

PORTLAND WOMEN'S COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER PARENTS

[Jun 1982]

75¢

Issue #19

(This is a letter written by the father of a community member to the parents of her lover. We felt this letter was special and wish to share it with the community.)

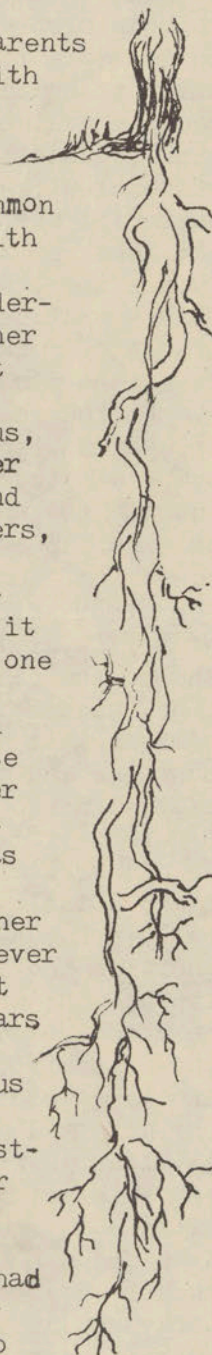
Dear Mr. & Mrs. _____:

Because the two of us as parents have something very important in common with the two of you as parents, we thought it would be good to share with you some of our thoughts about our daughters. We've known about "A's" life style for six years, so we've had a much longer time to try to understand what it all means than you have so far. There are only three other people we can talk openly with about this subject, but we have found it very helpful for us to be able to do so. We don't know whether or not you can discuss it with anyone, but you can certainly discuss it with us, if you want to, and that's why we're writing this letter. Your daughter tells us that you'll probably be coming up for a visit in September, and we're hoping to meet you then, but in the meantime an exchange of letters, or even phone calls, could be helpful for all of us.

I guess that my wife and I must have had a rather sheltered life, because when A. told us, in 1974, that she preferred a "gay" life style, it came as a total surprise and a rather large shock to us both. Neither one of us had ever known anyone who was gay, and we knew nothing about the subject beyond what we had seen in the newspapers and television or had heard in off-color "jokes." Our first reaction was numbness. For quite awhile we just didn't know what to think. We knew we loved our daughter very, very much, and we knew we didn't want to hurt her in any way, but we were deeply worried about whether or not she really knew what she was getting into. We also wondered a lot about whether we, as parents, had done anything wrong in our raising of A. that might have helped cause her to be "gay". In other words, it was the most baffling event that had ever happened to either of us, and there was no one else we could discuss it with then, so we had to adjust to the idea alone. (It was only two years ago that we found we could share it with our three closest friends.)

Fortunately, there were several things in the situation that helped us greatly to adjust. Most important of all, we had known and loved our daughter for 24 years, and we know her as an intelligent, capable, trustworthy, serious-minded, and responsible person with values close to our own. Even though we didn't know what being "gay" meant, we felt sure that if A. was gay, then being gay couldn't possibly be bad in itself. Another very helpful thing was her friends in _____, some of whom we had known for several years before she told us she was gay. My wife and I visited A. in _____ two or three times every year, and we were taken to sport events and cook-outs and met a lot of her friends, most of whom we felt were impressive and unusually nice people. One was a doctor, another a librarian, another an import agent, another a federal social security officer, another a very competent computer programmer, and so

Cont: pg. 2



Letter continued...

forth. We were vaguely aware that all of them were women, but we really didn't consciously "put two and two together," probably because of our lack of previous awareness about "the gay world". It turned out that all of them were gay too; so, once again, we felt reassured that if such nice people were gay, then gay couldn't be that bad.

Shortly afterwards, on a vacation trip, a group of people we were with happened to talk briefly about whether homosexuality was a sin. We did not join in this conversation, but you can imagine we were listening hard! Their opinion was that it is not a sin, and later I asked one of them, who is a practicing psychiatrist about my age, what percentage of the population is homosexual. He said that about 7% of the general population, men and women alike, have a natural preference for the same sex and are homosexual, plus another 8% who are bisexual. So the total is 15% who are not heterosexual, which most of us call "normal." That was a surprising but reassuring statistical fact, and as it has sunk into our minds we have felt less and less "guilty" about the job we did as parents.

Since then, we've done a lot of reading on the subject, and we now believe that sexual preference, like all other human characteristics, has a range of normal variation, and that although bisexuality and homosexuality are in the minority at 15%, there are far too many of them for us in the 85% heterosexual majority to shun them socially, to legislatively discriminate against them, or to wish they didn't exist. The problem with being gay is the attitude which society has against it, as typified by Anita Bryant. I don't know what her problem is, but I see her as a beautiful, but cruel woman who is trying to work out her own hang-ups by attacking other people and making them suffer.

