

A FEMINIST QUARTERLY

FIREWEED



BLOOD RELATIONS

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FIREWEED

Blood Relations

Issue 12



fire-weed *n* : a hardy perennial so called because it is the first growth to reappear in fire-scarred areas; a troublesome weed which spreads like wild-fire invading clearings, bomb-sites, waste land and other disturbed areas.

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Eva

Valentine's Day, 1982.

The break-up of the family. How old was my mother when her father left them? "That's not the kind of question you ask somebody" my father said. I'll never know. I never asked her, either. When she was dying I was so desperate to try to get to know her I forgot to ask those questions. I hardly asked any. I asked her once if it hurt when she swallowed, the tumour was blocking her throat. She lost a great deal of weight those last few months but only once did I admit it to myself, how old she suddenly seemed, how small.

Her mother, Eva Watson Van Tress, looks even taller in the photographs I have of her. She was 43 when my mother was born, married to a man who she believed would be a romantic world-traveller, and in reality turned out (as my mother once realised, half amused, half horrified) to be a gun-runner to the wrong side: the Fascists in Spain, the Army in Mexico. In my estimation Harry Louis Van Tress always looked sad in the photographs. He expected to gain control of money from my grand-mother when she married him, none of which materialised. I imagine they parted finally when my mother was about 15. She never heard from him again. In the meantime Eva and Harry didn't spend much time together. From the stories my mother told me I gather she spent her entire younger years going from country to country with her mother and at least two other aunts, accompanied by steamer trunks, sitting in grand hotel lobbies, waiting for the tutor to arrive. She went to over 14 different public schools in the U.S. alone before she finally went to a boarding school in grade 9 to achieve some kind of continuity. Also, probably, to "meet the right sort" of friend.

Elizabeth



Eva had four sisters: Esther (the oldest), Mattie, Emma (called Tommy), and Elizabeth. They had a brother who died young. Elizabeth always intrigued me the most. Her photograph is so pre-Raphaelite, she looks so soft and sad. She was always sickly, and paralysed for a large part of her life by a disease which seemed to have no cure. Finally, as an exercise purely of ironic interest, the sisters invited a Christian Scientist to heal her, and he did. Almost instantly. In my mind, it's a scene from the Bible: "Leave me alone with her" he said, and she walked out of the room 15 minutes later, having not walked for years. She was a painter, moved to Paris, living next door to Gertrude Stein and Alice Toklas. She was the first of the sisters to die, in her 40's of a heart ailment. Somehow she is the only one of the sisters that I am not a little afraid of. She feels closest to me.



Esther

Esther was tall and wide and imposing. She taught in soup-kitchens in the Depression: how to cook nutritious meals on 5¢ a day for the whole family, odd bits of meat and potatoes wrapped in whole cabbages. My mother often spoke of Esther. I imagine her to have been very powerful, very opinionated. If my grandmother Eva would suggest my mother take a breath of air after dinner, my mother would get up, put her coat on, reach the door and Esther would appear saying "Jane dear, don't be foolish, it's cold outside. Take your coat off and sit down." If Esther bought a new dress for my mother, Eva and Mattie would rush out to buy more impressive clothes for her. She was spoiled and fought over: the only child amongst five women.

My mother's oldest friend said she thought my mother was never happy sharing that apartment on East 57th in New York City with her mother and the four aunts. My mother never mentioned happiness to me, except to say once, when my own marriage was dissolving, that she thought I asked for too much happiness. But, she often spoke of beauty: how beautiful Esther and Mattie were, how they wore their favourite colours with matching jewellery. One always wore a deep blue, velvet and silks. The other wore emerald green. And yes, I think, as I sit here now imagining them, how beautiful they were.

Mattie, in the only photograph I have of her, looks the most 'handsome' of the five. She looks like a dowager princess — imperious and prim. Once a week in New York City she used to hold "gatherings" — writers, artists, actors — my mother's scrap-book is filled with autographed photos: "To my little sweetheart Jane — Uncle Will," a swash-buckling "Dennis King." In Mattie's eyes, what do I see? A little disdain? A little mistrust?



Mattie

I was trying to wear my glasses like Gloria Steinem: the hair just a little out front of the frames. My mother, father, sister and I were eating lunch in a restaurant in Cuernavaca, Mexico, where my mother spent six years of her childhood, and where my parents were living at the time. My mother was not then ill with the recurrence of her cancer, but still a changed woman, vulnerable and quiet. A group of women sat down at the next table, and suddenly my mother got up and walked over to them, standing beside a frail old woman perhaps in her 90's. "I'm Jane Van Tress," my mother said (I'd never heard her use her "maiden name") and the old woman turned to her and said "Yes, of course, you look so like your mother." My mother returned to our table, tears streaming down her face.

Her mother died when she was 26. This was 26 years later. I was 26 when my mother died, of the same disease as her mother. When I stood by her bedside listening to the machines running her heart, her lungs, draining her bladder and her stomach, watching her arms twitch against the cotton bonds that held her from pulling out the wires, I understood the immediacy she must have felt still, 26 years later, crying for her mother, her childhood, her own death. I feel I know Eva because I knew my mother. In my mind they are so much the same. The drama, the strength of facial structure, the intelligence in the eyes. But in the eyes: fear, sadness.

I wish I'd known Eva. I miss not knowing her more than the others. She died shortly before my parents were married. I asked my father about one of the few times he met her. I said to him all in one rush, "What was she like? Was she easy to talk to? Was she like my mother?" and he said "Yes. She was beautiful, yes." I felt satisfied and denied at the same time. What do I want to know? Would she love me?

Tommy was the only one I knew. I remember her with flaming orange hair, a velvet hat with a peacock feather, powdery skin. She came to stay with us in England when I was very young and I made one of my toy animals say to her "I don't like you" and she ran down the hall crying to my mother that I hated her. I begged and begged her to believe it wasn't me that said it, it was only my lamb. She didn't send me a Christmas or birthday card for a few years. When she finally relented, she sent wonderful dolls from a store in New York that used light blue boxes with pink strings in the design. My heart excited seeing that particular blue appear from the wrapping paper. It was a doll I played so much with it would have to be replaced by a look-alike the next year.

Tommy



I was six when we emigrated to Canada. We arrived in New York Harbour, the Statue of Liberty, the boats shooting jets of water into the air around us, in the hotel a colour tv that showed everything in green, Tommy (the only survivor now) in her dark apartment with cactus in the windows, tiny Japanese clay figures in the bowl with cactus landscapes, dust on the venetian blinds. Dark and light. Tommy in velvet, rust coloured, or was it her hair that was like rust. Both of us shy with each other. She died not long after. My mother went down to New York and arranged things, sold all the furniture, all the collections of five women's things. My sister and I didn't find out until months after.

There was never any talk of death in my family. Except when people weren't related to us, nor even friends. I never talked to my mother about death, her death. All these women are dead now. Three years after my mother's death it still occurs to me to pick up the phone and call her. There are things only she'd laugh at, only she'd know. I miss her every day, at one time or another.



Jane

Growing up with those five women: their "gatherings," their painting and writing and teaching, their Grand Tours, their self-sufficiency, their drama, their mistrust of men, their fears, their jealousies, their beauty: I envy my mother some of it, some of it she gave to me. All I have of my grandmother and my four great-aunts are these photographs and the way they exist in my head. I can close my eyes and remember the way my mother's strong body felt in my arms. Sometimes it's enough. How many families do we carry in our heads, loving them, hating them, missing them, regretting things said and unsaid. And in my mind, today, Mattie, Esther, Eva, Elizabeth and Tommy, out there with my mother as a young girl, holding so much colour against the snow.



Courtesy of Helen Weinzweig

Helen Weinzweig

My Mother's Luck

July 6, 1931

I have decided, my mother said, to go with you to New York to see you off. Your boat sails a week from tomorrow. In a week you will be gone; who knows if we will ever see each other again. No, no, stop it. I can't stand anyone slobbering over me. Now what are you crying for? I thought you wanted to go to your father. You keep complaining how you hate it here; I'm only trying to do what's best for you. You should be happy, going to Europe, to Germany, travelling in style, like a tourist. Not the way we came to this country, eh? Steerage, like cattle. Everything on that boat smelled and tasted of oily ropes. Hardly what you would call a pleasure trip. But then, how would I recognize pleasure — how would I know what there is in this world that gives happiness — when I have been working since I was nine years old. My feet, my poor feet. I can't remember when my feet didn't hurt. Get me the white basin, no, the deep one, from under the sink. And the kettle: the water should be hot enough. Take a chair, sit down. No, I'll fill it myself. We will have a talk while I'm soaking my feet. I suppose we should have a talk before you go. I know, I know; you don't have to remind me; can I help it, the long hours; you think I like to work so hard? It's not only you I have no time for: I don't have time to breathe, to live. I said, sit down! What do you care about your silly girlfriends? They'll find someone else to waste their time with. Jennie? Write her a letter. Ah, that feels better. My poor feet. I'm looking forward to sitting on the train. They told me it takes fourteen hours from Toronto to New York. Just think, I will be off my feet for a whole day.

Why do you look so miserable? I just don't understand you: first you drive me crazy to go to your father and now you sit like at a funeral. Tell you what: in New York we will have a little party before your boat sails. We'll go to a big, fancy restaurant. Sam and me and you. Yes. You heard right. Sam. Are you deaf or don't you understand Yiddish any more? I said, Sam is coming with us. You might as well know: he is moving in with me next week. Your room. No use leaving it empty. There you go again, always telling me what I should do. No one tells me what to do. I will stay alone until the Messiah comes, rather than live with another woman. I despise women: they are false and jealous. With a man you know where you're at: you either get along or you don't. There is no hypocrisy, such as between women. Marry Sam? What for? To give satisfaction to the old *yentes*, the gossips? I will never marry again: three times was plenty. Get a little hot water from the kettle. Ah, that's better. Now turn low the gas.

So, tell me, have you got your underwear and stockings clean for the trip? Your shoes need a good polish. I told you, you don't need everything new. Let your father buy you something, I've supported you for sixteen years, that's long enough. God knows as He is my witness I can do no more. That's what I told your teacher when she came to see me in the winter. She looked around the flat as if fish were rotting under her nose. I couldn't wait for her to leave, that dried up old maid. I told her, I'm an ignorant woman, I'll let you

educated people figure out what to do with my daughter. — Just one thing you should remember, Esther, it was your idea, not mine, that you should get in touch with your father. Whatever happens, you will not be able to blame me. Of course you can come back if you want. You have a return ticket. You can thank Sam for that. He said I should let you make up your own mind if you want to live with your father. You don't deserve Sam's consideration. The way you treat him: not talking to him when he greets you on his Sunday visits. He — what? Watch that tongue of yours. I can still give you a good licking if I have to. The smell of sweat is the smell of honest work. I don't like it either, but I've had enough from the educated ones, like your father, who know everything except how to raise a sweat. They all talked a lot, but I could never find out what they wanted from me. I cooked and cleaned and went to work. I tried to please the customers all day and then I was supposed to please them at night.

Like that talmudist, Avrom, you remember him — well, perhaps you were too young. One night I came home from work, tired and hungry, and there he was, exactly where I had left him at eight o'clock in the morning, at the kitchen table. In twelve hours nothing had changed, except there were more books and more dirty plates on the table. — And where, I asked him, am I supposed to eat? — He didn't even look up. He raised a white hand. — What means the hand in the air? You think maybe this is Poland and you are the privileged scholar, the permanent guest at my table? In America everybody works who wants to eat. — With my arm, like with a broom, I swept clear the table. I waited he should say something, maybe he would realize and say he was sorry he forgot about me, but all he did was look at me like he didn't know who I was. Then he bent down and picked up the books one by one, so slow you would think every book weighed a ton. His face got red like his hair, he was breathing so noisy I thought he was going to bust. Just the books, not the dishes, he picked up. He went into the bedroom and closed the door. All I asked was a little consideration, and for that he didn't talk to me for a week.

So what's the difference to me whether they know enough to take a bath. Sam will learn. He needs a nice home. He's a good man, he works hard, a presser in a factory. So maybe he will be tired at night. And he can pay his own way to New York. A working man has at least a union to see he gets a decent wage. What protection has a scholar got? He leans on the whole world and the world pushes him away. Not that I care about money. I am decent with a man, not taking from him every cent, like their greedy wives. Last week Sam handed me his sealed pay envelope. — Here, he said, take out for New York. Buy yourself a nice coat. — Naturally I wouldn't take his money. So long as he pays the rent, a little for the food, it will be enough. If I was to take his money, next thing he will be telling me what I should do. You can be sure the minute he tries to boss me, out he goes, like the others.

Your step-father, the first one, made that mistake. Max. Tall, the best-looking man I ever knew. He worked all night in a bakery and came home seven o'clock in the morning smelling like fresh bread. You two got along well. He

made you lunch every day and filled your pockets with bagels for your class. Every Saturday he took you to the show. Remember? When I came home from the store Saturday night, which was his night off, he was ready to step out. I could only soak my tired feet. One day he got a raise. — Lily, he said, you can stop work. Sell the store. Stay home and look after Esther and me. — I said, and suppose you lost your job, what will become of us in this Depression? And suppose your boss gives your job to his brother who came last month from Poland? — Max thought we should take a chance. — Maybe some day I will have my own bakery, he said, I want you should stay home like a normal wife. — He was not very intelligent: he couldn't get it into his head we would have no security without my beauty parlor. After that, Max was not the same. He talked to me as if I was his servant. — You, he would call me, instead of my name; you, don't make me nothing to eat. I have a bad stomach. — See a doctor. — A doctor won't help. I choke on your meat. — He came and went in his work clothes, so that there was flour dust on the furniture. I even paid for the lawyer to get the divorce, just to get rid of him.

What are you sitting like a lump for? Get me a little hot water in the basin. Careful, slow, do you want to burn me! You are such a *shlimazel!* Wipe it up. Are you blind as well? There, over there, by the stove. Ah, that feels good. I hope you will have it easier than me. Maybe your father can give you the education your teacher said you should have. All I have from life is sore feet. My poor feet, look how calloused and shapeless they have become. Once I had such fine hands and feet. The ankles, they used to be so thin. When I was young they said I had the hands and feet of an aristocrat. If you're really so smart as they say you are, you won't have to slave like me. You should have a life like the aristocrats in Europe used to have before the Revolution. I hope you will have a name everyone respects. What a life those fine ladies of Europe used to have: they got married and lived as free as birds. Like Georges Sand or Madame de Stael. Surprised you, eh? I know more than you think. In the papers I recognize names sometimes I first heard in Zurich: Freud, Einstein, Picasso. What's the matter? See, I did learn something from your father. He may tell you I was stupid, he used to tell me I was an ignorant ghetto girl.

Your father taught me to read and write in German. He tried to educate me. So did Isaac. I could always tell there was going to be trouble when they said — Lily, try and understand ... — And then I'd get a lecture. You would think that after your father I would not again be trapped by fine words. Yet I could not resist a man with a soft voice and clean finger-nails. They gave me such fine compliments: how my eyes are the color of violets; my skin so fair and delicate; how charming my smile; and they quote poetry to add to the feeling. I jump at fine words like a child at candy. Each time I think, this time it will be different, but every man is your father all over again, in a fresh disguise. Talk. Talk. How they could talk. If it wasn't anarchism, it was socialism; if it wasn't atheism, it was religious fanaticism; if it wasn't Moses it was Marx. Sometimes I wanted to talk, too. Things weren't easy for me, and I wanted to tell someone about my troubles. They listened for a minute and

got a funny look on the face like I remember from the idiot in my village. Once I said to Isaac — That awful Mrs. Silberman. Three bottles of dye I had to use on her hair, it's so thick and long. Naturally, I charged her extra. You should have heard her scream blue murder over the fifty cents. — Where you live up the hill, I told her, they would charge you double. I don't make profit on the dye. — I called her a cheap-skate. Anyway, it was her husband's money not her own she was fighting over. She called me a low-class low-life. I told her never to come back. Isaac didn't say I did right to throw her out. He explained to me about the capitalist class, and I said don't give me the manifesto. — You didn't see her ugly expression, I told him. And he said — Her actions were governed by the class struggle: she is the exploiter and you are the exploited. It was nothing against you personally, Lily. — But I'm the one she tried to cheat; I'm the one she cursed, may she rot in hell. — That's an ignorant approach to a classical social problem, Isaac explained—now, Lily, try and understand...—Still, Isaac and me got along the best. He had consideration. He used to read to me while I was cooking late at night for the next day. On Sundays we did the laundry together. He couldn't find a job, so he helped me what he could. I found little things for him to do, so he wouldn't feel useless. In the winter he carried out the ashes from the furnace from the store. He fixed the chairs and painted behind the shampoo sink. He was very artistic, the way he fixed up the windows with pictures and colored paper. He made all my signs, like the "Specials" for the permanents. I was satisfied. Good or bad, nothing lasts forever.

***“There is a second,
no longer than the blink of an eye,
when husband and wife turn into strangers.
That's what happened that night.”***

Isaac decided to go into business for himself. Nobody can say I stopped him. I gave him the money to buy a stock of dry-goods to peddle on credit. He knew a lot of languages, but that didn't put money in his pocket. He spoke Russian, the customers cried in Russian; he talked Ukrainian, they wept in Ukrainian; he sold towels in Yiddish, they dried their eyes on his towels. They prayed for help on his carpets; they lay sick between his sheets. How could he take their last cent, he asked me. So he gave everything away. Then he wanted more money for new stock. — I'm not the welfare department, I told him. The way he let people make a sucker out of him, I lost my respect. Then why did I marry him? God knows I didn't want to get married again: twice was enough. The government ordered me to get married.

Oh don't look so innocent. You think I don't know how all that court business started? It was you. You, with your long face and wet eyes, whining at other people's doors, like a dog, as if I didn't feed you right. I can imagine — Come in, come in, Esther, sit down and have a piece cake and tell me all about that terrible mother of yours. — Women! Slaves, that's what they are,

every one of them; yet if another woman tries to live her own life, they scream blue murder. I can see them, spending their empty nights talking about me, how I live with a man, not married. The Children's Aid wouldn't tell who snitched on me. Miss Graham, the social worker, was very nice, but she wouldn't say either. — I don't like to do this, she said, having to investigate reports from neighbours. Your daughter is thirteen years old and is paying a price in the community because her mother lives in sin. — I said, I am a decent, hard-working woman. See, my rooms are clean, look, my ice-box is full with fruit and milk, Esther is dressed clean, she never misses a day of school. A marriage license does not make a better wife or mother. — She agreed with me, but there was nothing she could do. I had to marry Isaac or they would take away my daughter. I said, This is a free country, I'll do what I want. — So they summons'ed me to Family Court. — Your daughter, the judge said, — needs a proper home. — I told him, Judge, Esther has a good home. She has a piano in her room and I pay for lessons. You should hear how nice she plays. — That is not the issue: it is a question of morality. — Judge, I said, I know all about morals and marriage. And what I don't know, the customers tell me. You should hear the stories. Is it moral, I asked him, for a woman to have to sleep with a man she hates? Is it moral for a man to have to support a woman whose face he can't look at? — Come, come, he said, these are not questions for this court to answer. We are here to administer the law. If you do not marry the man you are living with, we will take the child and place her with a decent family. — Go fight city hall. So we took out the license and got married. I have bad luck. Isaac decided to write a book on the trade union movement in the textile industry. He stopped peddling: he stopped helping me. He talked of nothing but the masses: ate and slept the masses. So I sent him to the masses: ate and slept the masses. Just shows how much the law knows what's best.

