

CROW'S



C A W S

BY CROW COHEN

# Roughing It in the Bush

## With Apologies to Susannah Moodie

I'm writing this by the sweet pond at the Northeast Women's Musical Retreat in Marlboro, CT, which happens every year on Labor Day. Come to think of it, I actually wrote last year's October column from the very same place, as a matter of fact. I guess there's something magical about this pond after all.

I wasn't going to come this year, because my ego has been a little fragile lately (it's been a rough year for me emotionally, yet life goes on as they say). But my Aunt Sadie is celebrating her 90th birthday not too far from here, so how can I avoid at least dropping in and paying my respects to a women's festival that has been alive (more or less) for 18 years?

For a few years, the NEWMR planners couldn't find a place to hold the festival, even though they've had money to purchase property for a permanent site since 1991. I guess they haven't found a suitable location.

Meanwhile, for the past few years, they've held it at this 4-H camp. Except for the old horse manure lying around, it's not a bad place. The pond is private enough for naked swimming, and I found a patch of woods in which to pitch my tent, where no one else comes around — I can actually camp here, not just jam myself into a tent city.

I like NEWMR because it's small, it's close to Vermont (relatively), and the night concerts are indoors, which makes for a rowdy nightclub atmosphere without the booze, drugs, or cigarettes — perfect for me.

Sure, there's a lot missing. The food is wicked mediocre when you consider how much the women's movement has figured out about the politics of food. (The Michigan festival's fare is

vastly superior, and they feed over 5000 women every year!) The workshop offerings were pretty pathetic as well, from my perspective. Most of them were related to foot massage, tamborine banging, improving your lovely home, managing your capital, or playing the newlywed game — not a radical concept in sight.

Oh well. It's a damn good thing I've lowered my expectations big time in terms of stimulating political discussion, except for the gig I've thrown together with a couple of buddies for the last 3 years — "Dyke Talk," one of those "add on" workshops.

Nevertheless, something keeps drawing me back year after year, feeding that tiny glowing coal of hope deep within. I figure if I hang around the remnants of the movement long enough, even when it's hardly recognizable, then something will shift — maybe within, maybe without — something small and subtle, barely perceptible except to those who keep searching for it. The trick is to be open to "it" without expectation, with patience, quietly stringing together a bunch of ordinary

days, which is where my deepest joy comes from anyway.

This is exactly the opposite of the stance I took back in the '70s, when I tried to force the issue, banging down doors, demanding (with grandiose expectations) that the revolution overturn the world as we knew it right then on MY terms, goddammit! Then I say to

acknowledging oppression from the stage, and she's not afraid of letting her wild side out, backed up by her African-American culture, which has been a tremendous gift to the movement.

Cris Williamson is a bit self-absorbed, but I have to admire her tenacity. She has had an inspiring love, respect and commitment for

Lucie Blue Tremblay's black jeans any day.

Do I sound a little looksist? It's not about body shape. It's about remembering that clothes can be a bonding factor. Public figures make statements whether they intend to or not, so what's Jaime trying to say — that we have a right to wear anything we like? Yeah,

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myself, "Those days are long gone, Crow. Who knows what it will take nowadays? A marriage reform law? A bunch of dykes drumming instead of analyzing or even singing lyrics? A gigantic march on Washington driven by big bucks?" What do I know? It all feels out of my hands. It always has been, but I was too arrogant to notice back then.

I have to say, the spark is still there for me at those wonderful NEWMR concerts, though. Toshi Reagon cranked up the energy (and the decibels) until I was "one with the noise," as she recommended. She has tremendous integrity when it comes to

women's music for the past 20 years, and when Olivia Records went out of business a couple of years ago, she started her own record label instead of selling out. Good for her. I just wish she'd acknowledge one or two oppressions other than the sexism of the music industry.

Jaime Anderson was a hoot — I loved her song about women learning to accept their bodies no matter what size or shape, but does she have to wear those frumpy dresses? I can't figure out if she's just parodying ladies, reclaiming her femme or just thinking they're attractive. Give me Cris' t-shirts and shorts or

and...? (I did enjoy her cream-colored semi-sparkly shit kickers, though.)

In general, those fabulous women-only concerts give me a dose of adrenaline that lasts a few weeks anyway, and I'm glad they still happen. Those signers for the deaf during concerts are always an added treat to women's festivals.

Will I come next year? Probably, whether I plan ahead or not — one foot in front of the other, god willing and the creek don't rise (not likely, given the ozone droughts these days).

And now, time for a little skinny dip before I head out to Aunt Sadie's birthday party. ▼



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