In other words, my wife and I have gradually not only accepted our daughter's life style, but are very proud of how courageously she herself has handled the situation. If we think it's difficult for us as parents, think of how much more difficult it must be for the person herself, when she first realizes that she is naturally gay and has to work out what it all means about her and to her future! It took A. 4 years after she consciously realized her own situation before she got up the courage to tell us. Most of her gay friends in _____ had not told their parents, and a lot of them who did were afterwards very sorry, because their parents couldn't deal with it and actually disowned or otherwise rejected their children, which is really a human tragedy. A. felt she had to tell us, her parents, because otherwise she felt she was hiding something from us and was not being honest with us, and she loved us too much to go on that way forever - so she took the chance, and it worked out very well. We now have a very beautiful and honest relationship with our daughter, and we have no regrets about how her life is developing.

My wife and I have known your daughter B. for about 4 years now, and we feel that we know her fairly well as a person, especially because we've seen a lot of her during the past year since they moved to Maine. We feel that she is one of our closest and dearest friends. She is a beautiful woman and a beautiful person and a true credit to you both. She is totally honest, very hard working, and very competent in her work, with a lot of energy and drive to do a really good job in whatever she does. She is also a very sensitive and compassionate person towards other people, and it is obvious to us that she has a very strong and deep love for both of you and for her brother and sister as well. She cares very, very much what you both think and how you feel, and she wants, probably more than you can imagine, to have you really get to know her better and to accept her as she really is. That means also getting to know A. and A's daughter also, and to seeing firsthand what kind of life she is living.



TOO MUCH TO LOSE

The day was slated for suntanning. My friend and I had settled into lawn-chairs while neighborhood cats dared each other to tread on foreign turf.

The Sunday "New York Times" said that Madison Avenue was focusing on gay males as consumers. Women still made only 59 cents for every dollar made by men. And, the magazine concluded, computing in discrimination, gay women probably made less than that paltry 59 cent sum. Thus, gay women were forgotten by the jingle-makers.

In the book review section, a reviewer pointed out that Sylvia Plath's husband, the poet Ted Hughes, had edited out integral portions of her recently-published journal. The reviewer revealed that Hughes had destroyed Plath's journals covering the last three years of her life, before her suicide. It was for the sake of her children, he wrote.

It was another hard day in America.

Within this sunny, though bleak, scenario my friend and I launched into a discussion of relationships with men. At age 29 I am about to live with a man - a "first" in my near three-decade life. I am nervous and apprehensive about it. I talk about this to my friend.

She has been gay and "out" for 12 years, but still has close friendships with men. She admits she is afraid to talk about these relationships with her gay women friends. She recalls a recent visit from a friend who sought her out just to talk about a relationship she was having with a man.

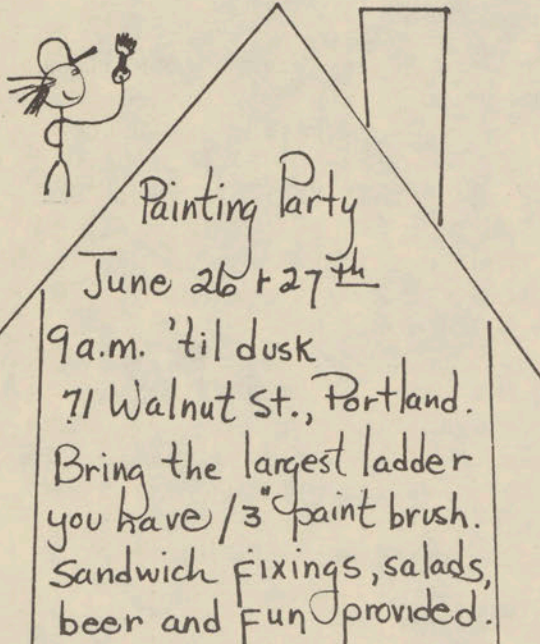
"I was amazed," said my friend, whom I shall call Anne. "Why should she be so secretive or fearful about talking about this relationship?"

I admit to Anne that I feel the same way with certain people I know. We both find we share this hesitancy. We find we both fall victim to this phenomenon that divides feminists who basically want the same thing - equal treatment by the law and our society.


Together she and I came up with a variety of reasons for this conscious and unconscious separatism. But first Anne, never subtle, corners me. "You start off," she orders. "Why are you afraid to talk about your relationship?"

My friend can be unmerciful, but I admit I am sick and tired of my insecurity at a charged time in my life when calm scrutiny and support is needed. I need affirmation from my friends, instead I am hiding this relationship like I am entering into a partnership with Phyllis Schlafly.

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Painting Party
June 26 + 27th
9a.m. 'til dusk
71 Walnut St., Portland.
Bring the largest ladder
you have / 3" paint brush.
Sandwich fixings, salads,
beer and Fun provided.



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JUNE 5, 1982
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ALL SOULS UNITARIAN CHURCH
11 KING ST.
AUGUSTA, MAINE
\$5 ADMISSION
(207) 338-4476 for more info

more of the letter ...