Love? Of course I loved him. For what other reason would I bother with a man if I didn't love him! I have bad luck, that's all. I attract weak men. Each time I think, aha, this one is different. It always begins with the compliments; it always ends with the silence. After he has been made comfortable in my bed, his underwear in my drawer, his favourite food in the ice-box, he settles down. I rush home from the store, thinking he is waiting for me. But no. He doesn't look up from the paper. He sits. I ask, Do you want fish or herring for an appetizer? He says to the paper, It doesn't matter. We eat. He sits. All I ask is a little consideration for all I do for them. Maybe once a week I would like to have a change. I wouldn't mind to pay for a show. I'm not ashamed to go up to the cashier and buy two tickets. Most women would make a fuss about that, but not me — I'm a good sport. I'm not one of your bourgeois women. That was your father's favourite word. Bourgeois. He said the bourgeois woman sold her soul for kinder, kuchen and kirche. See, I even remember a little German. That means — oh, excuse me! You know what the words mean — I forgot you are the clever one...

Hand me the towel. No, the one I use for the feet, the torn one. You're like a stranger around here, having to be told everything. I'll make a cup of tea.

You can stay up a little later tonight: I feel like talking. No, sit. I'll make the tea, then you won't get in my way. What do you want with the tea — a piece honey cake, maybe?

You and your father will get along, you're both so clever. Words, he had words for everything. No matter what the trouble was, he talked his way out of it. If there was no money for meat, he became a vegetarian, talking all the time how healthy fruits and nuts are; if he couldn't pay the rent, he spent hours complimenting the landlady on her beauty and charm, although she was fat and hairy; if I thought I was pregnant again, he talked about the joys of motherhood. When I cried day and night what would become of us, he talked the hospital into doing an abortion. But mouth work brings no food to the table. How was I to know that, young and inexperienced as I was? When I got married, I wasn't much older than you are now. I was barely seventeen when your father came home to Radom on a visit from the university in Zurich. It was before the war, in 1911. I was only a child when he fell in love with me. Yet, it can hardly be said I was ever a child: I was put to work at nine, gluing paper bags. At fourteen, I was apprenticed to a wig-maker. Every day, as I bent over the wooden form of a head, my boss would stand and stroke my hair, saying, when I marry and have my hair shorn, he would give me a *sheitel* for a wedding present if I promise to sell him my hair for the wigs. My hair was beautiful, thick and silky, and a lovely auburn shade. I lasted three months, because his wife got jealous and dragged me back to my father by my silky hair. My father decided I must have done something wrong and beat me with his leather belt. What was there for me to look forward to, except more work, more misery, and, if I was lucky, marriage to a butcher's son, with red hands?

So you can imagine when your father began to court me, how could I resist? He had such fine manners, such an educated way of saying things, such soft hands, he was a man different from anyone I had ever met. He recited poetry by Goethe and Rilke, which he translated for me. He called me "Blume," which means flower, from a poem that starts, "Du bist wie eine Blume." He didn't want a dowry: I wouldn't have to cut my hair. He was a modern man: his views caused a scandal. Your father wasn't much to look at — short and pale and poor teeth. You know that small plaster statue of Beethoven on my dresser? The one you hate to dust? That belonged to him. He imagined he looked like Beethoven — he had the same high, broad forehead and that angry look. Still, to me his pale, shaven face was very attractive compared to the bearded men of the town. So we were married by a rabbi and I went back with him to Switzerland. Four years later, just before you were born, we were married in the city hall in Zurich so you would be legal on the records.

Let me see, how old is he now? I'm 38, so he must be 48. The *landsleit* say he never married again. I bet he never thought he'd ever see his daughter again. He won't be able to deny you: you're the spitting image. Pale like him. Same forehead, and the same red spots across when you get nervous. I'd give anything to be there when you're both reading and pulling at your hair behind the right ear. You certainly are your father's daughter. Even the

way you sneaked around, not telling me, writing to Poland, until you got his address in Munich. I should have known you were up to something: you had the same look of a thief as him when he went to his meetings.

Those meetings! An anarchist he was yet. The meetings were in our small room. Every other word was "Revolution." Not just the Russian revolution, but art revolution, religious revolution, sex revolution. They were nearly all young men and women from the university, students like your father. Since he was a good deal older than the rest, he was the leader. They yelled a lot. At first I was frightened by the arguments, until I realized that these intellectuals didn't have anything to do with the things they fought about. It wasn't real people they knew, just names; it wasn't what they themselves did that caused so much disagreement — it was what other people somewhere else were doing. Where I came from, I was used to real trouble, like sickness and starvation and the threat of pogroms. So I didn't pay too much attention until the night we all had a big argument about Nora. First I should tell you about the young women who came to these meetings. They thought themselves the equal of the men, and the men treated them like comrades. Not like in Poland, where every morning of their lives men thank God for not having been born a woman. In Zurich the young ladies wore dark mannish suits, had their hair shingled and smoked cigarettes. Beside them, I felt like a sack of potatoes.

This play, *A Doll's House*, shocked everybody. Before you were born your father sometimes took me to a play. For that he found money. He called the theatre food for the soul. All such money-wasters he called his spiritual nourishment. I went anyway, because it was nice to sit in a big warm theatre, in a soft seat, and watch the actors. Remind your father about the night we saw *A Doll's House*. About ten of us came back to our room and talked until three in the morning about Nora. For the first time I was able to join in. I was the only one who sympathized with the husband — he gave her everything, treated her like a little doll, loved her like a pet. This is bad? So they have a little argument, so she says she must leave him and the children. Leave the children! Did you ever hear such a thing! — The servants know how to run the house better than I do, she tells her husband. — Servants! I said to myself, there's your answer — she had it too good. If she had to struggle like me for a piece of bread, she would have overlooked her husband's little fit. She should have cooked him a nice supper, given him a few compliments and it would all have been *schmired* over, made smooth. Of course, I don't feel like that now, but that's what I thought the night I saw the play. The men agreed with me: it was stupid to leave a good life, even a bourgeois life, to slave for someone else as a seamstress. The women were disappointed in their comrades: couldn't these revolutionaries see that Nora was being exploited by her husband ...? The men argued that she was responsible for bringing up her children and should not have left them to the mercy of servants: that motherhood was sacred in all societies. The women said Nora was an intelligent, sensitive human being and was right to refuse to be treated like a possession, like a piece of furniture. Nora had to leave to keep

her dignity and her pride. Exactly, the men said, dignity and pride are bourgeois luxuries. In the new society ... Back and forth the rest of the night.

All the next day I could think of nothing except what Nora did. It never occurred to me that a woman leaves a man except he beats her. From that time on, I began to change. I shingled my hair, I started to sit in the cafés and smoke. When I got pregnant again, I refused to go for an abortion. Four in three years was enough. I don't know why your father, with all his education, didn't know how to take care I shouldn't get in the family way. So you were born. Your father had to leave university and be a clerk in a shoe store. He hated the job: he hated me. You cried a lot. Nothing in your father's books explained why you cried so much. Then your father talked me into going back to work. They were glad to have me back at the beauty parlor. I was a good marceller. It was better to work than be stuck in a little room all day.

And the anarchist meetings started again. While everybody was making plans to blow up the world, I was busy running down the hall to the toilet to vomit. I was pregnant again. — Well, look who's back they said at the clinic, — sign here, Lily. — I hope you will have it easier than me. Your father should send you to college. Maybe being educated will help, although sometimes I wonder. I met educated women who never knew what to do with themselves. Once, I remember, I asked one of my customers, Frau Milner was her name, — And how was the march yesterday for getting the vote for women? — It was called off, I couldn't lead the march to the city hall, she said, I got my period, only it was a miscarriage and I was hemorrhaging and couldn't get out of bed. — So you think the world is going to stand still until we stop bleeding?

What finally happened? What do you mean, finally? Things don't happen all at once. You want a drama like in a play, a big fight, with one person wrong, one person right...? Nothing like that. I came back from the warm, clean hospital, where they were so kind to me, they looked after me like a child, I came back to a cold room, and dirty sheets, and our six dishes and two pots sticky with food. There wasn't a penny for the gas and I couldn't heat your milk. You cried, your father yelled he couldn't study. After going to university for four years, I couldn't understand why he still needed to study. I had to get up six in the morning to take you to the creche at one end of the city and go to work at the other end. You wouldn't stop screaming, and I spanked you, and your father said I was stupid to take out my bad feelings on an innocent child. I sat down, beaten. In that moment I knew I was going to leave. There is a second, no longer than the blink of an eye, when husband and wife turn into strangers. They could pass in the street and not know each other. That's what happened that night.

How did we get here? A good question, but a long story. We've talked enough; I'm tired. What's the difference now. Well, all right. You can tell your father how I did it: I want him to know I was not so stupid. He never knew I was getting a divorce until it was all over and I was out of the country. One of my customers was a very beautiful girl. She had long hair which I

used to dye a beautiful shade of red, then I marcelled it in deep lovely waves from top to bottom. She came every Monday morning, and every week she would show me new presents from her lover. She was the mistress of a famous judge in Zurich. Her secret was safe with me: our worlds were miles apart.

One day, instead of going to work, I took you and went to the Court House. You were four years old; the war was over. I wasn't sleeping with your father because I was afraid of getting pregnant; and he wasn't sleeping at home much. At the Court House I bothered a lot of people where is Judge Sutermeister; I found out where he was judging. You were very good that morning while we sat outside on a bench, waiting. People smiled at us and asked you your name, and found things in their purses or briefcases to give you — pencils, paper, bon-bons, a small mirror. About twelve o'clock, when the doors opened and people came out, I stood in the doorway and watched where the judge went. He left through a door at the back. I went in with you, through the same door. He was sitting at a big desk, writing. Oh he was an elegant gentleman, with gray hair. He looked very stern at me, and I almost ran away. I didn't wait for him to speak. I stood by his desk and told him my troubles, right away I said I wanted him to get me a divorce, and that I knew all about him and Fräulein Olga. He got up, he was so tall, and made such a big scene, like he was on stage; he was going to have me arrested. But I stood there, holding on to you and the desk. And what will become of her if I go to jail? And what will happen to your career and your sweetheart if your wife finds out her money buys rings and pearls for your mistress? —

For the next six months I kept on like usual. Fräulein Olga was the messenger for me and the judge. She didn't mind. She said it gave her something to do, asking me lawyer's questions, writing down my answers, bringing me papers to sign. One Monday morning Fräulein Olga came with a large brown envelope holding my divorce papers. Inside also was a train ticket and some money. The judge wanted me to start a new life in America. I agreed. I remembered I had a cousin in Toronto. Fräulein Olga was very sad. — Who will do my hair? — And she cried.

Two days later I left our room with you. This time we went straight to the train in Hamburg. We stayed near the station overnight. I bought underwear for us, a new sweater for me and a nice little red coat for you. We took the boat for New York. A sailor gave you a navy blue sailor hat with the name of the boat, "George Washington" in gold on a ribbon around the hat. You wore it day and night, on Ellis Island, on the train to Toronto. It looked nice with the blond curls. I could go on and on. The things that happened, what I went through ... It's one o'clock already! Let's get to bed. First wash the cups. Wash them, I said — I can't stand a mess in the kitchen. Remember, never leave dirty dishes around. Show your father I brought you up right. Which reminds me : did you buy rolls like I told you? Good. Sam likes a fresh roll with lox for Sunday. Just think, in a week you will be on the ocean ... Go already. I'll turn out the light ...

In My Mother's Favourite Story

Bronwen Wallace

In my mother's favourite story
I am three years old
wearing a blue smocked dress
white ankle socks and soft white shoes
it is the end of June after dinner
and I am playing with my dolls
on the front porch while my parents
finish their coffee in the kitchen
my mother keeping an eye on me
through the screen door
she adds a bit more sugar to her cup
stirs and looks out again to find
I've vanished
I am not on the porch where my dolls sit
complacently staring at nothing
I am not on the front lawn
not playing in the sandbox at the back
my father goes out to the edge of the sidewalk
and looks up and down the street
nothing
he begins to walk west crossing MacDonnell
which is not too busy at this time of day
and on up the next long block
past the T.B. sanitarium (*when I think of it
now my mother will say it still
makes me shudder the thought of all those
sick old men on the porch
spitting on the sidewalk*)
he stops at Regent which is always crowded
cars moving steadily in both directions
there is no traffic light but an old woman
walking her dog says 'Why yes, I did see
a little girl in a blue dress cross here
and you know I wondered, so tiny and...'
my father rushes out as brakes squeal
and two blocks later
he finds me still heading west
toward the banks of pink sunset clouds
'Ice cream' I tell him pointing at the sunset
'strawberry ice cream'
he carries me home crying

my arms outstretched over his shoulder
to the lost treat
home to where my mother sits
with her hand on the phone
ready to call the police
and then he runs to the corner store
for a gallon of strawberry ice cream
and long after my bedtime
the two of them hover around me
watching me eat

In my mother's favourite story
I am the child-hero of a thousand legends
moving through dangerous familiar streets
toward the vision no one else can see
and always her telling of it weaves
around me like a net her hopes
her sinewy expectations it explains
me somehow accounts for the green dogs
and rainbow coloured cats I drew in grade school
the conversations with fairies repeated
straight-faced at the dinner table
and like all good myths it is a charm
against the darker aspects of the story
the pale grey men whose deaths
rasp in their chests and the blind shapes
of trucks looming toward the tiny figure
mingle in her mind with the nightmare
monsters the cruel eyes that kept us
both awake for years
you were always imaginative she tells me
and even now the story grows as I do
and its adult version is a woman
writing poems and drinking soup from chipped cups
not noticing the dishes piled for days
in a dirty sink while her children
grow up untended and surprising
as flowers in a neighbour's garden

But in my mother's favourite story
I am rescued by my father
who becomes that legendary figure
striding through the hazards of my journey
to bring me home
like Alice and Dorothy and so many others
discovering the thing I sought

right there in my own ordinary house
so what can I tell her now seeing the way
she has woven the story so well and kept its
charm around me for so long
that the tiny child in the blue smocked dress
and soft white shoes
seems as remote from me
as any fairy tale
that the treacherous streets of her journey
remain lost somewhere behind
the unexpressive face of this town I return to
only on visits driving my car toward
my parents' house the red bloom
of a sunset caught for a moment in my windshield
then disappearing as I turn a corner

I am not thinking of strawberry ice cream at all
though always at these moments
my mother's story flickers through my mind
the momentary gleam of a fish swimming through water
the bright skin of my childhood curling
away from me though deep within my brain somewhere
the real event repeats itself in my cells
again and again the young child moves
through dangerous familiar streets
is rescued and returned
but I am beyond her now that tiny figure
and I would tell my mother that there are no charms
no words magical enough to fill
the silences that tighten in our throats
like dry coughs I would have her know
all streets are treacherous and even the best
loved children forget the rules
about crossing with the light
but perhaps she knows this anyway
it's her story after all and she always
puts herself in alone in the house
her hand on the telephone
and her eyes on the scattered toys
so easily abandoned
on the empty porch

The Influences of my Mother

Sara Diamond

IT IS USUALLY THE PARENT WHO CONSTRUCTS THE IDENTITY OF THE CHILD. IN MY CASE IT WAS TO BE THE CHILD WHO WOULD CONSTRUCT THE IDENTITY OF THE PARENT.

- 3 How do you go about creating a once-living woman through whom to see yourself? The remnants of a person's life exist as fragments, memories, legends, objects left behind representing a moment in time — perhaps impressions of their life through their own eyes — and a historical context.

BUT MEMORY IS SELECTIVE...

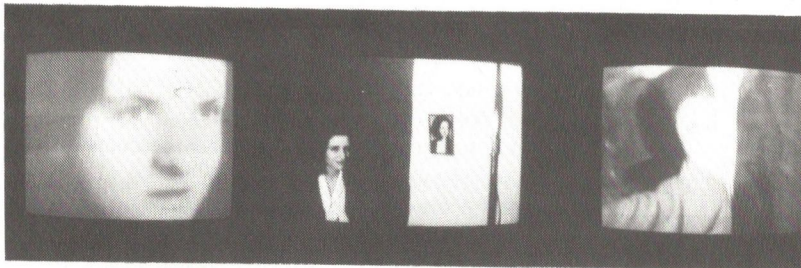
- 4 memories, legends, objects left behind representing a moment in time — perhaps impressions of their life through their own eyes — and a historical context.
- 5
- 6 None of these represent the truth; all are idealizations, partial and highly selective impressions.
- 7 WHAT ARE THE STAGES OF RECONSTRUCTION? WHAT ARE THE ACTS?
- 8 "You smile like her."
"I've been practising it for years."

THE FIRST ACT: DENIAL — NO MOTHER AT ALL...

- 9 "And your mother?" (*Official voice*)
"And your mother?" (*Impatient*)
"And your mother?" (*Angry*)
- 10 In which it is necessary to take action to distance the pain.
To make myself untouchable.
- 11 To protect myself against those who demanded that I mourn her death, release them from responsibility and get on with my childhood.

To negate those who remained and claimed that they had loved her I held the void where she had been tightly to me. I pushed her away.

But to say that it is as though she never existed is to acknowledge her presence.



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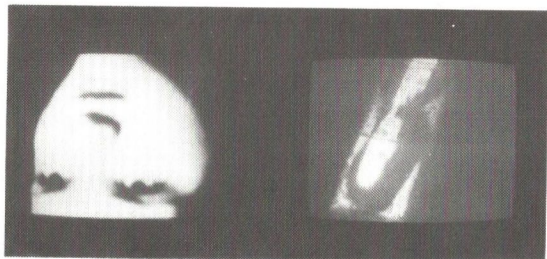
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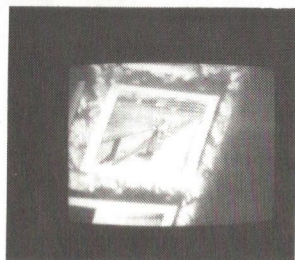


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12 She was unknowable, mysterious, larger than life.

13 **THE SECOND ACT: JUDGEMENTS. ANGER. THE NEGLIGENT MOTHER.**

My mother did not want me...that much I knew from the beginning. I dreamt recurrently that she led me to the top of a volcano. The trip up was filled with wonder. At the top, she picked me up, and threw me off the volcano. Every pleasure was followed by hardship. Even the botanical gardens, a wonder, were followed by the torture of the children's zoo. The animals, larger and more aggressive than myself; the small child, placed in the ring with them. Faced off. I retreated, chased by goose or lamb, against my mother's flank, back vibrating in terror.

