lesbian Newspaper 1971-1976*, edited by Michal Brody in 1985. This book is a collection of excerpts from their newspa-

per along with interviews of dykes who worked on the collective. One woman said, "Right now I think it's possible to be a separatist, to believe in separation with all your heart and soul, and still leave room for the fact that you can love women who say, 'You gotta be kidding me! Separatism? Gimme a break!' We didn't leave that kind of room for each other....We didn't for a lot of reasons. I ask myself, what were some of those reasons? In order to get out from under male domination which had/has our bodies and minds in a vice grip ever since "the dawn of mankind" we had to swing that pendulum way over to the "other side" so we could work up the momentum to fight back.

Now it's inevitable that the pendulum has to swing back for awhile accompanied

by reactionary notions like "feminazi" or "narrow-minded militant dykes" or "let's reclaim butch-femme for the fun of it" (now there's a thrown gauntlet, by gosh). Will that pendulum in the form of a labyris swing back out again? Should it? I can't help hoping it will even if it doesn't happen in my lifetime. I can see what happens to new lesbians who come out to communities who do not welcome them with open arms not just because they're cute, rich, young, of the acceptable color, or have conventional lifestyles which don't scare people - but because they have chosen to be dykes. And it ain't just about sex.

We need more dykes in this world because dykes have the chance to work through internalized homophobia and teach each other that lesbianism is potentially an ultimate act of liberation for any woman who dares. Who knows what a vastly improved world we could create with all that freedom on the loose!

ON THE OTHER HAND...

The Largest Ever International Conference
On Bisexuality Held!

BY KIMBERLY A. WARD

Last week, After months of teasing artists to perform and venues to hold performances, I was finally able to put away my organizer's hat and become just another 'ordinary' bisexual in a sea of faces. That sea consisted of 910 registered participants in the Fifth International Conference on Bisexuality, held on the Harvard Campus in Boston.

I have to confess that organizing by e-mail was a stretch for this low-income, using-student-e-mail-10-miles-from-home, organizer! People down in Boston were truly the nuts and bolts and I was the newbie getting my feet wet.

Still I felt the sense of satisfaction when I listened to Pennsylvania singer Moss Stern croon in a lecture hall on Harvard's campus "Hump me Dump me!" (in a rock song he wrote after hearing his niece try to pronounce "Humpty Dumpty") and was able to once again sing along with him when he dragged audience members up to accompany him in his solo rendition of Queen's "Bohemian Rhapsody" (and I assure you he didn't need us!) I was also happy to walk the halls and see Trans, S/M, polyamorous, pagan and Christian bisexual, and gay and lesbian allies alike.

It is during events like this conference, and the organizing of said event, that I am periodically reminded, from out here in the woods, that there is a huge thriving bisexual community out there.

Although I started this column in an effort to put a bi writer's voice out there, and I have felt a bit more contact with the rest of Vermont because of it, I do not come close to feeling I have done enough when surrounded by the likes of Lani Ka'ahamanu and Loraine Hutchins (Editors of the now famous, usually only bi book on the shelves, "Bi Any Other Name"), Fritz Klein, (Author of "The Bisexual Option" and originator of the Klein scale, used in bi communities, and I hope coming to a community near you some time!) And Bobbi Keppel, co-founder of the Unitarian Universalist Bisexual Network.) I could go on, (and I probably will, with a few diversions into other thoughts). The leaders of the only national organization for bisexuality in the US, BiNet USA, were all there to share in our yearly goals and accomplishments, and discuss such issues as the upcoming planned Fifty State March and the hoopla over the Millennium March on Washington, along with ways to serve the Queer community in the coming year.

Bisexuals and allies from over a dozen countries, including Australia, the UK, the US, India, Peru, Mexico, Canada, the Netherlands, Ireland, Germany, France, Japan, Switzer-