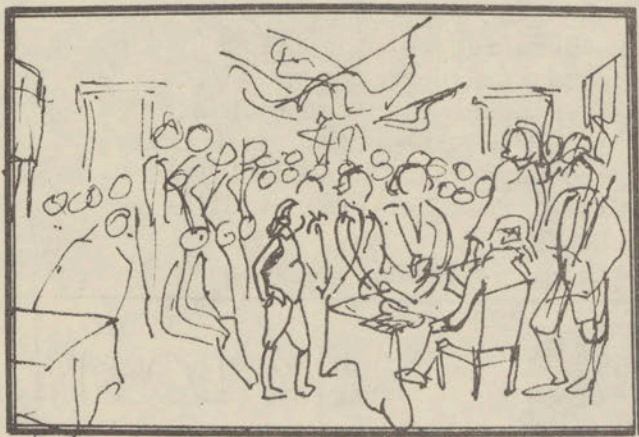
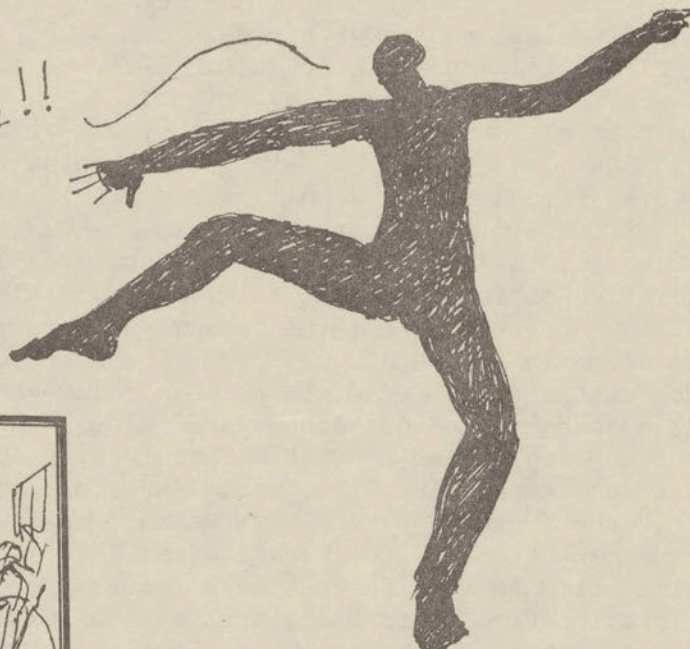
As my wife and I gradually became used to the idea of our daughter's being gay, we thought of lots of questions, which we asked and she answered. You may be having the same experience. We would both be very glad to try to answer any questions, and I'm sure that B. would really welcome them also. We found the book titled "Loving Someone Gay" to be very helpful to us; it is available in paperback.

Again, we would welcome a letter or a phone call anytime, but in any event are looking forward to meeting you in September.

In the meantime, we think that your daughter is doing just fine, and we're proud to have her both as a friend and as a life partner to our own beloved daughter.

Very Sincerely,

*Somebody!
help me
fill up this space!!*



CELEBRATE INDEPENDENCE DAY!!!!
FEMINIST STYLE

Join with us at Monument Square on July 1st to rage for the ERA and to declare our independence. We will recreate Trumbull's "The Declaration of Independence" but with WOMEN! Bring copies of the constitution to burn as you listen to rabble rousing and incendiary speeches. If you feel moved bring a speech! We welcome period costumes or favorite heroines. Come July 1st 12:15 To rage the ERA or to celebrate the passage. Information: Gina 7737152

Dear Nicole,

More than once I have wanted to write to tell you how much I have appreciated your writing in the PWC Newsletter. Your poetry and articles often touched a responsive or appreciative cord. Your article, "This is not a Divorce" in Issue #13 compelled me to put the newsletter aside in my must-do-someday pile as a reminder to be sure to write to you.

The concrete emotional details, the offering of the raw material of a relationship, were the most valuable for me. The political analysis is often too predictable; the rhetoric that always comprises a good part of such a newsletter is much less stimulating and informative. I would like to encourage you and other submitters to be willing to share on such a personal level.

Sincerely,
Mallory Cacciutto

Too Much To Lose Cont...

"Well first I am afraid other women won't think I'm a good feminist. Maybe I'm aging, but when I was younger I was suspicious of women who related well to men. I could more readily accept a brief affair or interaction for a man's physical attributes, which is a beastly double standard," I explain, laughing. "I could accept that physical or sexual plane, but not emotional. There was always a solidarity among women, and men were apart from it. But now we are changing. Some people are pairing off with women, some with men, and some remain happily singular. But a gulf is being created among them that should not be there. We don't stop needing each other, if anything we need each other more than ever," I said.