Couldn't she see my anguish?

My failure of courage, and thus my failure of her built an unbridgeable gulf between us. She became increasingly distanced from me, unresponsive to my needs. I became convinced that she was bent on my destruction. It was somehow associated with her abandoning me to the horrors of the night.

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She would not hear me; she did not see *me*, she only judged me.

Somehow I could not communicate the level of danger that threatened me. Her comforts were false, only delaying the moment of abandonment.

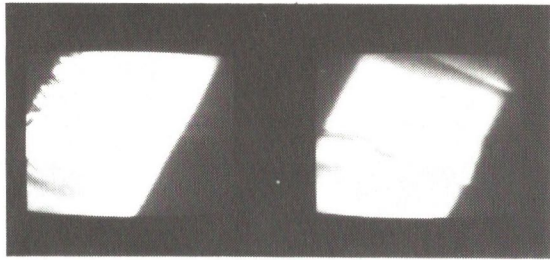
I was truly alone in the world.

It seems that she was convinced that I deserved to be punished: for loss of property, for damages, for a lack of charm, for complaining — for being too brave, for demanding too much, too little.

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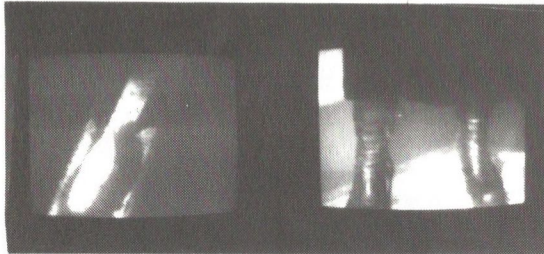
She set me up for rejection. She pushed me ahead two years in school; she dressed me in hand-me-downs and oxfords, instead of pointed shoes. She cut my hair in a style recognizable to all of my peers, that of Bozo the clown. My hair literally stood on end.

For these characteristics, some inherited, I was to suffer massive humiliation at the hands of my peers. She humiliated me. She wore no make-up. She refused to dye hair. She worked, unlike other mothers.



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She finally drifted even further from me. She became short-tempered, could not tolerate my presence. We were always politely distanced from each other. Suddenly — she was suspiciously nice to me.

She entered the hospital. She came out. Still, distanced, too friendly. I was really confused. She took me to Bermuda. It was an experience that reeked of solemnity: a truly special occasion. I ate lobster. We came back.

She grew thin, faded, unrecognizable. A distant animal screaming with pain in a room in our apartment. No part of me! She stopped talking to me. Nice day. Sent to New York. Come back and... she's gone.

I had been right all along: she would go to any lengths to get rid of me. A real bitch.

In which the rage at abandonment suffuses all memory, disguising itself as an inability to recall anything outside of the conditions of oppression. Especially when what comes next ain't so great...

In which, in typical fashion, we try to affix guilt.

"She was too old to have another baby. The cancer spread from her uterus after her birth."

"That trip took two years off her life."

Really, she committed suicide.

He believed that I thought that he had killed her and for years would not forgive me.

She never died, she was just hidden.

THE THIRD ACT: THE EMERGING MOTHER. A MEDLEY OF MIXED EMOTIONS...

"Sometimes I feel like a motherless child. Sometimes I feel like a motherless child. Sometimes I feel like a motherless child, a long, long way from my home..."

"Where is love? Does it fall from skies above?"

Will I ever know the someone who, I can mean something to? Where is she, who I close my eyes to see?

Is she underneath the willowtree, which I keep

dreaming of?"

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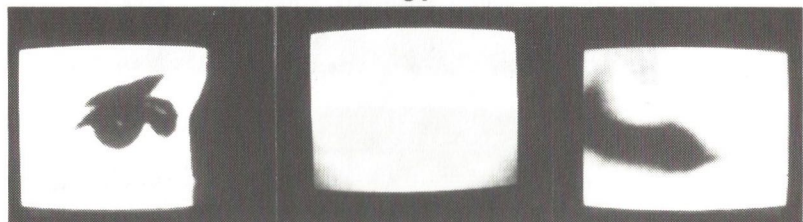
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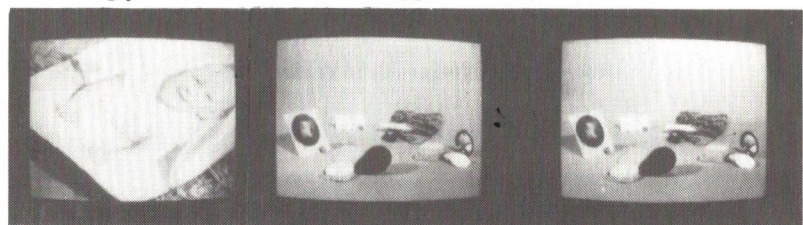
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- 28 "Oh the mother and child reunion, on that strange and mournful
 29 day, oh the mother and child reunion, is only a heartbeat away.
 30 Oh little darling of mine..."

- 31 "When I find myself in times of trouble, mother
 Mary comes to me, singing words of wisdom, 'Let
 it be.' "

THE FOURTH ACT: DEFINITIONS

- 32 When I reached the age when I looked like her, my fascination with
 my own image became a fascination with hers. I could admit memory
 because I needed it for myself.

- 35 But, who was she to me?

- 33 I searched for a recognition of myself within her image. To
 reconstruct her would be to locate myself. I needed to know that she
 had loved me totally to love myself.

- 34 It was essential for me as a woman to retrieve the woman who had
 brought me into the world.

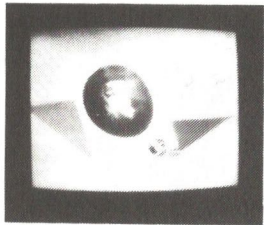
I struggled to reclaim my memories. They were infused with images
 belonging to other people with their mythologies.

- 36 "Wow! Here's the package of stuff my dad sent me about my
 mother...Here I am as a baby, here's..."

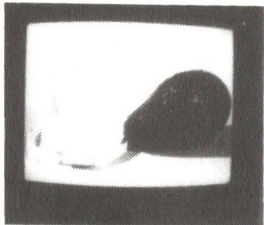
- 5 I began with unsolicited information and then secretly, I probed.
 I tried to treat this process as a form of historical documentation. I was
 6 forced at first to rely on oral sources. I sought collaboration from
 material evidence.

- 7 I discovered the power of mnemonic devices in triggering historical
 memory. I learned that there is no neutrality in history.

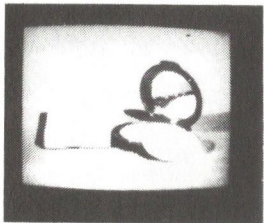
The more I learned of her, the more I seemed to remember. But was
 she created for me, did I create my knowledge of her myself?



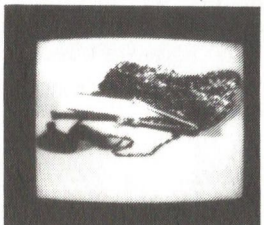
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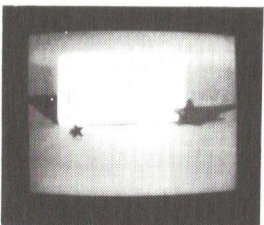
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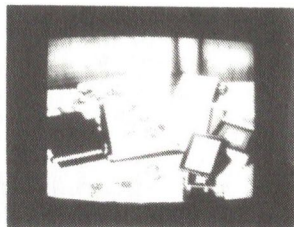
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8 *Other Voice:* "When she was five, your mother's father jumped off the roof. He landed five feet away from where she was skipping and died."

My voice: She detested my father's driving. She criticized him relentlessly for his suicidal actions on the road.

9 *O.V.:* "Your mother supported birth control and abortion. She was very close to other women. She lived with your father until they got married. She had had other lovers."

M.V.: I remember her hiding her diaphragm, with which I was fascinated, from me.

11 *O.V.:* "Your mother would not wear make-up and all that crap. She was proud of her body and process of aging and refused to pretend she was other than who she was. She was several years older than your father."

M.V.: She was so warm and soft to lie against. She was unafraid to be naked. She smelled of lavender.

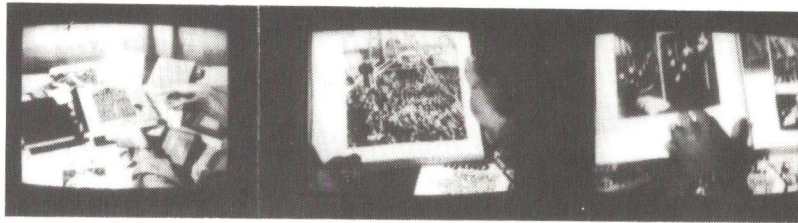
12 *O.V.:* "When I first met your mother she pushed me off the Staten Island ferry and into the water for making some remark she didn't like."

12 *M.V.:* She explained menstruation to me in a subway station bathroom when I was four and tried to explore the Kotex dispenser. All the women in the bathroom stood and stared at us.

13 *O.V.:* Your mother wore a navy dress with red Soviet stars to our wedding. It was three days after Germany attacked the Soviet Union."

M.V.: My mother loved to take me to the Easter Parade. She loved the crowd and we would stare in amazement at the clothes and hats people wore. It was the 1950s; she probably missed May Day.

14 From my secret desire to recreate her history, I developed an overt fascination with her context.



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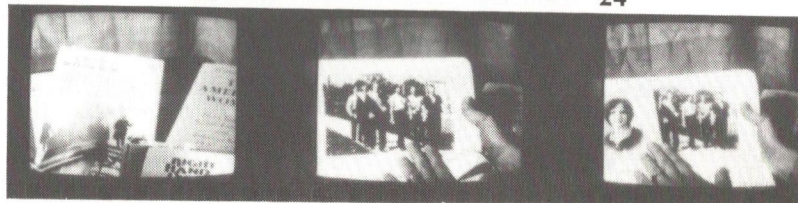
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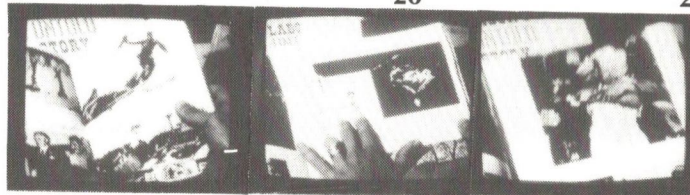
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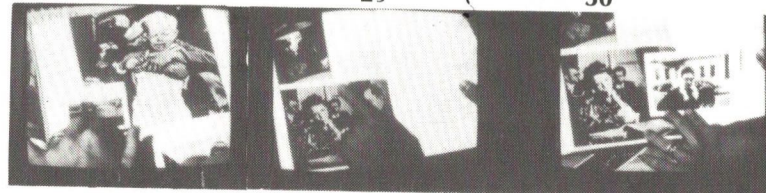
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15 I searched for her in every relevant historical situation.

16 These are immigrants coming into the U.S. at Ellis Island. My grandparents came to New York this way.

17 I wonder if they're in this picture.
Are they here, afraid to be turned back?

19 Here's the Lower East Side where they lived. They worked at home
21 and in the sweatshops for the garment industry. Here's my mother's
22 mother — did she work with these women?

And the tenements with the laundry hanging out, the kids playing in
23 the alleyways. Here's my mother and her brothers Jack and Meyer out
24 in the dirt, did they play in this alley?

25 And then the thirties, the union struggles. My mother worked in a
26 cigar factory; she organized it. And she joined the Communist Party
27 like these men. Did she know them, work with them?

28 And then the war, and my father away to fight Fascism? Was
29 she lonely? Proud? Relieved when he returned? And fearful for
30 my brother, who hardly knew his dad?
31

And then McCarthyism, the Committees. "Mrs. Browder, coy Communist."
32 Did my mother know her? And this woman, who gave
33 evidence against her comrades? My mother was tried by the Committee,
ripped up the list of names they gave her and was fined, black-listed,
forced into self-exile.

And the move to Canada, the isolation after years of struggle, the adjustment, the loneliness...

THE FIFTH ACT: THE HEROIC MOTHER.

In trying to discover my own subjectivity, my mother became somehow an object to me, idealized and to be measured against.



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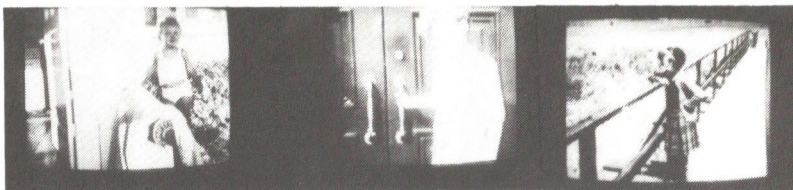
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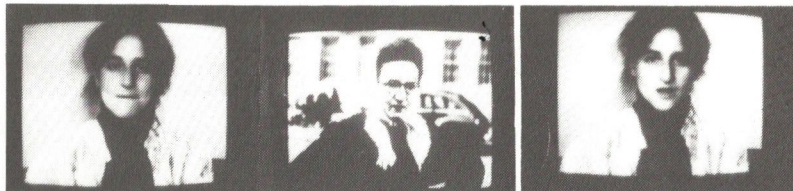
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36 Wherein I sought to learn my gestures from her, to copy her example.

37 Rather than hating her, I denied all that was negative, incongruent with her model image:

1 My mother had loved me, that much I knew from the beginning.
2 She threw me off the volcano, not into it: she saved me. She believed
3 that my courage must be cultivated, not my fear. She stood by me in
4 danger. She refused to take my power away by resolving things for
5 me. She worked so that I could eat well and have a strong woman role
6 model. She believed that I would be stronger by not conforming to the
7 expectations of other children and their parents. She gave me access
8 to my body as a female child. She made even her death accessible to
9 me, believing above all in my strength and ability to transcend the pain. She was an idealist, a realist and a really tough woman.

THE FINAL ACT: THE RECONSTRUCTED MOTHER. MOTHER AS SUBJECT.

I have made this tape as a step in my own process of accepting my mother's death and life.

I can never pretend to fully resolve the conflict that I feel with her and her dying; there is no final act.

But I know how incredible she was in and for her time. I see her as separate from me and as a part of who I am.

I love and respect other women because of my mother. I believe in the power of struggle and collectivity, in part because of her life.

I am analytical and loving because of her. I hold her eroticism within me.

This tape is for mothering. This tape is for all those who have lost their own mothers, either through death or through the oppression and distortion that women experience.

13 This tape is for Mary, my mother.

Three Poems by **Theresa Bacon**

from the fields

i can come to ohio after my mother's death.
i can calm my hands on the cold fences.

it will be christmas. it will be winter. it will be the grey,
flat late afternoon of returning to family.
i will go to what has taken me from them.
i won't call.
i'll go to the trees, those black fathers, i'll go like the crow
and bury my head in a nest of dark arms.

we will keep the quiet.
we will oversee the scraped, continuous fields.

this land is good, generous, gentle.
i grew up here. i colored this sky with my crayons.
i taught my horse
the first cornfield, the second, the third
that kept our house
from the tracks, from the trains
opening midnight with their cooing.

i can come back to ohio and route myself
between farms, watching the low mist
lift from the fields
because it will be early, the coat
she wanted me in, unbuttoning.

I shall

Mother, I have grown up now
have made my bed this Sunday morning with fresh sheets
sheets I have washed over, over until
faded, thin, almost veils now.
I have not gone to Mass and will not
today and do not ever go.
A shaft of yellow light
glances a diagonal across the cover
I am folding back now with my hand.
Mother, I have come to some terms with it:
the loss, the wellspring, the awesomeness.

You set out plates, face inside your heart
slapped, repeating hurt, this between us
so practiced it is grimy.
The flashing tree, our complex tree
see my kite strings caught in you
scrap from adolescence and the tree
not loosening.

You made me up in cotton when I was half
your height. Nothing is the same
about us except exactly the bone
structure of our hands. I have gotten
fabric, this soft floral print and a difficult pattern
to make a gored skirt for you, though it is hard
coming home, I shall. I shall
cut it out on the kitchen table, you must
stay close for fitting.
Please let's talk of it now.
I want it to fit you well.

Blow

— for M.W.

Sighs
quake through you. And one morning
last week you fainted, just as you
got up. You can't
say why. And when you told him how you felt
about marriage, that you find yourself
here, with him (not to say forever but to intend
to continue, to value what this house
means, and to say some thing
outright, between you to lay out the thick cotton
tablecloth, the weave rough on your four hands
smoothing it)

—what he said was
I can't understand.
I don't know at all how you feel.

2.

Blow the house down.
You cook for him there, rub
the counters with snippets of sponge
houseflavored dreams.
Bread rises. Will
there be enough for everyone?
The wolf comes, the little
pigs in gingham pen themselves
inside, the bread in its tin pans getting higher almost
leers at them, they lock each pane.
The room fills with steam. The wolf
circles and taps on the glass, a racket
of taps, persistent taps. The little
pink pigs helplessly
huddle all three on all three.

3.

At night all night the sea wind
rattles the house and woman
after woman inside you pulls her curtains
shut, tight, with involuntarily clamped hands.

The water's not far. If early
in the day you run by its roaring, if you
look back at the house, and blow.

QUILT

Donna Smyth



Maureen Paxton

The following is an excerpt from "Quilt" a novel by Donna E. Smyth to be published by the Women's Press in May, 1982. "Quilt" explores the bonds that hold a rural Nova Scotia community together and the tensions that disrupt its inhabitants' lives.

The yellow truck. It was there again this morning. She knew it would be there, knew it before she drew back the curtain to look. Had known he would be back before she even got out of bed this morning, each morning how hard to do, getting harder — get out of bed, one foot then the other when her body wanted to stay still, always stay still, cuddled up under the sheet, resting, still, with nobody to bother her, nobody to tell her what to do. Resting, still. Not ever to get up to the cold, unblinking morning stare that greyed her face in the mirror looking back at her.

She used to be so pretty! Ralph had told her that in the early days, everyone told her. She could have been Apple Blossom Queen in Hanover if she hadn't wanted to get married so badly, hadn't been so stupid. If she dared, she would have turned the mirror to the wall. But Mrs. Sanford came to look at the room every day. Checking to see if she'd made the bed, was keeping it decent. As if she was a kid instead of a grown woman. It was because she was a social worker case and on Welfare. She hated that but what else could she do? She had no money. No place to go.

And the social worker was already hanging around from the time before when the doctor called her in though Myrt said not to. Not to cause any trouble. And the doctor said Ralph didn't have to know but he didn't know Ralph, how he could sniff it out. Ralph hated social workers almost more than cops.

So Myrt thought about it a long time before she phoned. But the more she thought the worse it got until it didn't seem like there was any way out. Heads I win, tails you lose. Her Mom used to say it as a joke but it was no joke.

The social worker said nobody would know where she was staying. They didn't know Ralph.