"Another reason I am leery of it, is that it is, well rather conventional. And if I can do something that conventional, what other things will I do? I am not going to stop supporting the ERA, or start rolling my hair, but the conditioning I most abhor comes out in my interaction with men. And as much as my lover and I work to change that, we still fall into stupid interplays. It isn't easy to throw away all that social conditioning. But it's easier to dispell that baggage when you live alone, or just among women," I explain.

Anne, a Brunswick resident, recalls her friends of eight years ago, "We were all really anti-men. The only men we admitted to having relationships with were gay men. But here are straight men worth knowing," she noted.

"And how can we ever effect change unless we try and set up role models," I add. It is this lack of role models that bothers me. I feel I am embarking on a somewhat suicidal mission, and the success rate is against me. This man and I are groping in the dark for a way to live equally and fully. And like gay men and women, he and I are making history if the fabric of our relationship is to be fair, just, and evenly woven. It is a terrifying prospect. The successful couples I know who are not fraught with neuroses, I can count on one hand.

I like the people I work with. Taken alone, they are fine, caring people. But one man's wife tells me over drinks that she never trusts women and isn't about to start now. The husband of one co-worker disappears for whole nights. My mind is reeling from my search for a marital paragon. I asked an old friend for advice about this last week. After 10 years of marriage, and four kids, she lives alone. Five years after her divorce she is still embittered and does not yet have the distance to sort it out. "All I can tell you," she instructed over margueritas one night, "is talk out anything that bothers you. Don't let it ride. It'll build up to a point that it destroys everything."

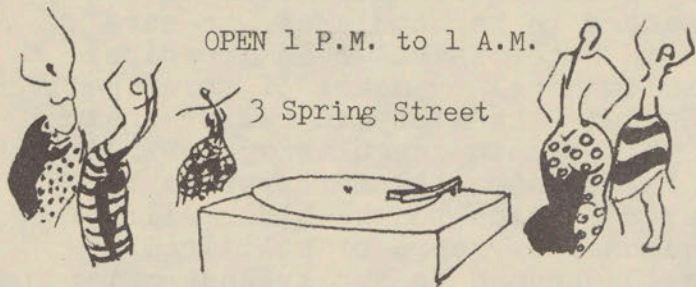
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THE UNDERGROUND

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BOOK REVIEW



Piercy, Marge. Braided Lives. New York: Summit Books, 1982.

Events or issues of the last 15 years have provided the settings for most of Marge Piercy's novels: the counter-culture of Cambridge during the early 70s in Small Changes; the 60s anti-war movement and fugitive underground life of Vida; the oppression and institutionalization of minority women in Woman on the Edge of Time; and the episodic tale of one lesbian's experience in The High Cost of Living. Compared to the characters of these stories, the personalities of Braided Lives seem old-fashioned. In this new novel, Piercy describes the growing-up of women and men in the 50s, conservative years of McCarthyism and H-bomb testing, before these people have emerged as the radicals of the later era.

The narrator, Jill Stuart, is in 1982 reminiscing "those few years when I became the woman I have somehow in all weathers and colors of luck remained." A half-Jewish poetic and independent child of working-class Detroit, Jill enters the University of Michigan in 1953, against the typical discouragement of her parents, in hopes of studying her way out of a domestic destiny and her class background. This move opens the way to a catalyzing and formative relationship with her roommate-cousin Donna, an impulsive, boy-crazy, guilt-ridden woman with whom Jill shares her most significant and lasting emotional experience of these germinal years. Piercy creates a vivid picture of the college life discovered by these two women and their bohemian friends, all joined in rebellion against the repressive morality of a time when lack of birth control and the illegality of abortion shaped women's lives and fears. For Jill and her crowd, the social climate includes not only obnoxious dating games and double-standard curfews, but also poetry gatherings, leftist study groups, and alternative political forums during that quiet period of transition between the demise of the Old Left and birth of the New.

But while it is understood that political activism brews in the background, Piercy rightly describes the social mood of the 50s era by means of Jill's and Donna's relationships with men. As would be expected, there is little to learn from this series of unhappy romances; in keeping with the style of her other novels, the author creates several sorry male characters, conceited, domineering, demanding men who strive for mastery and power over women with whom their conversations are fencing matches rather than dialogue. In those days it was not yet understood that women could insist on something better. Were it not for Piercy's ability as a scene-writer and the strength of her female characters, this tale would surely bore the many readers in her audience who have heard enough about power and domination in heterosexual relationships. But Piercy also redeems her otherwise trite novel by means of an effective and interesting literary technique which sets the story in relief against the present era of the 80s. Throughout the text the regular typeset, in which the narrator is Jill of the 50s, is occasionally interrupted by italicized print which shifts the narrator's voice to the older Jill of 1982. This matured, successful poet, seasoned by years of political activity, shares some facts explaining what happened to her friends after 1959 and the roles they continue to play in her life, whether dead or alive. This juxtaposition of past and present creates a nostalgic, haunt-

Continued on pg. 12

Too Much To Lose cont...

I am beginning to think finding the golden grail will be easier. No wonder people write to Dear Abby. I am left pondering if my guard is somehow slipping. And there is another thought that disturbs me. Every political movement runs a cycle from militancy to either destruction or assimilation. If we lose some of our fierceness, our separatism, do we lose our movement? Do we grow weaker?

I am not against separatism, that is acceptable as is being bisexual, homosexual or heterosexual. I just don't want to feel negated by the fact I relate to men. Variety supplies an enrichment of political views that should not tear apart campaigns, or visions, or people. Living with men does not mean sacrificing the special qualities that women hold. It is simply a relationship of polarities, that these days must be brought together if women's qualities, including consensus, nurturing, and empathy are to become a prevailing practice in our world.

There is another issue at work here, Anne reminds me. By this time we are eating pizza and our first sunburns of the season are making us feel drowsy and feverish. "It makes lesbian women insecure that other women can relate to men. First our society puts us down for being gay. Then on top of it other women who are feminists can relate to men. We feel guilty and take it out on those women. First society makes us feel guilty, then without meaning to our friends do. It makes us feel there is something doubly wrong with us," Anne states.

And there is something else.

My Christian upbringing makes me afraid of good times. When I am happy in love, I feel fate is concocting a painful surprise for me. I know that is insipid. But I mistrust anything that makes me happy. So I dread talking about this pending cohabitation for fear I will tempt fate, a fate I espouse to control.

Speaking of fate, we have all had bad relationships with men. There are relationships I have embarked on that are humilitating and mortifying to remember now. And they are not that many years in the past.

You learn by mistakes. And my lover and I have the invisible scars to mark our follies. Others have suffered too and have chosen to live separately and they should. But that separatism should do no harm to others.

In witchcraft, all is permitted as long as it harms no one. Rendering harm is accomplished through judgement, criticism, and estrangement. We receive enough of that in life, and should not suffer that at the hands of our friends.

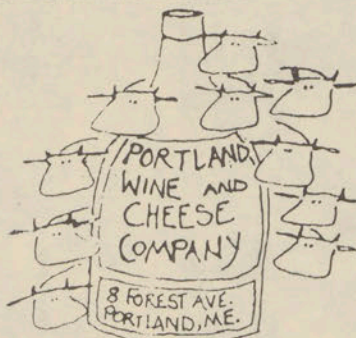
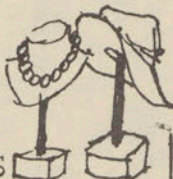
I create some of that separatism by fearing to tell about my life and sharing the good and bad with my friends. Some of that separatism is created by other women who live separate from men and censure those who do. There is too much at stake for such division. There is too much to lose. And our goals are too much the same.

by Christine Kukka



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10 - 5 Saturday

Tel: 207-772-4647

JUNE

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
		1	2 Lesbian Rap Group 7pm 92 Bedford St.	3	4 6-9pm. Gillian Gator show at Portland Art Building 8pm Books, etc. play by N. d'Entremunt	5  8pm Alix Dobkin 338-4476 info
6 Softball - Deering Oaks 10-12 noon 6:30pm Cam. Board mtg. Cheryl Ring's 774- 5508	7 5:30 P's Reading Group YWCA 7pm Fem. Spirituality State St. Church	8	9 772-3093 Fun + Binding, OutReach, Fundraising Mtg. 7pm, 71 Walnut St. Lesbian Rap Group 7pm 92 Bedford St.	10	11	12
13 8:30 → ? Hike Bald Pate near Bethel. Everyone invited.	14 5:30 P's Reading Group YWCA 7pm Fem. Spirituality State St. Church	15 <u>Newsletter Deadline</u>	16 20 Whitney Ave. 7pm - 712-3457 <u>Newsletter Editorial Board Mtg.</u> Lesbian Rap Group 7pm 92 Bedford St.	17 Internal Process Task Force, 71 Walnut St. 772-3093 for info.	18	19
20 Softball - Deering Oaks 10-12 noon 3:00pm PWC. General Mtg. YWCA	21 5:30 P's Reading Group YWCA 7pm. Fem. Spirituality State St. Church	22 7:00 Grtr. P.H. NOW Pot Luck Supper	23 Lesbian Rap Group 7pm 92 Bedford St.	24	25	26 9am Painting Party 71 Walnut St. (see ad)
27 9am Painting Party 71 Walnut St. (see ad)	28 5:30 P's Reading Group YWCA 7pm. Fem. Spirituality State St. Church	29 7:30-9 Volleyball YWCA \$1.25 + memb.	30 Lesbian Rap Group 7pm 92 Bedford St.	7:30-9 Volleyball YWCA \$1.25 + memb.		