Last week she'd talked the old lady into going to town. Then, wouldn't you know it, she'd seen him, seen the truck in the main street in Hanover. As soon as she saw it, she dived into Stedman's, hauling Mrs. Sanford and Hazel with her. They thought she was crazy. They didn't know him! When she tried to explain, the words came out in a tumble

—It's him, I tell you! Driving by in that yellow Datsun. Didn't you see him?

I wonder if he saw us? If he saw me with you, he'll put two and two together. He'll come after me.

Mrs. Sanford was cantankerous, impatient with her

—Doesn't matter if it was him. He can't touch you now, social worker'd put him in jail.

—You don't know him like I do. I know him!

Like she knew the ugly look on his face as soon as he came in that night. Knew the look before she smelt the booze. He growled at her, kicking out a chair from the table and turning it around, straddling it like a horse he almost upset it and she didn't dare laugh. He growled again

—Give me a cigarette. Where the fuck you been?

—You know where I've been — sitting here waiting for you to come home.

I need the money.

—What money?

—C'mon, Ralph! It's payday. I know that. Don't you think I know that? I need the money.

—I think you're so dumb you don't know nothing!

He laughed as if it was funny. And behind him the television voices went on, the television laughter. Somewhere people were happy, were laughing and having a good time. All of a sudden it made her mad to think of that. She had a right to a good time too, not all the time, she wasn't like that but, now

and then, she had a right to be happy too. And being mad about it made her reckless, made her say something before she knew what she was saying

—I'm not so dumb as you think I am. Give me the housekeeping money.

And even though she was mad she couldn't keep the whine out and she heard it herself, whiney woman voice.

—So you're not so dumb as I think, eh?

His eyes were little and mean. And his face was all red with the veins on his nose standing out. She knew she shouldn't argue with him. It just made it worse to argue but she did

—No, I'm not dumb! I got good marks in high school till I had to quit.

He leered at her but not like he wanted her. A senseless leer that made her stomach muscles tighten, chilled her with warning. She should get out of the house till he sobered up. But she didn't leave, remained frozen to the chair, and now he took it up again, slow, as if he was relishing it

—And we all know why you had to quit, don't we? The whole frigging town knows why you had to quit.

—I quit to look after my mother and you know it!

—You was running around with that Sonny Ledoux.

—So what? He was a nice guy.

—Nice guy! He told everyone how you had the hots for him.

—Liar!

—Who you calling a liar?

—Ralph, give me the money, please? I'm tired. I want to go to bed.

He reached over suddenly so she had no time to move. Taking her by surprise like that, the slap almost knocked her off the chair. She cried out

—You stop that now! You got no call to slap me around!

He did it again. This time she was on her knees with the shock of it, her head ringing like it was bells in a tower, not a head but a tower. Why did he always hit her head?

—Get up now! You hear me, Myrt? Get up on your feet. What do you think you are, some kind of a dog? A bitch, eh?

—Leave me alone!

Sick in her stomach, she hung onto the chair, feeling the wooden rung under her fingers, holding onto it like it was the last thing in the world, the wooden rung and the chair. She wished she never had to move again. And he stood over her, she could feel him standing there, could see the black shoes scuffed with some mud on from the parking lot of the beer parlour, and one lace half undone. She stared at the shoes but she didn't look up. If she looked up, he'd go for her face, that only happened the one time and then she learned to keep her head down. He nudged her with his shoe

—That social worker was here again, wasn't she?

—I can't help it! I didn't want to let her in but she made me.

—Liar! You phoned her like last time, didn't you? They don't come snoop-ing round for nothing.

He kicked her on the thigh and she had to let go the chair rung and it scared her to let go, scared her more than her leg hurt her



Maureen Paxton

—I'm not lying! Ralph, honest to god!
 —Bitch! Liar!

His fist hit her ear, something hit her ear. It was ringing and ringing like a bell, a wedding bell in a church. She giggled in the middle of it all senseless giggle like in church when you couldn't help it, couldn't stop it. Stop it! and he came down on her then with his knee in her side so she couldn't breathe, slapping her and slapping her

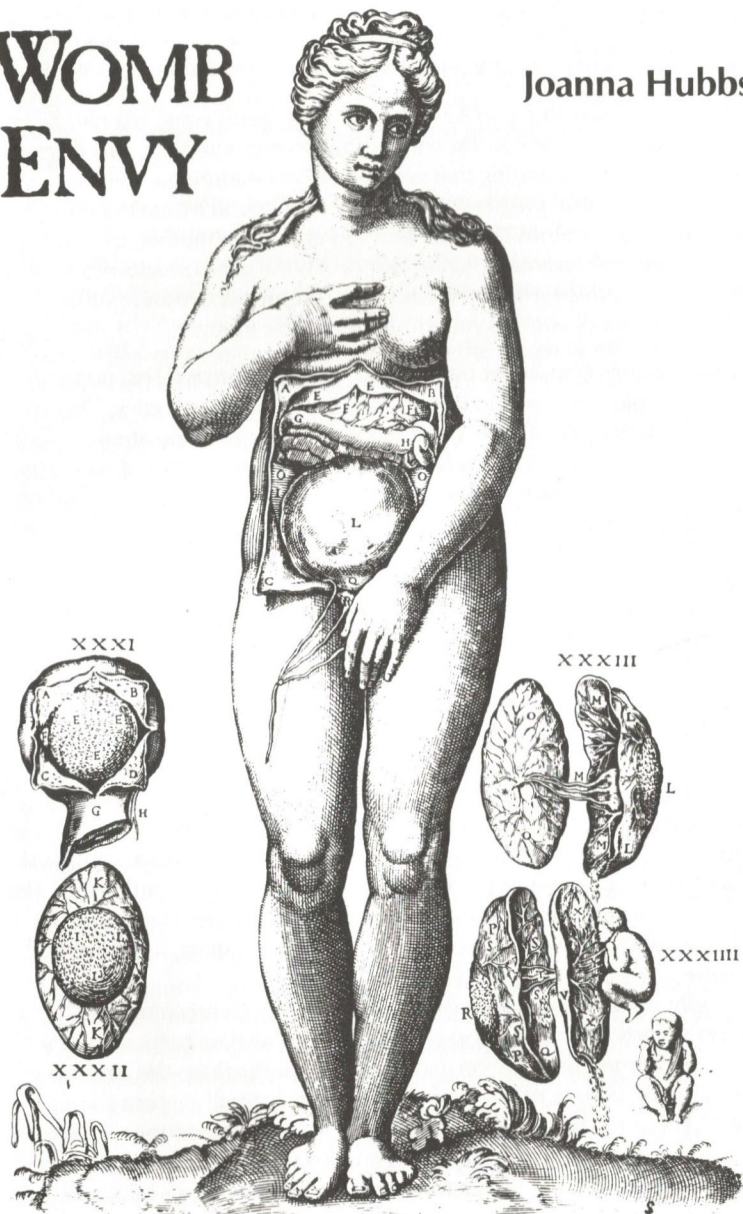
—You're my wife, see? If that frigging cunt of a social worker comes round her again, snooping round here, I'll break her frigging neck and yours too!

But his words were garbled, lost in the ringing. And she hung onto the rung again, waiting for it to happen, if she could hang on till then it would happen — the pain rose and rose in her like a scream and she was screaming but she was waiting and hanging on and here it came! She was slipping out to where the silence was, blessed silence with no scream where he couldn't go, couldn't touch her, nobody could, nobody touch her, it was like being in a church where only she was allowed and nobody, not God, not nobody could touch her, could make her do anything ever again.

But rest.

WOMB ENVY

Joanna Hubbs



The coming of test tube babies has been heralded as a boon for women and a victory for science. Technology permits women who are unable to conceive or who want children but not the burden of pregnancy to triumph over the deficiencies of nature. There are, however, complex issues associated with the test tube question which have not been discussed much less acknowledged.

Students of human behavior have long pointed to a universal male urge to do what women do. The psychoanalyst Eric Fromm sums it up

Quite in contrast to Freud's assumption that 'penis envy' is a natural phenomenon in the constitution of the woman's psyche, there are good reasons for assuming that even before male supremacy was established there was a 'pregnancy envy' in the male which even today can be found in numerous cases. In order to defeat the mother, the male must prove that he is not inferior, that he has the gift to produce. Since he cannot produce with the womb, he must produce in another fashion: he produces with his mouth, his word, his thought.

Simone de Beauvoir in her pioneering book, *The Second Sex*, was one of the first to explore the notion of creativity based on womb envy. De Beauvoir has discerned manifestations of this male envy in the creations of technology, the "remodeling of the face of the earth" on the part of men. Considering the dramatic developments of the past twenty years in the male attempt to take over woman's most awesome role, it is perhaps time to review the phenomenon.

The three basic manifestations of womb envy may be seen in the attempt to emulate female reproductive power, to denigrate that power, and to go that natural power one better in a number of ways — most strikingly through science and technology, which attempt to harness the forces of nature.

Let us look at some examples of the three ways in which womb envy is expressed: First, *emulation*: Bruno Bettelheim, noted psychoanalyst and anthropologist, in *Symbolic Wounds: Puberty Rites and the Envious Male* (1962, subtitled, interestingly enough, "How Preiterate Man Masters Fear by Trying to Make Woman's Power His Own"), describes the universal phenomenon of transvestism on the part of males and the curious custom of *couvade*, in which the father simulates the pains of childbirth while the mother is in labor. He writes about a ritual among the tribes of new Guinea in which the youth's penis is subincised to simulate a vagina and is called by that name.

Secondly, *denigration*: In a review of Mary Daly's *Gyn/Ecology* (1979) the reviewer reports the following experience: Standing next to the doctor who had just performed an abortion and watching him pick up the embryo she heard him say with a smile: "Another of man's small victories over the womb!" There is a well-documented history of male resentment of female reproductive ability. "It's almost a pity that woman has a womb" we hear from the nineteenth century doctor quoted in Susan Griffin's book, *Woman and Nature* (1979).

Thirdly, *substitution*: In Hebrew mythology woman is created by a male god out of the body of Adam: two men play a role in her becoming. In Greek mythology, the goddess Athena is born out of the head of the Father God Zeus. The Greek sculptor Pygmalion creates woman out of a statue, Galatea — a motif which must particularly satisfy the male psyche in that it is used by such diverse talents as the French director Roger Vadim who "created"

Brigitte Bardot in his film *And God Created Woman*; and closer to the Greek myth, Bernard Shaw whose play was used as the basis of the Broadway musical *My Fair Lady*. Indeed Madison Avenue has now become the modern Pygmalion, marketing the "miracles of modern science" to shape the contemporary Galatea.

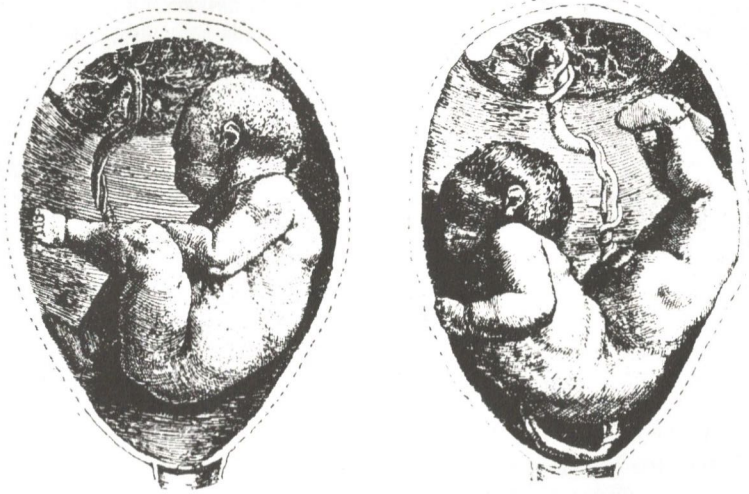
Women can create men biologically; men cannot create women. Men nonetheless can deny women's role in the process. The vision of the baby floating in the amniotic fluid of the test tube must suggest some kind of victory over the female. By giving up her direct role in bearing children, woman does not achieve independence from the burdens of motherhood: she becomes dispensable in a world created in the image of man. The test tube may very well be the final assault on woman in a millenia-long male attempt to dominate woman and nature. This is not to argue for a return to Motherhood and Apple Pie; rather it is intended as a warning against a restructuring of that traditional notion into Fatherhood and Carnation Instant Breakfast!

It is clear then that we don't need to look far to see many manifestations of the male desire to create, to "mother." We hear men talk of an idea as a "brain child," of a pet project as "my baby." The very act of artistic creation is described by Otto Rank, an early disciple of Freud, as the act of being reborn by oneself. And the artistic impulse linked with the biological process of creation is also described by Carl Jung in his idea of *anima*, the feminine aspect of the male psyche which is identified with the creative and nurturing process.

But what about those instances in which male womb envy transcends these "amicable" boundaries? What of the desire to imitate woman by taking over her powers and denigrating her own natural functions? We don't have to look too far to see manifestations of aggressive cooptation. Susan Griffin has shown woman and nature as linked; the rape of land and the rape of woman are of a piece. The conquest of land in the name of progress, the process of colonization — this urge can be found in any number of social and economic phenomena.

It can be argued that through man's intervention nature's productivity is harnessed and maximized. But unbridled intervention cannot be disassociated from the idea of conquest, the conquest of nature. This is most apparent in the masculine control of fertility. The ritual of childbirth is no longer limited to women as it was before the Industrial Revolution. Men control the manufacture of prophylactics; most obstetricians are male. But what interests us most is the quest by scientists for the creation of human life in the test tube. Is it the male womb?

Attempts to create life outside the womb have a long history in the development of western science. The Greek philosopher Diogenes of Apollonia (fifth century B.C.) argued that the father, not the mother, engenders the offspring. He also believed that woman had both less soul and less mind than man. Aristotle later suggested that the life-giving power did not reside in woman alone but was in fact centred in the male sperm, the female being merely the vessel. In *The Myth of Analysis* (1969) James Hillman sums it up:



If woman had a womb — seen in ancient myth and folklore as autonomous, self-moving even, a sort of ‘living creature’ — she was deprived by the Christian church initially of having a soul ... Her creative organs were denigrated — the male gave life; and they were seen as sources of affliction even: Hysteria, disease of the womb, was diagnosed in any number of instances as a disease in which the autonomous animal dominates the human being cutting her off from pneuma, respiration, spirit and degrading her into the animality of the womb.

The womb is denigrated both as the source of life and as the source of spiritual infection, hysteria and disorder. It is both the territory to be conquered and the enemy to be fought.

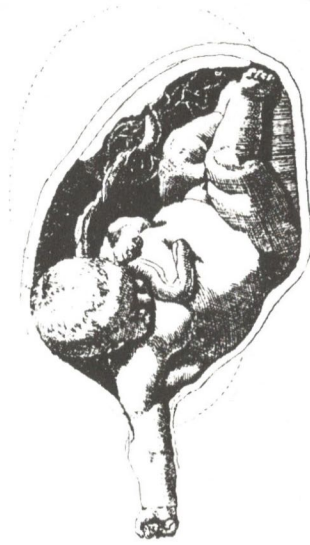
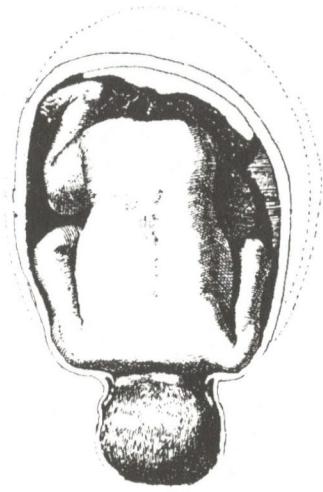
Why this fear of women? Wilhelm Lederer in *Fear of Women* (1968) and R. Hays in *The Dangerous Sex* (1970), both psychoanalysts, see this fear inscribed in the male psyche as an attempt to outgrow the sphere of the mother in order to achieve their own masculinity. Helen Diner in *Mothers and Amazons: The First Female History of Culture* (1931), argues that the world in archaic myth was seen frequently to be created by female parthenogenesis. “Woman, then, created man, not the other way around.” If man imprisons woman in his history, she is nonetheless his creator before she becomes his creation. Theories concerning the existence of mother goddesses, which are based upon the observation and interpretation of archaeological artifacts of the Paleolithic era, are, not surprisingly, regarded with suspicion and even hostility by many male archaeologists. And yet scholars have used these very same theories to show that civilization moves from a primitive mother worship to a spiritual and hence “superior” view of life and patriarchal social organization. (Read, for example, Bachofen’s nineteenth century pioneering work, *Mother Right*.)

Despite attacks on the matriarchal thesis, particularly among anthropologists, recent scholarship had tended to substantiate the views of R. Briffault. Briffault wrote *The Mothers* (1927), a monumental study on the pre-eminence of the feminine in archaic and ancient cultures. The theory of matriarchy as a kind of reverse patriarchy has been discounted and other terms have appeared: matriliney to mean descent through the mother, matrilocality to mean living in the home of the wife, and matrifocality, to mean cultures which centre on the importance of the woman in social and affective life. There is, however, increasing evidence that earliest religions and ancient social groupings gave pre-eminence to women. Merlin Stone in *When God Was A Woman* (1976) argues that, despite the current fall from fashion of Bachofen and Briffault, these pioneers may indeed have shown the way toward a reconstruction of woman’s history by pointing to the conquest of matriarchal institutions by patristic ones. The archaeologist Jaquetta Hawkes, echoing Briffault’s arguments, observes that there is evidence from many parts of the world that the role of women in the social and religious structure has weakened.

The tradition of shamanism, for instance, is thought to be the oldest form of religious worship. It was first discovered among the hunters of Siberia, where women were the first shamans. Women shamans in Eskimo culture (according to the anthropologist Eleanor Leacock) decrease in numbers and importance upon contact with Western missionaries. The idea that woman has a special communion with mother nature which the male must emulate in order to acquire her power — over nature and hence over her — is seen in his attempts to look and behave like a woman. A number of Siberian groups have shamans who dress like women and affect their mannerisms. Their costumes are often decorated with iron breasts. In many cases shamans are initiated into their calling by feminine spirits or nourished by maternal animals.

The notion of evolution from matriarchy to patriarchy is the core of Engels’ *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*. Engels argues that the shift is linked with the accumulation of food stuffs; at the core of his argument is the idea of property and the need to protect that hard-won prize. We could say, following Engels’ argument, that in conquering nature, harnessing its productivity to his needs, man is no longer dependent on natural creativity but becomes master of it. The development of agriculture, in which male labour and the need to defend property appear, coincides with a shift from mother goddesses who create parthenogenetically to father gods who do so in imitation. The omnipotent goddesses of earliest times are first coupled with male consorts and then gradually displaced as sources of fertility. The male assumes the active and inseminating role. To the defender belong the spoils.