COMMUNITY NEWS

Events for Fun that Bond

Can You, Canoe? The third annual Ptld. Women's Comm. Saco River Canoe Trip will be July 24 & 25. This event has proved to be truly a wonderful time! For more info call Ann 772-3093.

Sunday, June 13th, will be the first Ptld. Women's Comm. hike to Bald Pate (near Bethel). This is an easy, scenic hike to be enjoyed by all. Meet at 71 Walnut St. at 8:30am to carpool. Bring lunch and wear comfy shoes. We'll return by late afternoon. For more info, call Ann 772-3093.

GILLIAN GATTO would like to invite the Portland Women's Community to a show at the Portland Art Building which will include ten of her woodcut prints, Friday, June 4, 6-9 P.M., corner of Fore and Union Street. The show will be running the whole month.

At Quinn Field in Deering Oaks, SOFTBALL time--Every other Sunday morning from 10-12 AM, June 6, 20, July 4, 18, and Aug. 1, 15. Bring bats, balls, gloves, and friends. We are there for a good time, all skill-levels are encouraged, if you have never played come anyway and we will teach you how much fun it can be to learn. Call Ann-772-3093, or Bunny- 772-3457 for more info

THE BOARD of the Portland Women's Community meets the first Sunday of every month at various women's homes. All women invited to attend. Call Diane Elze (774-3329), Jennifer Tarling (772-3457), or Ann Houser (772-3093) for information.

A benefit reading for the Ptld. Women's Community Newsletter, "The Inheritance", a play by Nicole d'Entremont, reading by Balenda Ganem, Martha Lunney, Pamela Ryan, at Books, ETC., June 4th. \$2 at the door, 8pm.

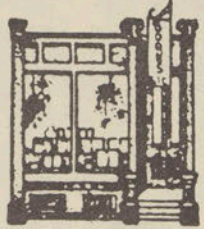
THE INTERNAL PROCESS TASK FORCE of the Portland Women's Community will be meeting Thursday, June 17, at 71 Walnut St., to discuss, expand and implement the matters talked about at the May Board meeting. This will be a business meeting. All women interested in working on the Task Force are welcome. Call Deborah Cole, 772-3093, for further information.

THE PORTLAND WOMEN'S COMMUNITY meets the third Sunday of every month at the Portland Y.W.C.A. in the Every-woman's Center, at 3 P.M. Potluck supper follows short business and cultural event.





NEW VENTURE
195 CONGRESS ST. - ON THE HILL
THE REMARKABLE FURNITURE SHOP
AFFORDABLE COLLECTABLES
WED. - SAT. 10:30 - 5:30



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PORTLAND, MAINE
Telephone 774-0626

THE ALLIANCE TO PRESERVE REPRODUCTIVE CHOICE has been planning actions in the Portland area to support pro-choice. Several activities have been held, including a picket of the SO-CALLED "Right to Life" fundraiser at the Eastland Hotel. For further information, or to get involved, call Merrie, 774-7789, or Marilyn, 846-4644.

A Pot-Luck Supper! N.O.W.
Time for leaving monthly business behind. Time for FUN! and to make posters to send off with the Maine contingent going to the July 17, counter demonstration to the National Right to Life - Compulsive Pregnancy - convention in Cherry Hill, N.J. June 22, 7:00pm, Tuesday.

"the warmth of your hands" - a shiatsu massage course for women. Course includes: Shiatsu technique, meridian stretching exercises, color meditations. Taught by Helena Lipstadt, presented over 2 weekends, June 4 & 5, June 18 & 19, Fridays, 6-9 P.M., Saturdays 10 A.M.-1 P.M. in Camden, \$60. For further info, contact Helena Lipstadt, 374-2155, or Debby Rose, 763-3211.

LEARN SELF-SUFFICIENT SKILLS ON THE MAINE COAST this summer, including: organic gardening and marketing, basic building, canning, maintenance of auto and small farm machinery, edible sea veggies, beekeeping, timber harvesting, and a host of other goodies. Recreation is also provided. Weekly programs May 29-October 2, \$150 weekly includes food and shelter. For further information, contact Anna-Nur Spencer, Ridge Rd. Box 687, Tenants Harbor, 04860, 372-6606 or 372-8103.

IRIS

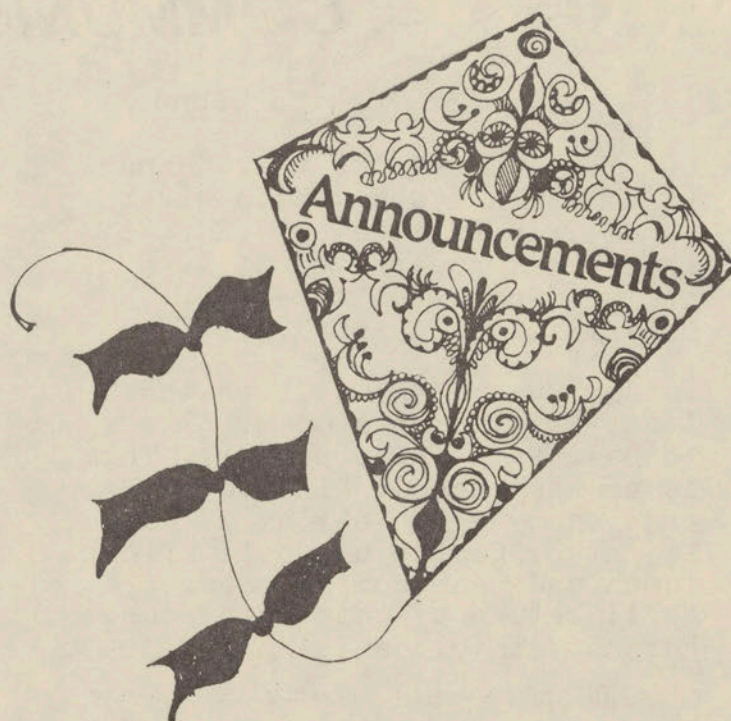
A woman's club

food, drinks, dancing = fun

Wed-Fri.
5pm - 1:30 am.

Sat + Sun
7pm - 1:30 am

40 Pleasant St.
Portsmouth NH
03801
603-436-8958



A SUPPORT GROUP for lovers/friends/relatives of incest victims/survivors has formed in Maine and will meet Saturday, June 12 at 3 P.M. Call Dale, 442-7421 for more information.

THE DISPLACED HOMEMAKER RESOURCE CENTER has recently opened in Portland at the Williston-West Church, 32 Thomas St., Tuesdays and Thursdays, 9 A.M.- 1 P.M. Services include: one to one assistance; information and referrals; peer support groups; Pre-Vocational Training Program including personal development, career exploration and job readiness skills. The program assists women who are over 30 years old, having difficulty finding a job, have been primarily a homemaker, and who are widowed, separated, divorced, or have a disabled spouse. Women can drop-in to the center, or call 773-3537.

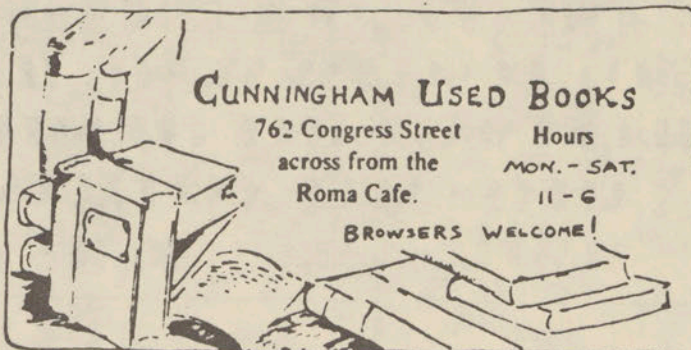
Grtr. Portland NOW meets 4th Tuesday every month, 7:30pm, Public Safety Bldg.

CUNNINGHAM USED BOOKS

762 Congress Street
across from the
Roma Cafe.

Hours
MON. - SAT.
11 - 6

BROWSERS WELCOME!

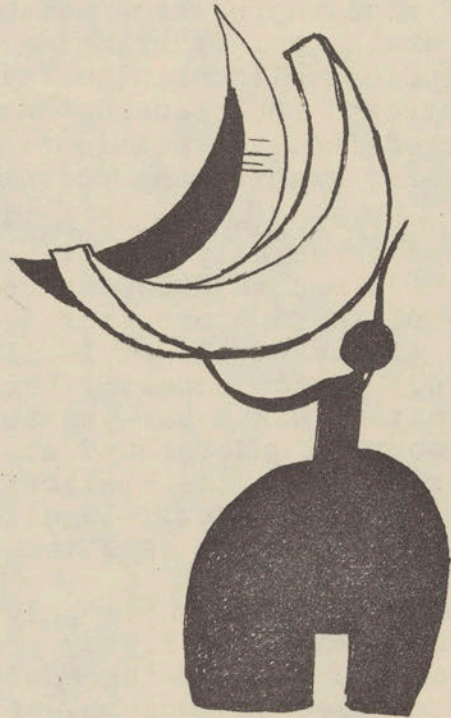


Parents

They stand there, our parents
with flat stomachs or smooth skins,
in light or dark.
They stand there, our parents,
in photos, younger than we remember them,
younger than they remember themselves.
Children with children. They stand there,
looking shyly into the sun or each other,
with long dresses or hair too short.
The young fathers holding children like trophies.
The young mothers' eyes gone dreamy.
When we were last safe,
they sat on the edge of our beds
during the thunderstorm. We wondered why,
since nothing could happen if they were home.
When they argued, the world cracked.
Death was our fault and the broken dish
and the hand cut on the broken dish.
But, in the morning, the sun rose
silverware clattered in the kitchen,
coffee bubbled in the pot
and laughter and low voices.
They stand there, our parents,
in the old books with brown edges and
the paste gone crusty on the backs of photos.
They stand there, finally
young and slender and forgiven.