The Greek god Apollo proclaims in the *Oresteia*, “There can be a father without a mother.” The Egyptian god of creation Atun dispenses with the feminine by creating life through the act of masturbation. In Euripides’ *The Bacchae*, Zeus calls to his son Dionysus: “Enter this my male womb.” The Hebrew Jehovah creates through the mouth as he orders the light to divide



from darkness and fashions Adam. Metis, the Greek goddess of wisdom, is swallowed by Zeus. Through her counselling from inside his belly he gives birth through his head to the goddess Athena: mind over matter.

If nature is to be dominated and given form by the male, so must woman in Christian society. Mary, the desexed symbol of femininity, functions simply as the empty vessel for male creation, and gets her identity solely from her son.

Women, however, did not take kindly to such usurpation of their powers. There is ample evidence that witches were the continuation of female fertility cults and had that same special contact with nature. The persecution of witches by church and state from the fourteenth through the seventeenth centuries was man's way of destroying the life-giving, healing ability to transform naturally. The male counterpart of the witch, the alchemist, who sought the secrets of life in the "laboratory," went for the most part unharmed in these witch-hunts. Mircea Eliade, a historian of religion, claims that alchemy itself, in which minerals are treated like plants in the womb of Mother Earth, is rooted in ancient fertility rites. Alchemists attempted to turn base metals into gold by simply speeding up the natural process of gestation by which they were thought to reach their perfect state, gold. Many alchemists saw this process as an allegory representing control over the reproductive forces of nature. The completion of their work was viewed as "rebirth." In alchemical literature the creation of gold is both a material and a spiritual process; its product is often represented as a baby. An emblem in Michael Maier's seventeenth century alchemical treatise, *Atalanta Fugiens* shows a baby in the belly of Hermes, the patron god of alchemy. It is not surprising that this triumph of laboratory work could put a child in the belly of man. As Maier writes, "The ... test-tube is artificial, it is true, but it makes no difference whether a nest is made by the hen or by the farmer, for the coming into being is the same." Woman, in Maier's treatise, is frequently pictured as dead.

And so we come to the dawn of modern science, the attempt to find nature's laws and to control them. By the seventeenth century Francis Bacon, who had the mind of a modern, could say, "Let us put nature on the rack." At the same time, René Descartes, philosopher of the new scientific outlook, made his famous "discovery": "I think, therefore I am." Although this discovery has been seen as the triumph of modern consciousness, it also set up an irreconcilable split between mind and body. Man was able to separate himself from the world around him, to look at himself and nature objectively. And so the whole cult of positivism, of objectivity, began as did the alienation of man from nature.

All the discoveries of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are attempts to control nature's powers through intellect. This was the time of the new astronomy, the first observations with a microscope and telescope, of experiments in a vacuum. (A vacuum, think of it: a space detached from its surroundings.) A new science of motion was born and the principle of inertia formulated; the circulation of the blood was discovered, and a decisive step forward was taken in the study of anatomy and physiology. Theories were formulated to explain how the earth was formed. With Descartes, a new distinction was drawn between the "subjective" world of everyday experience based on the senses and the "objective" reality of atoms and corpuscles moving according to definable laws. The world was defined as a *machine* rather than an *organism* and God was seen no longer as the father so much as the creator-clockmaker, artisan or engineer who followed a logical pattern, who created not through biological generation but through his intellect and hands.

By the seventeenth century, then, thinkers such as Bacon and Maier could see no distinction between products of art and products of nature. Descartes wrote, "There is no difference between machines constructed by artisans and the diverse bodies that nature composes." The only difference is that the mechanisms of man-made machines are visible (one might say, like the penis — out front) whereas "the tubes and springs of natural objects are often too small to be perceived by the human senses." The eighteenth century thinker Gassendi makes apparent the need for the subjection of nature to male domination — that is, the substitution of male creativity for female womb — when he writes that we cannot understand the work of nature, only the work of man. It's not difficult to understand which became more popular in the age of reason.

The philosopher Vico wrote, "Just as nature imparts life to physical things so the human mind imparts life to mechanics." And here, we might add, Zeus gives life to Athena through the head. Man creates woman, man creates man, man creates nature, man creates the tools for that control, man creates the cult of technology.

But it was a woman, Mary Shelley, who in the early nineteenth century, pointed to the clear dangers of male parthenogenesis in *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus*. The young Frankenstein is an alchemist whose obsession is the creation of life. "Whence, I often asked myself, could the princi-

ple of life proceed? After days and nights of incredible labor and fatigue, I succeeded in discovering the cause of generation and life; nay, more, I became myself capable of bestowing animation upon lifeless matter." Immediately upon creating his monster Frankenstein has a dream in which he sees his sister-wife and mother slowly dying under his embrace. Again, man creates, woman dies. But what is the result of this male parthenogenesis? Not only does it lead to the death of women, but to the creature rising up to destroy its creator. The Frankenstein monster is the creation of a narcissistic double. We see this impulse in a recent book, *In His Image: The Cloning of a Man* (1979), which refers to current fascinations with masturbatory reproduction.

So what, then, can we make of all this? Is it possible that the attempt to create life outside of the womb via the test-tube will itself produce monsters devoid of a humanity that only nature and woman can confer? Is not Huxley's *Brave New World* the culmination of a patriarchal domination of nature and woman? Remember the supervisor in the Central London Hatchery and Conditioning Centre

'For of course,' said Mr. Foster, in the vast majority of cases fertility is merely a nuisance. One fertile ovary in twelve hundred — that would really be quite sufficient for our purposes. But we want to have a good choice. And of course one must always have an enormous margin of safety. For we allow as many as thirty per cent of the female embryos to develop normally. The others get a dose of male sex-hormone every twenty-four metres for the rest of the course. Result: they're decanted as freemartins — structurally quite normal (except, he had to admit, they do have the slightest tendency to grow beards) but sterile. Guaranteed sterile. Which brings us at last,' continued Mr. Foster, 'out of the realm of mere slavish imitation of nature into the much more interesting world of human invention. (Italics ours)

Later Huxley comments, "What man has joined, nature is powerless to put asunder."

Mary Daly has warned us in *Gyn/Ecology* against a return to the myth of the sacredness of female fertility on the part of women. We're not suggesting that motherhood defines the nature of woman — to women themselves; rather, it is how *man* has defined motherhood and envied it. But in acquiescing to this male image of motherhood, women are collaborating in their own denigration and destruction. Female fertility is not simply a fact; it is also an awesome power symbolizing human relatedness to nature herself. Man's attempt to break that power, or intervene in it, is reflected in the development of technology. We see the results of that labor: the rape of land, the messing of his nest. To recognize that impulse may not be enough, but recognition is the first step towards woman's redefinition of the power associated with her potential motherhood.

Tell me the stories, Mama

Ellen Bass



Helen Klein

You are going into surgery. You are
across the continent
in a blue and white kitchen
on the eleventh floor of a condominium
overlooking the ocean. Right now
as I finish a late lunch, you are making
your dinner, perhaps chicken.

I have the surgeon's name and number.
I will ask him questions
from pencilled notes. Patiently
he will explain by-pass, dye-test,
pressure cuff, degree of closure.
I will thank him too profusely,
hang up, feeling my questions
unanswered. You

are the one I want to ask, you
know the stories, tell me again
how your mother sent you to the store
for onions when you were a little girl. A nickel or perhaps three cents
for a bag of onions. Tell me how she said you can always put in an extra
onion. Onions are cheap. When you got to the store you saw licorice,
sour balls, chocolate kisses. You bought a pocketful.
"What did she say?" I'd ask you. "What did she say?"
"What could she say?" you'd tell me. "It was done."

I need to hear again
when Grandmom married, the women in her cigar factory all chipped in
a dollar and bought her a crystal cut-glass bowl. Eighteen women.
Eighteen dollars. It was a small fortune and shone in the light.
Long after your father left she took pleasure from the bowl.
But there were five children, the apartment was small and one day,
it had to happen, Jack knocked Norman or Norman knocked Jack and
shattered. When Grandmom came back from the store she didn't say
the bowl
anything.

The tears just began to flow. She cried all the rest of the day,
making dinner, putting the younger children to bed, silent, the tears
slipping down her cheeks.

Remind me
how in nurses training, when the girls went to the movies,
they all returned red-eyed but you. The supervisor asked, "Miss Wolpert,
how is it you're not crying?" "I've seen too much in life," you said.

Tell me how you met Dad, he was your patient.
His eyes were bandaged, but he said he could tell you
were coming by the sound of your footsteps.

I want to remember the name of the street where you first lived.
I know you didn't cook. Meals were free at the hospital
and Dad ate at his mother's. But sometimes you'd look around the
kitchen,
worried if your father came to visit, you'd have nothing to serve.
He never came. You'd bake, in case.

Tell me about the move to Fresno, how you went for the climate
hoping it would help Dad's health. There were no houses,
you lived in a hotel room. Herb's teacher called you into school.
He was wearing short pants and high socks like boys did in the east.
She said, "The other children make fun of him, buy him long pants."

Tell me how Dad hurt his knee, he was kneeling making a display
at J.C. Penny's, I can't remember — wallets or ties — what the display was,
tell me

how long he was in the hospital, how you'd walk Herb to school
then walk to the hospital, 3,000 miles from home, from family, and
you'd tell me, even though your heart was breaking, the sun
would be shining down on you, the air filled with lemon blossoms,
still you'd feel grateful to be alive.

Tell me the stories, Mama. I need to hear you talk.
Pour a highball, set it on a yellow paper napkin.
I want to hear them again and again
until I can tell them like you.

PHOTO ARCHIVES

FIREWEED has always encouraged the submission of visual art in all forms conducive to reproduction in our format. We hope to offer artists a forum outside mainstream media, and we in turn search out the unusual, the varied art form. We feel strongly that women's work that is considered to be "imperfect," "banal," "domestic," i.e., outside establishment or avant garde traditions, has a place. Within our tradition, we present here a collection of archive photographs from different sources: the Ontario Provincial Archives, the Herstory Archives, the Fireweed Archives, and the photographs of Helen Klein. We welcome and encourage future submissions from our audience.



English Immigrants, Quebec City, 1911

Courtesy of Ontario Public Archives





Courtesy of Ontario Public Archives



Courtesy of Ontario Public Archives

Uncle/Heber

Gillian Robinson

A game of waiting. Heber takes Susan to the house. Heber takes his children to bed and watches out for the car headlights. Heber finds her lying in bed and she is sleeping.

Ten years old and sleeping away from home to help her aunt. Ten years old with the softest skin and black eyes. Ten years old and watching men. Moving sideways when they come close. Back with the apple tree, back with her grandmother, watching her grandfather destroy the hornets. Back woods the brook wide and she is ten years old and he came in the night and lay beside her and lay there breathing so heavily and when he touched she said his name as if she could say it and he would go. Ten years old and she has to open her legs for him to push hard, to push harder and there is blood on the sheets and she doesn't say anything because they said they always said that you were there to be for them. *Open your legs.* Heber takes her takes her hard and he is groaning with the tightness and he comes too quickly and he doesn't look at her. Black eyed Susan with the small hole — pushing against her pushing her down because he can't understand — he can't touch her without her feeling pain. Heber walks to the door and the night is black without the moon and Susan is black and they are tied by movement — they are tied by blood and he leans against the door and thinks of the children and the house. Sleeping. Contained.

Heber is watching for Susan to get up. Susan lies there. Susan lies there while the tears fall down her nose and down her body until they reach the bloody hole and fill it up. Susan is sleeping curled round the sheets. Black eyed whore without any hole. No sense of when it's going to stop. Heber just keeps opening the door, opening the door and she screams and screams and Margaret sleeps while black eyed Susan falls under the night. Falls under the man, falls under his cock pressing hard against her pressing for release.

Looking out for Heber, protecting the shell, the family. Screaming in the woods and bending down wondering where the marks are. Evidence to bring, lay down on the table and show the tear marks, show the marks of the cock to her mother bending down over her sleeping father.

Heber comes home and Heber watches out of the side eyes checking black eyed Susan for evidence and Heber threatens down by the beach telling her what's good for her. Heber takes her arm and points away. Susan, black eyed Susan screaming in her sleep while she is taken.

Through years Heber moves down her body like possession. Like night he possesses. When the sun strikes black eyed Susan he knows, he can see the marks and he shudders and Margaret asks him if he is ill.

Black eyed Susan is sixteen and thin. Scared and mean. Hates her mother for not protecting. Hates her mother for not screaming with her. *Where were you? Where are you?* she asks the mirror and puts on more mask and returns to the world of men. Susan moves towards them, pulling them in without recognising their faces. And their cocks pull her down in the backs of cars and she lies there feeling Heber, feeling Heber feeling Heber.

Power within walls. *You have everything you always wanted*, they tell Susan, *A house, children and a loving husband.* She calls her husband 'Dad' and when he sleeps she waits for the next day. The next day, the same day where it happens. Black eyed Susan twenty, married, three children and still immobile, waiting, watching, moving towards men and laughing, hating, hating without power. Full of child, watching men move around her until all she knows is Heber's body coming down on her. Coming down hard. Coming down with pain. And she says *harder* and she screams *harder* and why can't she die there waiting for the next battle. Waiting for Heber to come back after all these years. Heber down the road with the car taking her back in the woods, taking her back, hard, taking her down, fucking her until she is black, until she is not Susan but a body crying out in the woods through the wind.



Courtesy of Public Archives of Canada

A Letter, Elisabeth, My Mother

Gillian Robinson

If in blood I asked you not to turn around, not to look back, not to remember when in bed you lay shaking, remembering your dreams, moving away from the man beside you.

Turning your head, looking down on me, sleeping, a child, while you uncover, while you damage. While you grow older waiting for release. You are again there singing. Standing by the bed and calling against any demons. Calling against harm while I shake, while you shake. And then through the door comes the man shutting out the light. Calling you back. Calling you into a world of safety while I am left lying there waiting to be devoured by any idle demon: desiring child.

And how could you live that double life? Hearing through the thin walls the sounds of my fear and listening to him talk, listening to him devour, like my demons, your dreams. How you woke in the morning and came over to me and laughed and then walked over to him and said, "I can't remember my desires before you. Did I have any?" His mouth silent. His mouth avoidable.

Don't look around. Your eyes grow older when you look down on your hand holding another. Hoping for another.

Later you are gone again and again. I watch you this time, leaving by plane, taking off away from me, standing on the snow. Leaning with you as you go up into the night air: full of fear, but not as loud as a child. And all my fear centres around you dying. You leaving when I am not ready. That you are always, and circled, the centre. The way I again excuse all these fumbblings at care. At the bed when I reach down and know you, desperate against another day.

That damned desire. That damned lust. That eros. I learned that in the playground. I heard it in the dark rooms with other girls and I heard it from your dark rooms, and yet the transference of erotics is silent. Between mother and daughter, mysterious. You knew back there, between the pain of those thin walls, the danger of imparting erotics to me. The danger of temptation and the varied dangers of loss. Loss to excusing. Loss to the daughter turning the hours around him, the daughter's lover. Turning time away from you. You, standing there waiting for another outcome. "He didn't understand. He didn't hear me. He never listens. He is only interested in himself."

Litanies we laugh about in letters. Incantations we repeat.

Every time you changed. I knew loss. I knew the past disappearing. I again asked you to remain as past: not to involve my changing body in understanding. I wanted innocence. I wanted strength.

Turn. You walked down from the car. Through snow. You, leaving daughter, son and man, sitting. Leaving in some distant anger at being again not alone. Being responsible. So you vanished for some time. Walked down that long stretch into the snow and I still feel fear: you had left me. You had finally said, no more. You were leaving me to interpret the world on my own.

By some thread you returned and leaned back in the car and laughed at my hysterical protests. "I've come back. I'm here." And so, angrily, through the slowness of language, we move away from each other. Not forgiving. Women opposed because outside expectations demand some softness, some hardness, and most of all devotion, attention.

Later you rented a room. To be alone. I couldn't understand. I thought I was the most important source. I was angry. I was angry. And you went less proud.

So possessed. So colonized. We tear in blindness at each other. Consumers of men we romanticize in anger, away from each other.

How can we explain leaving? Explain blood between us so strong, so fierce. So violent that we shriek out in these letters that we are lovers, and yet still mother and daughter living out some role lost centuries ago.

How can we leave and still trust the word to interpret to each other the world we exist in?

I keep listening. I am anxious to be gone. Too much waiting to see you.

Let you go. Keep you: safe, silent.

Women's Stories

Lina Ladron de Guevara

These stories were told to me by different women and through a long period of time. Some of them I remember from childhood, others are quite recent. The story-tellers were all women that had come from the isolated rural areas of Chile to work as servants in the city.

The stories remained very clearly imprinted in my mind. I have tried to reproduce them as they were told to me. They are all true stories.

The cherry-tree

In the back of our yard there was this beautiful cherry tree. It was very old and the trunk was crusty and covered with scars. It seemed to me that it was a person. In the beginning of the summer, ours was the first tree that gave cherries, ours were the first cherries to ripen. But the tree was so tall that it was very difficult to get the fruit and the birds always got the best of the crop. One day, a maid came from the house of the Mrs. and said that the Mrs. wanted some cherries. So I climbed up the tree and picked the reddest, the juiciest and the biggest of them all. And I had a beautiful little straw basket that my godmother had given me when I became eight years old. And I made a bed of green fig-leaves, and put the cherries on top, taking care that there was no dust, no dried leaves on them. And I went to the house of the Mrs. and stood in the kitchen door with my basket. That kitchen was beautiful. Bigger than our whole house, with an enormous black stove in the centre with an enormous and shiny kettle on top. There were two maids in the kitchen, girls a little older than me. I knew them but I never spoke to them because they were stuck-up. They took the cherries and went inside and I heard the voice of the Mrs. saying: Put them in the blue bowl. And the girl appeared with the blue bowl and put the cherries in it. I have never seen anything so pretty. The bowl was blue like the sky, and glossy, and of a shape so round and soft you wanted to touch it. And the red cherries inside looked even bigger and juicier and redder than they had before. So I was happy to see that. But the bad thing was that they never returned my little basket, and I never dared to go and ask for it. I was too shy.



"Third World Arise" 10' x 18' oil on canvas

The father

My father died when I was very small. We lived beside this river, a real fury it was, a torrent, specially in the winter, when it came down the rocks jumping and roaring like a mad dog, biting the sides of the canyon. Once there had been a bridge there, you could still see the posts, but I guess the river took it away one winter and nobody could put it back again. So people would ford the river carefully, they knew where to go and if they were on horseback there was no problem.

Then one day my father said he wanted to go to town, see his friends. And my mother said: Please Belisario, don't go, you will come home drunk and the river is bad, and the baby might come any moment now. But he said: I gave my word that I was coming. And he went. That night there was a very bad storm. The wind was howling and we could hear the water running faster than ever. We all sat around the fire, my mother holding her head in one hand, stirring the fire with a stick from time to time. The only light came from the fire and the room was filled with dark shadows. Then the dog heard something, scrambled up and went to the door. And we heard a voice calling, in the middle of the wind and the river: Carmela! Carmelaaaa!! And we huddled around my mother and I could see that her eyes were very big. We did not move from her side that night, and we fell asleep on the floor, all the children huddled there, one on top of the other. The next day we found my father's horse, standing on the other side of the river, all wet. My father was never found. Nobody searched for him that much either. What for? We knew he was dead. And my mother had to raise all eight of us, and the baby that was born a month after he died.

The little sister

My mother was a cook in the Hospital and worked very hard. She started work at six in the morning and never got home before five o'clock. So we spent a lot of time alone. We were six and I was number five and seven years old. My oldest brothers and sisters were never home. They had other more interesting things to do and just came home a little before my mother arrived, pretending they had been there all the time. Taking care of me and my little sisters, that sister of mine, Clarita! She was four at the time of my story and she had been sickly as a baby. She had had tuberculosis and everybody thought she was going to die, so they made a lot out of her and pampered her and gave her good things to eat. And she was a pest. She didn't die. No, she was stubborn as a mule and she clung to life and didn't die. And I was saddled with her. I had to go with her everywhere and carry her when she was tired and prepare food for her when she was hungry and tell her stories when she was bored. I could never be by myself. And she had this whiny voice, and kept picking at me, grabbing my skirts, clinging to my legs and never let me give a free step.

So, one day we were walking by a canal and she was crying and whining as usual. And she made so impatient that I pushed her into the water and that was that.

But there was this man walking by and he saw everything and he took Clarita out of the water, dried her face and patted her head.

So I took Clarita home, made a fire and dried her dress and combed her hair and gave her a piece of bread. And we sat and looked into the fire for quite a while. We never spoke of what had happened and Clarita never said a word to anybody.

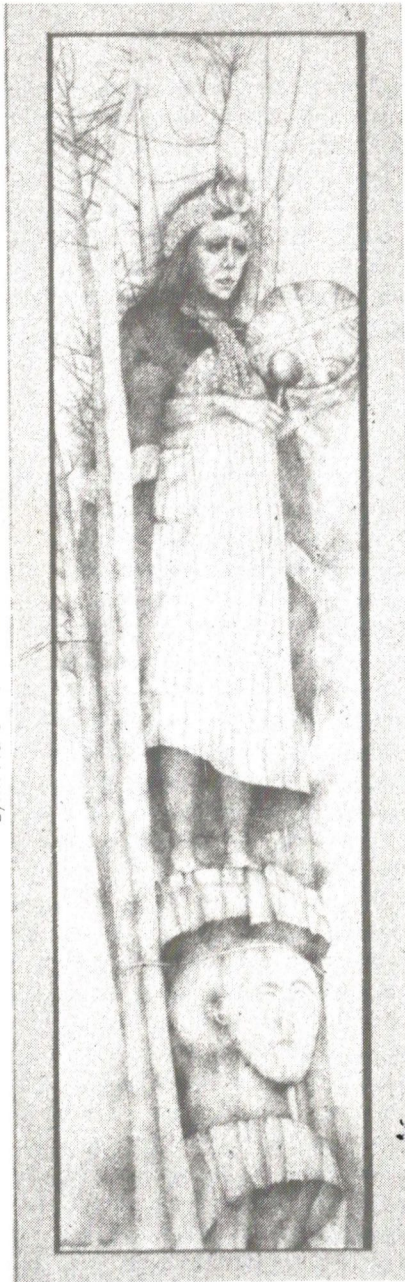
So, today she is a grown up woman and sometimes she makes me mad she does so many stupid things. But of all my brothers and sisters, she's the one I am closest to.

The Mrs.

That was my Mrs. When I was a child and living in the country, there was always this big car, dark blue, running along the roads, and it would come to the gates, and honk the horn, very loud, and then some kid would run to open the gate and the car would flash by like lightning and then disappear amidst a cloud of dust. And then people would say: that was the Mrs. And for a long time, I was so silly, I believed that the car was the Mrs. And I couldn't understand when people said: "the Mrs. did this and the Mrs. said that" and I would imagine that big dark blue car doing and saying those things. I was very silly when I was a child.

The earthquake

The day of the big earthquake, in the month of May, it was a beautiful sunny morning, the first sunny day after weeks of rain, and then my father said: I am going to town, to buy what's missing. So he went, riding his horse, and my stepmother, my little brothers and I, were left alone. And I went to see to the chickens, and I was closing the door of the chicken-coop when I heard a roar and a rumble, and I could see clouds of dust coming out of the hills that surrounded our house, and even the air was trembling and I couldn't stand on my feet and I had to kneel down. And all the animals, the cows and the sheep started coming to the houses, bellowing and bleating and pushing one another, and they had to cross this little bridge over a stream, and the bridge gave way and crashed down, and the animals fell in the stream, kicking and scrambling and there was all this confusion and the roaring and the trembling seemed to get worse. And I tried to get near the house and I had to drag myself along because I couldn't walk, the earth was shaking so hard. I heard the clatter of the pots and the crockery falling from the shelves in the kitchen and running around the floor. And suddenly I heard my stepmother screaming: It's coming, it's coming, the baby is coming. And I don't know how I ran into the kitchen and I saw her, holding onto the door-jamb, moaning and groaning. And the blood was running down her legs. And then the shaking stopped and I helped my stepmother on the bed and she had the baby. And I had to cut the cord and wash the baby and wrap it in a blanket and do everything the best I could, while my stepmother kept screaming and saying that her heart was giving way, that she was going to have a heart attack! It was the first time I had seen anything being born. My father was very strict, and always kept us away when the animals were about to give birth. And I was eleven years old. I think now that I discovered too many things in the same day. When my father came home, he was very angry with me because I had forgotten all about my little brothers. Poor souls, they were hiding in a corner and one of them had his leg crushed under a big wardrobe. It never got straight again and he had to use crutches, but he managed very well to run around and even to play foot-ball.



"Chile"

The burnt girl

Near our house, there lived this girl, she must have been twelve years old, and she and her little brother had been left all by themselves. But she was a good worker and managed for a time to care for the chickens and the vegetable garden and the neighbours helped her when there was need.

Then one night, Manuel, one of the neighbours, looking outside the window said: Whatever is that, that walks in the yard? And they all went outside, and it was the girl and her dress was burning and her hair was burning and she ran around the yard, whimpering and trying to put out the flames with her hands. So the neighbours brought water and put out the fire and the girl lay there without moving, with her eyes open.

They brought her into the house and put her on a bed and surrounded her with green things. Green cabbage leaves, green lettuce, branches of the willow tree, which at that time were of the lightest green. They covered her body also with green leaves, and kept the room as dark as possible, so that it would be fresh. But she just lay there, without moving, and from time to time a slight tremor would run over her body. All the neighbours came to see her, and some of them took care of the little brother. He said that the kerosene lamp had fallen over his sister, when she tried to turn it off for the night. She lay there and nobody could do anything to help her. She died after three days. They buried her near the willow tree, because the cemetery was too far. There used to be a little cross over her tomb but now it is gone. This was many years ago.

Two Women

Ethel Harris

1

As we sit at lunch to-day
in the dove-gray mist
you continually move
your fingers along the edge
of the white tablecloth
the way a child does
when it grasps the binding
of its blanket.
Then you lift your hand
and press it to your temple
saying
things will always be like this
your daughter will rise against you
forever
like a sea of anger
breaking on your shore.

2

Do you remember
when we were young
and eagerly wanted our children
relishing even our labour?
No one told us
we would raise our daughters
in dollhouses that would give way
under the world's fire.
We lived protected by a trench of dreams
and we wake up now
glad we had no crystal ball
to play with.

3

Do you remember
when your own mother stood above you
on the stairs
and forbade you take a step?
How you hated her power
her coldness and indifference
to your desires?
But you never told her.
Now your daughter hates your power.
And she tells.

4

To be a woman is to be
a house of hurts.
You gave what you thought of
as peace.
Your words were quilts
that covered rumpled beds
but the hearts still ached
in their solitary rooms.
Now they rise against you
like an army
and you are undefended.

Cry Baby

Carole Itter

It is visiting hours. Four new mothers receive scores of visitors. Each mother has put on her make-up ahead of time and arranged herself into the most comfortable seated position possible considering the stitches. Some of the mothers make more than one trip to the nursery with groups of visitors to look at the new arrival. When my second group of visitors arrives, I decide also to show this new baby to them. I shuffle down the hallway and for the first time look through the glass window. I can't tell which baby is mine and they are all crying and I can't stand it so I go back to the room and crawl into bed. The next day I try it alone. I stand on one side of the glass, crying, and the baby is on the other side of the glass, crying, and we are not able to get together because it is not "time." I recall Oscar, the farmer, saying that after the calf is born, many farmers remove the calf from the cow for the first two days. It provides the distance between them that the cow needs in order to stop worrying about her offspring. Is that the role hospitals offer to new mothers? I leave with the baby on the second day.

Sputters, growls, bubbles, bigger than any journal-keeping reality. Time measured by the emptiness of a tummy to the fullness of these breasts, then reversed. I have never known tiredness like this, as though travelling day coach from Vancouver to Halifax to Vancouver to Halifax to Vancouver, two weeks of it, two weeks old today, not more than three continuous hours of sleep, my dreams rich, strange: he brings newborn kittens one by one into the bed, wet, crawling over my skin while the mother cat is crying out, I call his name but only the first letter comes, "Gee," screaming and awake.

Sleeps, sucks, shits and belches, is very strong and has the paternal dimple on a pointed chin, the eyes are steady, this is our child. "Hi there. I'm your mom. That guy? He's your dad. Your name? Well, we like the sound of it, hope it works for you. We weren't very good at finding you a name, long list, old relatives, ancestors. We'll find another name for you too, one less feminine, more sturdy, the kind you can use should you become an economist, or a revolutionist or a writer. Like Welwyn. Or Marden. I'm your mom and I'm full of magic tricks and milk."

He and I celebrate an anniversary by taking a short walk together, arriving back just a little bit early. The baby is quiet, upstairs listening to grandmother coo and soothe. We have some extra time, I carry the jar of vaseline, he the rubber prophylactic towards the bed. I am talking nervously, "what if it doesn't work, isn't possible?" and it isn't. I begin talking more nervously, he long and straight, says sharply, "don't talk about it." Better I get up, baby is

hungry and needing a bath, crud and fluff stuck in the armpits, the neck, an empty belly. ("Later," says grandmother, "you'll wonder how you ever did it.") Well, the month was a miserable failure with this beautiful wee child responding to the tension in me, the total exhaustion, the colic night after night, the screeching for hours on end.

Colic is a bad break to get with a first baby; it shatters so much of the natural joy new parents share.

The exhaustion. The depression, the tension, the visitors, the telephone, the hemorrhoids, the stitches, the dreams, the stomach flu, the sleeplessness. The colic, the gripe water, the barley water, the bottled water, the pacifier, hot water bottle, and then the tranquillizers casually prescribed for what? a three week old baby? exclaimed the pharmacist, the father, the grandmother, the aunt. NO WAY. The laundries, the home typesetting business, the clients, the Christmas, the family with three children who had stomach flu and staph infection who moved in for the Christmas season. Quite literally, the longest months I've known, the hours awake.

...and if your baby's crying half the night, making evenings with your husband hideous, destroying everyone's sleep, you'll be ready to try anything that might stop it. Sometimes warming, cuddling, rocking, or (strictly by prescription) sedatives or a change of formula will do it. It's not temper, it's pain.

Baby child, holding me on the line. Tension, then no milk or restless milk, breasts that are needed, the connection so distant as I look down at the bare head, the embryonic profile so exquisitely contoured, one brilliant eye open which looks up at me. The nipple held fully in the small mouth, the tongue sucking rhythmically five or six times, then a brief rest, then twanging the tip of the nipple quickly and on again.

When I leave the house, I forget that other very insistent existence. Yet two hours away and I'm feeling my breasts fill up suddenly and I'm fretting. Can this presence be part of the next, what, fifteen years of my life, this insistence. I don't think I'll be able to do it, I simply won't be able to cope.

Growls, farts, grunts, groans, squeals, every few seconds another loop of sound, the audio version of what's happening inside. The baby lies in the adjacent room in the old wicker carriage, the noises are atrocious. I should be asleep. The public health nurse said most firmly, "When the baby sleeps, you sleep." But baby is restless as I am. My thoughts to my stomach, and then to my breasts, then to that stomach, then the sound of that crying, stomach, breast, stomach, a constant refilling.

One of his friends phones, then phones back to ask of the baby. "Grand." Asks if I breastfeed. "Yes." Asks how do I like it? "Weird." Well, it was a weird question to begin with. How to expound further by telephone, that she lies at my breast sucking? That my milk gives her colic and therefore pain? That she screams for hours on end? That I don't love her then? That I'm at my wits end and nobody has noticed? I pick up a book I've been trying to read, stand in the partial afternoon light while pushing the carriage back and forth with the other hand. That way the cries don't hurt.

Colic is defined as a "paroxysm of acute abdominal pain," but we are not sure just what it is other than a separate and distinct pattern which is commonly referred to as "colic" or "the three months" colic. (If it lasted more than three months, we would find lots of mothers in the funny farm.)

He said, "Doesn't it ever make you angry?" Baby was squealing and screeching and squirming on my lap. "How can she, she's doing this because she's uncomfortable."

The crying is almost continuous from 7:30 at night to 7:30 in the morning. My stomach aches and cramps, I hold back screaming out, doubled over in the pain. If that tummy cramps as mine does, no wonder the crying. I am exhausted and angry at everyone. I am too tired to sleep, too weak to eat and there's no food in the house. I make an appointment to see the doctor and as I enter the office, he looks at me and smiles, giving his immediate diagnosis — "It's the case of the exhausted mother and the thriving baby." He prescribes librium and says that once my sleep gets back in order, so should everything else. I am breastfeeding and probably shouldn't be taking drugs because it might affect the milk. Perhaps this is a blessing in disguise. Within a week, I am totally dependent on the librium for a night's sleep and guard the tablets carefully. My sanity is being rescued and I am so grateful that they work. A month later I can see that there is a baby and I am a mother and we are inseparable and I love this babe beyond description.

Laughs, smiles at everybody and every thing, knows the family, reaches out for things, knows three toys, cried when he left the room, is amazed, simply amazed by the family cat. A little person, distinct as the two ears which stick out so far they sometimes fold over. The longest three months of my life. My feelings so mixed, loving the baby yet despising the time consumed. I now can find one hour a day to spend at the home business. I am still tired all the time, no strength, no stamina.

Postpartum depression is now considered to be the reaction of a vulnerable personality to the stresses and strains of pregnancy and delivery, followed by the responsibility to a new baby ...the sufferer feels continually tired with a persistent headache, and aches and

pains all over her body. She becomes increasingly prone to feelings of inadequacy...

The crying doesn't stop and I've got to do something that is a diversion from the sound. The book says that you let the baby cry itself to sleep at night, you do not go to it and that the first night you try this, the baby will cry for an hour, then the second night, for a half hour, the third night for fifteen minutes and then not at all. I will follow the book as nothing else is working and the first night, this baby cries for an hour, the second night the baby cries for two hours, the third night the baby cries for three hours and the fourth night, the baby cries for four hours. The book does not work. I am in some kind of deep agony, I listen to the advice of everyone, I don't know what to do. The most sensible advice from a neighbour, that a baby will fall asleep once it's content. This one isn't. Others talk of spoiled babies, how they will cry because they know they'll get picked up. I understand the resentment that parents feel when a baby cries all the time and also the guilt. I can't stand the crying. Every night the crying. Is it fear of the long sleep? Is it hunger? She is hungry but won't eat, is tired but won't sleep. Then somehow, finally, whew, the crying has stopped, I take a deep breath in the silence. A phone call had interrupted the emptying of the right breast, a client for the home typesetting business arrived during the left one. Each evening comes and I am tired and tired of being continuously tired. I don't have the option to sleep.

Silence is the absence of a crying baby. Maybe I'm going out of my mind, deeper and deeper into depression. I am too isolated or I am lonely or, I want a whole afternoon to myself or, I want to see more people or nobody drops in, so I work all day yet don't take time for myself. I've lost contact with him, we live on different shifts. I see that he does what he wants to do when he feels like doing it and that I do what's needed to be done. If this is where marriage begins to break down, then I know it. Three days went by when he didn't touch the baby.

Not surprisingly, the first few weeks at home can be the most difficult time of a mother's life. ... However good your intentions to put child, husband and home first, as a new mother you are courting trouble if you forget that you too, have needs...

It's the disillusionment. Each day there is less of me and more of the baby. I don't read anything, books or newspapers. Mostly I am exhausted creatively and that's the largest problem; being strongly motivated in a direction other than motherhood yet finding motherhood totally consuming with no releases. To collect whatever is myself at the end of the day is about as interesting or possible as collecting raindrops from the windowpane.

I begin to think that having a baby is some sort of trick played on me. I am grounded, immobilized, everything halts while this baby takes what it needs

to grow. I resent all those voices ringing in my ears, "Oh, you *should* have a baby, you'd make a great mother." Now I think they were wrong, that motherhood is a difficult role, that I've made a dreadful mistake. Years later, she, so bright-eyed, is to say, "Oh, you're the best mother in the whole world" and I reply "Thanks, kid" thinking what can she remember of what we went through.) I didn't have a baby in order to have a baby, I had a baby in order to have a child.

BABIES, WHO COULD HURT THEM

He told me the story of that phrase scrawled in black paint on the wall behind the crib and I know how that mother felt. Firstly, babies like fat people best and since I'm not fat and cuddly to lie on, they tend to fuss more quickly, all those bones sticking out, not enough soft parts, where's the tits for milk?

HERE IT IS, MOMMY'S TIT, DON'T CRY BABY, WE'LL GET IT IN YOUR MOUTH AND THEN EVERYTHING WILL BE ALL RIGHT. OH BABY, STOP IT. STOP IT. OH BABY, WAIT A MINUTE, THE NURSING PAD IS CAUGHT IN THE NURSING BRA. OH POOR BABY HAS TO WAIT WHILE MOMMY FIGURES THIS OUT, DON'T CRY LITTLE BABY, SOON IT WILL BE ALL BETTER AND YOU WILL HAVE SOME MILK FOR YOUR TUMMY AND A TIT FOR YOUR MOUTH, THERE — IT'S FREE. HERE'S WHAT YOU'VE BEEN WAITING FOR, BABY, WHAT A GOOD BABY.

OH, BABY IS HUNGRY, BABY DOESN'T WANT TO GO TO SLEEP YET. BABY WANTS TO SUCK SOME MORE. HOW COULD BABY STILL BE HUNGRY? BUT BABY IS SUCKING SO IT MUST BE HUNGRY. WE WILL SIT DOWN AGAIN SO THAT BABY CAN SUCK. THERE.

BABY'S HUNGRY AGAIN. BABY WAS SUCKING THE MILK FROM THE TIT JUST HALF AN HOUR AGO BUT BABY'S HUNGRY AGAIN. BABY IS SUCKING THE MILK EVERY TWO HOURS AND SOMETIMES EVEN MORE FREQUENTLY BUT BABY MUST GAIN WEIGHT THEREFORE BABY MUST SUCK THE MILK WHENEVER BABY FRETS. BABY DOESN'T CRY BECAUSE NOBODY CAN STAND TO LISTEN TO BABY CRY, ESPECIALLY BABY'S MOMMY. EVEN BEFORE BABY CRIES, MOMMY GIVES BABY THE TIT. BUT THE TIT MUST BE WASHED FIRST AND BABY'S SHIT ITS DIAPER SO THAT HAS TO BE CHANGED AS WELL BECAUSE BABY MIGHT GET COLD SITTING IN ITS SHIT, SO BABY WILL BE CHANGED JUST AS SOON AS MOMMY WASHES HER TITS AND *THEN* BABY CAN SUCK THE MILK FROM THE TIT. BABY HAS NO IDEA HOW CLEAN IT IS, WILL BABY EVER KNOW HOW CLEAN IT IS, WILL BABY CARE?

The best thing about being a baby is that it doesn't last too long, only a short period of immobility, total dependency, poor articulation and poof! it's over,



Joss Maclellan

and a more tangible reality can be faced. I don't for one moment imagine that those who project a sort of Buddhist serenity and all-encompassing understanding onto a young baby are those who are also getting up two or three times a night to tend its needs or hanging over a wringer washer.

So much changes as the baby grows. Crying now and I don't agonize while it happens nor resent my days. Crawls for long periods each day, plays with toys and other simple objects, occasionally looking at me to see what I am doing. The exhaustion is leaving slowly and with it, the depression. The baby is still crying, maybe I can help. The crying is part of the baby; apart from the baby, the crying parts the baby; it's partly the crying.

Anyone who has been a mother can hear any child crying sooner than anyone else, have you noticed. I hear a young baby next door. The baby has been crying hysterically. There are moments of exhausted sobbings and then continuously piercing wails. I doubt the baby is being tortured but that's how it sounds. It rarely cries for so long. My feelings go out to the family who are in such close range to the screeching. Suddenly it is silent and minutes later, a brief choking sound. Silence is the absence of a baby crying.

In the mornings, I remember to take a Vitamin B and some iron tablets, right after the porridge. Baby plays on the floor, bumping against the chair, then knocking the chair to get the feel of it. Mornings are slow, in fact, awful and it's not really very early. Baby sleeps longest between 5 am and 9 am, comes into bed for the breast and then we play until her father can't take anymore of it, having gone to bed only a few hours earlier. Sometimes in his sleep, he mutters "go away, go away." Other times he says "fuck off, why dontcha?" but he's usually quite pleasant about it. Mornings are slow. The baby bumps the chair again and cries while trying to pull up. She'll be walking soon enough. I change the wet diaper, find some woolen pants, put on socks and slippers, tuck in the shirt meanwhile baby hollers and kicks and tries to get away, all the while firmly pinned to the floor by my knee.

The porridge got made and served. Baby won't eat it. I take baby out of the chair, wipe hands and face, clean off the plastic bib, hang it to dry, collect the uneaten cold porridge from the tray and put it in the fridge, wipe down the chair, put it away, fold up the newspapers from under it and throw them away, wipe off the floor where the porridge was tossed just further than the newspapers. Breakfast is over. I sit down and hope there will be ten whole minutes before I have to move again. Each day the needs are immediate and basic and terribly repetitive.

Much of it blotted out, wiped off, slated clean. The baby cried and cried and I said firmly and resolutely never never never again will I go through these months. Baby cried and cried and cried. Baby would sleep for an hour, cry for two hours and suck for one hour, then sleep for an hour, cry for two and

suck for one. One night I stepped from the bed and collapsed to the floor, a couple of thunks against the wall and down. I went to women far more experienced than I at raising babies and asked what can be done for a baby with colic. There is a lot of sympathy, a lot of encouragement but no solutions. The baby will outgrow it. Cautiously I tell one of my deep depression and she clarifies the problem in a simple reply, "It may not be depression so much as exhaustion." I hang onto that phrase for weeks.

One night this is what happened. I was standing by the kitchen sink, having already laid out in front of me a clean tea towel, some paper serviettes and a sharp paring knife on top of the neatly folded pile. I wasn't awake. What woke me up was him walking in and saying wryly, "What are you going to do, peel the baby?" That's when I woke up. I looked at what I'd laid out in front of me in amazement and quickly put the items away and went to the crying baby. It's taken time pondering just what I was about to do and what might have happened had he not walked in the door at that point. I did not know what I was doing. *I did not know what I was doing.*

Everything seems different this morning, something is about to happen, something startling or maybe just exciting. A change in the air, in my mind, something I woke up with and have carried since. Here I am, living about a mile from the hospital in which I was born, anything could be a change. What is it that hangs in my mind like a trick toy? The baby yells for the milk which sits in a cup on the counter, the demand-shout "yu" means milk. Out of the chair and she begins to crawl back to eat the lumps of porridge that she methodically dropped onto the floor. Now I remember. The biggest thing that will happen today is that the telephone service man will arrive to install another extension onto the phone. That makes three phone lines and two extensions, five phones in this rambling house in the far end of town. If we can't be near our friends, at least we are near our telephones. Baby is learning to pull up against the chair. Baby needs my conversation, my voice talking and I am unable to keep up the patter, baby simply wishing to be recognized and I know that, but how much talking do I have to do?

Wow, are you ever lovely. What a lovely baby you are. Just look at you looking at the tit. Hey there, beauty, got a smile? Sssmmmmiiiiile? Oh now, that's it, thatsa smile. What a good lookin' kid you are. Hey there, got another smile for mommy?

Amulet

Maureen Harris

Why should I
watching your legs
straight and strong
scissor along the sidewalk in front of me,
think *polio*
think *meningitis*?

Or
as you cut through the twilight
to the park,
shiver in the warm air
and feel the miasma of evening
reaching out to enfold you
as you hover at the slide's lip?

Or
hearing the sharp cry of delight
from your twisting shouting swing
see damp hands of fever
touch your sweating head?

Oil

Pamela Oxendine

the moon is shaped and slotted through matchstick bamboo
cold wind licks the frosted window
creeps to kiss noses
in the dark
Evergreen Properties made the apartment so cold tonight
that I'm afraid to leave children in it
even with the oven on
some people know to go just far enough
with those who feel they can't fight back
but be quiet my little birdies
nest deeper in this double bed
with its safe lid of every blanket in the house
sweet buttocks probing knees burrowing faces
rub cold noses deeper into breastflesh
fingers pat them hush them
I look into the still full moon
and wonder how he lives
the man who's made money on this
three day mistake
there are two hundred units in this building
maybe enough for a winter holiday
sleepily curse him and his warm-faced fat children
and hope I don't have to get up
for one cold pee
the filtered moon still slips through bamboo slats
the children melt into sleep
and I am left a lonely queen mother
crying joyfully over such beauty in my bed

Excerpts from an interview on a woman's search for her mother

Ann Mathers

Ann Mathers: When my mother first told me about being adopted, she said she and her husband really loved and wanted me. She started to tell me more about my background — that I was illegitimate and that my father had died in a car accident, (he was in the RCMP) — and that's all I was told.

It sparked my curiosity. But I got a negative view of my birth mother, and thought maybe she was a sleazy waitress somewhere in a beanery. I thought I must have come from a really bad place to be here.

When I got older I realised that she was probably faced with huge problems — having her boyfriend die when she was four months pregnant; she would have had to find a place to live, people to feed her and provide for the baby until she was able to get back working. In those times she would have been hard pressed to find day-care. She was probably well aware that men don't like to marry a woman with a child. You realise you're not wanted for personal as well as economic reasons.

You get this idea from the media that women who give up children are not very desirable, or they are weak, or alcoholics. It's very hard to get a good opinion of your birth mother. But my adopted mother wouldn't let me think of my birth mother as a sleazy person. She would say, "stop calling her 'that lady that gave me up.'" When I was starting my search I had to realize that she may not be so great, but at least I would find that out.

In June, 1981, I made a split decision to find my father's family. I wanted to get rid of this black hole, to get rid of the emptiness I'd been feeling, to find out more about myself. I got the money together and bought a return ticket to Ottawa. Before I went I had gone to the RCMP headquarters in Toronto and asked for a list of all the men who had died in 1959, the year that I was born. I had to cajole one of the officers to give me those names. I gave him a good story as to why I needed them.



Helen Klein

Five of those men were over the age of fifty or sixty and two of them had died in the west of Canada. Only one had died in the area where I was born. (I had been told that my father had been brought up in the Ottawa Valley.) I went to the library and started to look up the microfilms of the *Ottawa Journal*, knowing the date my father died. There was a notice in the death column saying when he was buried and giving the names of all his brothers. Still not knowing if that was *the* man, I was taking my chances. I looked up the names in the phone book, trying to figure out which one I was going to call and how I was going to phrase this 'delicate' situation. I phoned up one of the brothers and asked him if he had a brother who was in the RCMP and had died in 1959. He said yes. Then I asked the big question, "Was he going out with a girl at the time?" "Yes." "Was she pregnant?" When he said "yes," then I knew this was the right man.

After I said I was "that" child, he couldn't believe it. He wanted to meet me. So he and another brother came and brought me back to their home.

I was trying to be subtle in asking about my mother. But I finally asked them if they knew anything about her. They said her name was Joan. It's just "Her name is *Joan*," and she has an identity. I asked them, "Well, what did she look like?" I was just hanging on the edge of my seat finding out this information from a personal source. It was wonderful! They also knew she had a mother living in Vanier.

I was really scared, I couldn't believe that I had found out so much. I didn't know that I would be so shaken by it all. Then I had to phone her mother. I said to her that I was a friend of her daughter's and wanted to get in touch with her. Well, her mother's eighty-one and didn't know who I was, but she gave me her phone number anyway. The whole time I knew I was talking to my grandmother, but I couldn't tell her.

The next step was phoning my mother. Just before I made the call, I had fits — I didn't know what was going to happen — what if she rejected me? I didn't know if I could take being rejected twice. So I phoned her home and a young boy answered. I figured that's her son, and I was pleased about that. He gave me her number at work. She picked up the phone, and I knew it was her. I asked her if she was sitting down, and she got a little angry and demanded to know who this was. I said: "This is Ann Mathers, but you wouldn't know me by this name. I'm your daughter." She was speechless. Then she said, "I thought you were going to do this." She was very warm. I asked her, "Would you like to meet me?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"Right now. Right away."

She wanted to meet me right that minute. We arranged a meeting at her house that night. Her husband and her three boys were going to be out that evening.

All I remember is going up these steps and I could see her shadow in the door. The whole time my stomach was turning and turning. The moment I saw her it was an incredible feeling. She smiled and as soon as she smiled, I

could see my smile. Exactly the same teeth and mouth — I knew I was right. I was very cool, I had to become detached from the whole thing, so just pretended I was going to visit somebody. I walked right in and shook her hand, but of course she gave me a hug. I cried and she cried. She was very happy, very glad to see what I turned out to look like. She was very happy to physically see me. She showed me pictures of her three boys and told me a little about the rough time when she had me and explained why she had given me up. She wanted to know that I had had a good life, so I painted an extremely rosy picture because I didn't want to say anything negative at the first meeting. I didn't want to blame her, or suggest that I'd felt abandoned.

It was funny. When I met her I felt like I'd known her all my life. There was a connection. I felt warm towards her, but at the same time the past feelings of resentment clouded it.

I felt overjoyed, so much relief — like a completely total person — something I've never felt before. I always felt like there was a huge chunk missing. I found out my nationality, saw pictures of my grandparents, things that people take for granted: but if they're denied to you it means so much.

I asked her if she really loved my father. How long they had been seeing each other, were they in love? It was 'yes', 'yes', 'yes'. She told me that he had committed suicide. I had been told he was in a car accident. Now this threw me for a loop. It made me feel angry; I blamed him for everything. But when we talked about it, it was good. She even went to his funeral pregnant; I give her credit for that. A lot of people thought that she was the reason for him doing that. Somehow they blamed her for being pregnant, for giving him additional problems. It was good therapy for us to go through it together.

I went to visit my birth mother just after Christmas: we exchange letters. I don't think there should be an instant family created, but I do want to keep up the contact. I feel like a child who has separated parents and has to divide her obligations.

There is a strong connection with my birth mother. I'm growing to love her. But the word 'mother' can only apply to the one who has raised me. You can't expect to feel the same for someone who has just walked into your life.



Maureen Paxton

Two Poems by Susan Swan

Mrs. God Unchained

Mrs. God is a deserted giantess
who bore more than her share
of dead babies
in case one pelvis wears out
she has two lower bodies
and ten arms all the better
to clean with

Why can't Mrs. God get it
through her great head
that she is title holder
to the biggest mythical love
in the universe?

I want to save Mrs. God!
Hey there! You with the stars
in your eyes, it's your daughter
speaking. I came into this world
to unchain you from that stellar
pillar and take you off to another
solar system where some female
deities I know will put you
on to the marvels of built-in
astral vacuums and self-cleaning
suns and moons

I want to take care of you
Mrs. God and blow the whistle
on your invisible husband

Don't you know Dad
was a freak too big
(or was it too small)
to be seen
he was never there
when I looked for him

as a heavenly phenomenon
he was entitled to worries
about giving the public
complete satisfaction
but it really was too much
when he issued his own handbill
and called himself
the greatest
natural wonder
of googolplex worlds

between you and me,
I think Dad was a self-serving monster
he didn't fit in at home
and he won't be back no
matter what he tells you
now our father has found
a more elegant space
for those exhibitions of himself
those transparent displays

Look, Mrs. God, you've got to face
the cosmic music and stop carrying
the sky on your head

Who told you it was your
job to keep a bright ceiling?
A fine figure of a goddess
like you ought to roll up
the Milky Way and polka
on the eternal you-know-what

Of course, Mrs. God can't hear
the diminutive words
of her beloved daughter

I can big talk all I like
but my mother in heaven
won't get off her knees
the afterbirth of her last child
has made a mess of the cosmos

Scrub-a-dub-dub——Mrs. God
knows her place in the firmament:
she juggles the sky when she
gets tired from shoulders to hip
while her windmill limbs spray
and buff planetary fixtures
until they glisten like new worlds

Mrs. God is a sanitary engineer
Mrs. God gives the best service in the galaxy
Mrs. God is love

and there's not one thing I can do
to make her come down to earth

Satellite Telecast to God

you big protean evader
I know you're out there

cruising Paradise
& rehearsing
for your next
freak show

what kind of father
is too perfect
to be responsible
and covers his ass
with claims that he
is everywhere?

it's a wonder
the Recording Angel
didn't kick you
out of heaven,
you miserable sinner!

are you receiving me?
this is God's daughter
going for simultaneous
transmission

cross my heart
I'll take your name
in vain because I won't
be your handmaiden or
priestess either why should
I be a gopi or houri who
indulges your fetish
for adoration?

YOU ARE NOT MY MASTER——god
YOU ARE NOT MY LORD——god
I AM NOT A SHEEP————shepherd

are you getting me now?
I'm on the blank end
of a cosmic hook-up

you deserve your
showroom of imported
relics a plastic crucifix from Japan
& a Dixie cup for a chalice

or street corner hand-outs
a Three Dimensional portrait
girdled in a vegetarian restaurant
with gold tinsel

your size gave us kids
a complex, you star-struck mogul

your problem
was too much time
too many yes men
on your right hand
too many groupies
in the grove

you wouldn't be
in the position
you find yourself
if you knew how hard
it is to be the only
daughter of an invisible
curiosity

our connection could be
as easy as lifting
your baby finger
You may be a divine freak
but you are still my father
so come home from the sideshow
and let's get back to normal

fire•weed *n* : a hardy perennial
so called because it is the first
growth to reappear in fire-
scarred areas; a troublesome

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Snapshots of my Blood Relations and Others

Susan H. Poteet

The album is large — 12" x 15" — fat, with cream vellum pages. It is covered with a dark rose velvet, hand bound for such carefully cherished memories. The photographs are held by black paper corners. I like the look of the black and white photos cornered with black on the cream pages. It is satisfying to open this book at random.

Aunt Myrtle

She is pictured here in her going away costume, a mid-calf thirties suit with a large hat set at a rakish angle. Her unnatural thinness and a look of fine high strung nervousness should have warned the family that, career woman though she may be, she already carried within her the seeds of her destruction. Her martini habit grew and while she made smoking elegant with her long ebony cigarette holder, her cough was a sign, even in those pre-Surgeon-General's-Report days, that cigarettes could kill you.

Julianne Pulling Jeffie In A Sleigh

Julianne, my black mother, is pictured here, at 18, shortly after she came to us from the deep South to become what was called in my family, the maid. Slightly overweight, teenage baby fat, she grins with obvious delight into the camera. It is her first winter of snow. My brother Jeffie, in the sleigh, is over-bundled and not enjoying himself. Good old Julianne. She introduced me to love comic books, and movie magazines which featured Marilyn Monroe, whose beauty neither of us would attain, but whom we admired. From her I learned about the strict taboo against bathing during menses, although she could not present an explanation which would satisfy my nascent, rational mind. She hugged me often from pure excess of feeling and taught me all I learned at home about affection and family feeling.

Grandmother Stern

This is an old photo, taken around the turn of the century, by the look of the Gibson girl hair and hat. She is beautiful in a soft-focused way. My grandfather's failure in the stock market in 1929 turned her poor and bitter. She envied success, even her own children's, and returned all Christmas gifts to the stores from which they came, because they didn't suit her. She spent my early adolescence looking for signs of sexual precocity. She examined my underwear for telltale stains and smells. Still an inveterate doll player, I didn't know what she was after, but I figured it must be dirty.

Gretchen And I Dressed For Church

Gretchen of the giggles and curls, first best friend and model for all others, we loved each other with a passion which we expressed by pricking our thumbs with a needle and pressing them together, swearing eternal sisterhood. We are about six in the photo, standing side by side, holding hands, in matching navy blue wool coats, sailor hats, white socks, and black patent leather Mary Janes and white cotton gloves. When it was not Sunday, we cooked up plots to drive away Gretchen's housekeepers, hired to replace her mother who had recently died of cancer. We were convinced they were all mean and rather enjoyed the pathos of the poor mistreated orphan. We made poison drinks, rigged doors to surprise and worked at ghost and monster sounds in the halls. The housekeepers all left quickly, driven away by our malevolence. In a closet, we examined each other "down there." Although the darkness made observation difficult I remember a delightful sensation, warm and exciting. Only the fact that we were caught by my mother and warned not to do that kind of thing stopped us from further exploration.

Cousin Nancy On Her Horse

Nancy's blond ringlets and childish cuteness furnished Grandmother Stern with endless ammunition for her battle to prove Nancy's superiority to me. But the arrival in the mail of this photo of Nancy on her own horse drove me to open hostility. During summer visits, she would not let me near the horse and I sulked behind my book. My mother was shamed by my behavior, the more since it seemed the hatred was one-sided. Nancy was a perfect darling when the adults were around, reserving her contempt for me to our moments alone. She turned plain as a woman and did something unmentionable which caused her to lose her children in a court case with her ex-husband. My revenge was dampened by the fact that my grandmother was dead and I was too well bred to say anything. Only Grandmother Stern would have appreciated my satisfaction.

Headmistress Martin

Here is a 5" x 7" newspaper photo, accompanied by an obituary. The photo was not new, but taken in her young womanhood. Her style was late thirties schoolteacher, and she never changed it. She wore her hair in a top knot, preferring to ignore the services of a hairdresser, and as my mother commented, she had no taste in clothing. But she had a regal bearing, a New England accent and the self-confidence of an old school feminist. She was not lovable, or even particularly kind. As a young student I shared the other girl's fear of her, as well as my mother's contempt for her lack of fashion. But in my ninth year of school she called me into her office for a talking to. My only previous encounter with her had been in the spring before when a bee had flown into the classroom window, stinging me on the arm. My exclaimed "shit" took me to her office where I was informed that the school did not tolerate that sort of language. On this visit, she was as stern as ever when she told me that my marks did not reflect my obvious intelligence and that she would expect better work from me in future. It had never occurred to me that I was intelligent. I worked, at first in terror of Mrs. Martin, but soon for the pure joy of it.

Great Grandmother Katherine

Great Grandmother Katherine is pictured here in extreme old age (she lived to be 98), still beautiful, tall, thin, dressed in clothes which I always think of as romantically old-fashioned, long, flowing soft material that clings or billows in the breeze. Cancer of the larynx had required the removal of her voice box so she croaked rather than talked. In intimate moments she whispered. Her husband, the fourth generation of doctors in his family, had died in a typhoid epidemic in the 80s, leaving her with four young children. She raised them by becoming a dressmaker. The line was broken as she was only able to produce a dentist, having to wait for her grandson, my father, to pick it up again. She was an autodidact, and my father remembers her reciting passages from Shakespeare, who was her favorite author. When I was four, she gave me a miniature bureau. She whispered that it was over 100 years old and I came away awestruck with the sense of the past. After her death I adopted Katherine as my middle name, and liked to believe I was a throwback, leaving aunts, cousins, grandmothers, and mother in the limbo I felt they deserved.

Studio Portrait Of My Father

This picture must have been taken shortly after the war. While my father wears a dark civilian suit, he still has his army issue steel rim glasses which he later abandoned for the heavy horn rimmed frames favored in the 50s. He is not smiling and behind the glasses his eyes look sensitive. For most of my youth and early womanhood my father was my model. He was a wonderful man, a very good doctor who made house calls and had office hours at night for his working patients. They loved him. He worked very hard and we saw little of him at home. But when he was there his sense of humour and love of life, the overflowing of pure good spirits, made those moments memorable. He was a curious man and he treated me as his student, less learned but intellectually his equal. I wanted to be like him; I flattered myself by thinking I was like him.

I took the notion that I would become a doctor. I was not discouraged, nor was I actively encouraged. I was a good student of the sciences, and loved dissection. But real live blood and gore, other peoples', that is, sent shivers down the backs of my legs. In my last year of high school I shamed myself terribly by fainting on a class trip to the blood bank. So much for medicine, but not an end to my desire to be a man. It sounds primitive and stupid in 1982 but in the 50's it had a simple purity to it that was not at all Freudian — I didn't want a penis and was quite well adjusted sexually. But boys could see that they were not of supreme importance to me — one commenting to friends in my presence, "She's one of those girls who think they are superior to men." He hadn't gotten it quite right. I just didn't believe I was inferior.

Maureen And I On The Banks Of The Seine

Dressed in summer frocks, heirs to Daisy Miller, Maureen and I took on Europe. Best friends and soul mates, we explored 7 countries in 7 weeks with *Europe on \$5 a Day* as our guide. We found out of the way cafes where we could dine elegantly for very little, saw every museum, opera, play, concert, and ballet we could find and afford and went about with young men of various nationalities who were on similar quests. Our North American innocence protected us and we returned convinced we had seen something better. We were pronounced "snobs." On the long bus, train, and boat rides necessary to transport us so far in so little time, our intimacy deepened. We admitted and discussed our lost virginity, two carefully guarded secrets until then, and dreamed of lives of independence and excitement.

Verna Richards In Front Of Her House

The Book Shelf, it was called, a tiny hole in the wall crammed with books. This was before the days of paperback books and mass marketing. Books were expensive hardbound objects of beauty and my father had given me a charge account at the store. Verna was my first adult friend. She was in her late 50s, a doctor's widow who was childless. I felt honoured to hear the story of her life, filled as it was with hardships overcome and dreams realized. Born of a poor family, she taught herself to play the piano by practising on a paper keyboard. She married well; her husband's wedding present had been a grand piano. She loved literature, guided my reading and encouraged my dream of becoming something — translated, I guess, that meant becoming something more than a housewife and mother.

Mother In An Evening Gown

It is a classic 30's fashion pose. The black gown is cut in a V to the waist at the back. The model is seated with her back to the camera, her elegant face with its rich black hair in profile. When I first discovered this picture in an old dress box of mementos, I was stunned by my mother's serene and youthful beauty. No wonder she was so dissatisfied with the material she had to work with in her only daughter. The thin lanky dishwater blond hair was her greatest frustration. It failed to respond to the best designed cuts, perms and tints. But she would not give up. It was a challenge which became an obsession and finally the battle ground for our struggles. "My God, what have you done to your hair," was her invariable opener when I stepped from plane or train. "Nothing, Mother," was my equally invariable and honest rejoinder. By the time I went away to university, I had chosen to move the battlefield of life from the physical to the intellectual. Clearly I would never succeed in Mother's world. No choice could have been more destructive of harmony between my mother and me, for she was as inadequate and uncomfortable in the world of the mind as I in the world of appearances. At first I thought she refused to think, for I regarded thinking as the most natural of functions. Now I think the mind, if unused, will wither, like an arm stricken with polio. As if in compensation, my mother *felt*, and expressed her feelings eagerly and often. Without reason to support her feelings, her utterances were the most extraordinary jumble of prejudices, judgmental gossip and unmasked rumblings from the unconscious. She spoke of those of other race, religion and class with fear and hatred. Sex was a disgusting duty that one was lucky to escape. And so we became ashamed of each other. Twenty-five years have done little to change this. Time has given me understanding and compassion but it has also made me realistic. I am resigned, as I hope she is, to the chasm between us. But saddened. I am saddened.

My Children As Little Ones

The birth of my second child was a final telling moment in my progress through the matriarchal world. My first child was a boy. Twenty months later when I was awaiting the delivery of the second, the child's sex was much more important. Perhaps it was superstition, but I was sure that if this child was not female, I would never have a girl. My mother-in-law had four boys before she gave up and her telling me this during my second pregnancy gave it added significance. As the baby emerged, I asked the nurse what it was.

"What do you have now?" she said.

"A boy," I answered impatiently.

"Well, he has a little brother."

Accident, really, that I had no sisters, that I had boy children, that my only brother never married. So much of my experience and feeling about the family has its root in accident. Sisterhood, the passing on of my values to a generation of daughters — I cannot find these in my blood relations. And so my family album is filled with chosen family — mothers, sisters, daughters, nieces, and I expect in the future, granddaughters. I call these people friends — my family of friends.

Twelve Sisters Sitting In A Circle

The long hair and granny glasses tell you that this is circa 1970. The group is animated — laughing, talking, making points. You can see this even in a still photograph. We met weekly for two years, played soccer on outings and picketed, organized, and started other groups. We told all our secrets, and complained a lot. At first, that is. Later we left off complaint and began to plan our futures, and on occasion, the future of the world. We eventually agreed that it would take a long time, more than a lifetime or many lifetimes. That made our faith stronger. Now we are scattered throughout North America. When two or more of us are gathered together, it is as if we had met just last week. The conversation begins where we left off. Sisters, sisters of the Sisterhood, sisters of the second wave. No dark blood rites join us, no priests or judges legalized or sanctified our union. Unless the second wave fails to generate a third, or the final holocaust comes, I anticipate a lifelong union.

PHOTO ARCHIVES



Catherine Parr Traill, her daughter Mrs. Atwood, Susannah Moodie.

Courtesy of Ontario Public Archives





Helen Klein



OURSTORY

FIREWEED is and will continue to be a journal in the process of continual change and growth as Collective members leave and new women bring their ideas and energy into the shaping of the journal. This section is intended to keep you in touch with the women working on **FIREWEED**.

Joining the Collective:

Sheilagh Crandall has worked as a **FIREWEED** organizer, editorial adviser, fund raiser and associate member for over two years. We are delighted to welcome her onto the Collective proper and look forward to her continuing warmth and wisdom.

Gillian Robinson joined the Collective with Issue 11. She brings with her years of experience working for other alternative publications and a dedication to feminism as well as an energy and enthusiasm we all value.

FIREWEED is anxious to recruit new Associate Members and urges all interested women to contact us by mail or phone. This spring we're putting special effort into developing our Collective and expanding our community, so tell us about your interests, skills and concerns. Call 922-3455 Monday to Friday between 11 and 3 or write P.O. Box 279 Station B, Toronto, M5T 2W2.

We're also looking for community representatives to help us reach a broader base of women. If you know women who are writing, if you can brave the bookstores for us, if you think we need your input, please let us know.

Our supporters may not be aware that all **FIREWEED** donations are now tax-deductible. Receipts for donations over \$10 are issued automatically. Receipts for any amount will be sent on request.

FIREWEED is being displaced from our offices at 280 Bloor West. Our new office is located at 16 Baldwin St., Toronto, Ont. M5T 1L2.

FIREWEED is grateful to the Secretary of State Women's Programme for funding our six months' community outreach project. This is the first time **FIREWEED** has had salaried staff and it's given the whole Collective a chance to regroup our energies. Our grateful appreciation to the Women's Programme and their continuing support.

Contributors' Notes

Theresa Bacon is a poet from California whose work has been published widely in literary magazines. **Ellen Bass'** most recent collection of poetry is *For Earthly Survival* (Moving Parts Press, 1980). She lives in Aptos, California. **Sara Diamond** is working on a series of oral history interviews with women activists in the 1930's and 40's. These interviews are being developed into a book to be published by Press Gang. She has also compiled a bibliography of women's labour history research sources in the provinces, also to appear from Press Gang. She's working on video productions on women's history and union involvement.

Connie Eckhart is a visual artist from Toronto. **Ethel Harris** is a Toronto poet whose work has appeared in *The Canadian Forum*, *Waves*, *Tower*, and *Canadian Author and Bookman*. **Maureen Harris** is a poet who has done an "Ideas" series on storytelling for CBC radio. She works as a librarian in Toronto. **Joanna Hubbs** is a professor of cultural history at Hampshire College in Massachusetts, and has written on the subject of the perception of women in European cultural history for the journal *Signs* as well as for a book, *Mother Worship*, (J. Preston, ed.).

Lynn Hutchinson Brown is a visual artist from Toronto. Her latest exhibition, held at the Gadatsy Gallery in Toronto in February of this year, is touring regional public galleries. **Carole Itter** spends half the year with central heating and plumbing in Vancouver and the remainder of the year at Roberts Creek and Dollarton without. Writer, artist, gardener, homemaker, her forthcoming book is titled *Whistle Daughter Whistle*.

Helen Klein is a Toronto artist, interested in family snapshot genre photography. She also writes poetry, and is attempting to juggle her artistic interests with the management of the Renaissance Cafe. **Lina Ladron de Guevara** is an actress, theatre director and teacher of drama. Born in Chile, she has worked in Santiago and Valdivia, Chile, as well as in Cuba, and currently in Victoria, B.C., where she works as drama instructor for the Bastion Theatre School. She is currently involved in the translation of several contemporary Latin American plays in order to promote the knowledge of theatre of that continent in Canada.

Joss MacLennan is a Collective member and xerographic artist living in Toronto. Her work has appeared in many issues of *Fireweed*, as well as in *Books in Canada*, *Toronto Life*, *Canadian Business*, and on book covers for the House of Anansi. **Ann Mathers** studies Art History and lives in Toronto. **Pam Oxendine** lives and works in Toronto. She is a member of Squid Ink, a writers' collective which is producing an anthology of their work in the spring of '82. She will be reading from her work on CJRT-FM in July. **Maureen Paxton's** work has appeared in *Fireweed* Issues 5/6, 8, 9 and 10. She works out of Toronto in both commercial and fine art.

Susan Poteet teaches English at Dawson College. She has been writing criticism for six years. **Gillian Robinson** is a Collective member, assistant editor of *Fuse* magazine, and a writer with no fixed address. **Carolyn Smart** is a poet and Collective member, whose collection of poems, *Swimmers In Oblivion*, was published by York Publishing in November, 1981. Her forthcoming collection, *Power Sources*, will be published by Fiddlehead Books in August, 1982.

Donna G. Smyth has published many short stories. Her two plays *Susanna Moodie* and *Giant Anna* are in the repertoire of Nova Scotia's Mermaid Theatre. She teaches at Acadia University and is an editor of *Atlantis*, a Women's Studies Journal. **Susan Swan** is a Toronto writer and has worked extensively in journalism and theatre in Toronto. Her novel about the Victorian giantess Anna Swan will be published by Lester and Orpen Denys in the spring of 1983.

Bronwen Wallace is a poet and film-maker from Kingston, Ontario. Her collection of poems, *Marrying Into The Family*, was published by Oberon in 1980. She's currently arranging distribution for her film, "All You Have To Do," completed in January of this year. **Helen Weinzweig's** novel *Basic Black With Pearls* won the Governor General's Award in 1980. Her short stories have appeared in many magazines, including *Jewish Dialog*, *Saturday Night*, and *the Canadian Forum*.

Acknowledgements

The Collective would like to express our appreciation and special thanks to the friends and associate members who willingly and enthusiastically offered their time and talent in the publication of this issue: **Joanne Gormley**, for her hard work on distribution in Montreal; **Sheila Block**, for all her promotional efforts in Vancouver; **Susan Taylor**, for her promotional work in Ottawa; **Lynne Fernie**, for her continuing work soliciting and editing for issue 13; **Suzanne Gautreau**, for her steadfast support and assistance in production and editorial; and thanks to **Beatrice Bailey** for her help with production. We would also like to thank **FUSE** for allowing us to use their production space for layout and the **Women's Press** for their efforts in locating our new office. **FIREWEED** is grateful to the Ontario Arts Council for making available Writers' Grants funds. We would also like to thank those individuals who generously donated the funds that have helped make publication possible.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

Lesbian former nuns: Please share your stories of convent life, coming out as a Lesbian, struggles to transform your spiritual consciousness, and anything else for a collection to be published by Naiad Press. We welcome tapes and interviews as well as written material. Contact: Rosemary Curb, (formerly in Dominicans 1958-65) Rollins College, Winter Park, Florida 32789, U.S.A., 305-645-5318, or Nancy Manahan, (in Maryknolls, 1966-67) 1066 Terrace Drive, Napa, California 94558, U.S.A., 707-252-7419. The deadline for this collection is October 31, 1982.

Lesbian Counsellors Network: If you counsel lesbians and are a radical lesbian feminist or separatist, you are invited to join a network of radical lesbian counsellors. We will be sharing theory, techniques, case consultation, workshops ideas, and personal survival ideas as they relate to counselling lesbians. For more information, contact: Ruth Baetz, Box 242, Rt. 2, Burton, Wa. 98013, U.S.A.

A special issue of the *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy* on Women and Medicine (vol. 7, no. 2) will be published in spring 1982. Single issues can be ordered for \$6.50 from the publisher: D. Reidel Publishing Co., P.O. Box 17, 3300 AA, Dordrecht, The Netherlands. The issue contains an editorial by Caroline Whitbeck and articles and reviews by Maureen Flannery, Adele Laslie, S. Kate Lindemann and Elizabeth L. Oliver, Mary Rawlinson, Janice Raymond, Elizabeth V. Spelman and a foreword by Margery Shaw.

Prison Writings: I am gathering the writings of womyn who have had the prison experience. This includes the writings of womyn currently incarcerated allegedly for a "crime," the writings of womyn who have chosen to go to prison at some time as an expression of their outrage, and the writings of the healing time after we "get out," if we indeed have. This will be a selection of anything you have to offer: journal excerpts, poetry, essays, letters, drawings, thoughts. Anything which expresses for you your experience in prison. There is a need for womyn who have not been there to have access to what we all have to say, and also a need for us to be able to say it, and have it be heard. Send material to: *Prison Writings*, c/o Maggie McKenna, 332 So. Silver Lane, Sinderland, MA 01375, U.S.A. Please include a brief autobiography, and SASE if you want it back.



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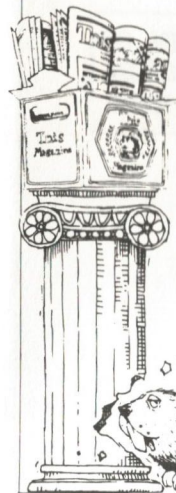
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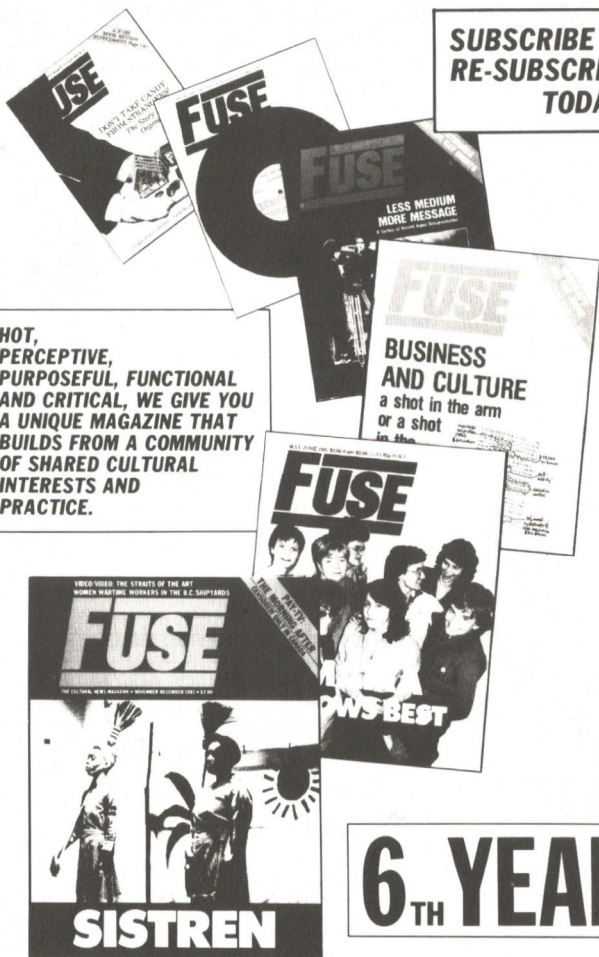
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