Nicole d'Entremont

from our perspective



Facial Skulls

I am left bone dry
not unlike animal skeletons found in the southwest.

Men keep coming back
returning to scrape and dig
to find more of me.
They are weak
they lean on me then turn back and lie
lie to me.
Gaining strength they drain this source

I am left.

Their plans are to replenish my soul,
all I will need is the touch of their warm skin.
Re-hydration
from their saliva
body fluids.
Often they refill their sense of my securities
with alcohol
nicotine
whatever chemical will bring this skeleton to life.

And if I do my eyes want to scream
"why don't you do this to yourselves
Not me You stay alive You've killed me
now let me die"

Ellen Kunkle
3/16/82

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MORE BOOK REVIEW

ing atmosphere which makes the story much more compelling than it would otherwise be. By bringing the 50s directly against the 80s, while only alluding to those climactic events of the 60s and 70s which have both destroyed and resurrected Jill's companions and lovers, Piercy has diverged from a tradition in modern movement writing which often takes the 50s for granted and accents the later, more dramatic era.

Piercy's use of a later perspective as a running commentary becomes especially effective in dramatizing the problem of abortion in the 50s and the 80s. Abortion is a major theme in this work as well as one of the author's purposes in writing it. Both Jill and Donna suffer the trauma of 50s-style illegal, dangerous abortions without follow-up care. Donna's shocking fate inspires Jill, who has been collecting information since her own botched operation at 18, to develop a safe and supportive underground abortion network whose code name is "Donna." The story told in the italics traces the growth of this community of aid from the early 60s until legalization in 1973 made the network obsolete, but "for how long?", asks the apprehensive 1982 voice of Jill facing another reactionary era.

But abortion is only one theme connecting the many fabrics of our "braided lives." Piercy presents her various female characters as victims of crimes running the whole gamut of oppression--rape, wifebeating, forced intercourse and sodomy, sabotaged diaphragms, prostitute beating, brutal abortions, lesbian persecution--before women's consciousness had developed a frame of reference from which to struggle against this suffering. These are the germinal years, still greatly influenced by a warped Freudian thinking that filled the talk of the 50s, while a few isolated women began to gather vague and slowly forming perceptions of what is really wrong in relationships between women and men. But the story also follows Jill's steady development as a poet asserting her art against the discouragement of boyfriends and academics who scorn her emotional style. In this book wherein action is confined to six years beginning in 1953, Piercy skillfully describes youth and growth, keeping her characters as young as they are while tracing their gradual changes. As in most of her novels, class provides a major theme, the consciousness of her characters always reflecting their backgrounds and, in Jill's case, a brief return to her street-gang past testifies to the need to restore what one has learned there. Jill's conflict with her mother, a shrewd and interfering woman

Continued on pg. 13



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more book review

who finally becomes her daughter's friend late in life, is among the best developed of the many relationships interweaving these braided lives. But Piercy describes the most sensitive relationship through Jill's affection for Donna, a friendship which offers a deeper picture of growth and development between women than have the stories of Piercy's lesbian pairs, even those of Small Changes. The friendship remains platonic, despite repeated allusions to Jill's repressed feelings, while loyalty and ultimate tragedy leave a mythical Donna inspiring Jill's later life.

Only Piercy herself knows to what degree this novel is autobiographical. She deliberately makes it apparent that the barest outlines of Jill's life are modeled on her own: Jill and Piercy are about the same age, grew up in Detroit and attended the University of Michigan, moved around for fourteen years while active in the Civil Rights, anti-war, and women's movements, have written seven books of poetry by 1981, have somewhat psychic mothers and love cats, and finally settle down on Cape Cod. Piercy is both a writer and a radical activist who has experienced a great deal of what she fictionalizes, and Braided Lives may well be the most personal of her documents to date. Like Vida, this new novel is filled with a nostalgia for times and friends now lost. But unlike Vida, who in dreary desperation runs with slim hopes amidst a deteriorating existence, Jill finishes her narrative with the cautious optimism of one who has created herself as a poet enriched by the ghosts of her past and survivors of her present. Braided Lives is a warm and serious novel in which Marge Piercy has once again demonstrated her talent in capturing the spirit of another dimension of women's experience in America.

Joyce Rowe

WOMEN IN SCIENCE

Starting next month this column will be used for women to discuss science and technology as it relates to them. It is important to discover and understand what has happened and what we would like to have happen in these fields.

Science research has often been dismissed on the grounds that it is a "male field". Although I would not deny that one's psychological set has an effect on the research one does, I think the effect is one of subject rather than of quality. One's background and mind-set may determine what aspect one chooses to explore through scientific research. However, it does not necessarily determine the quality of that research. A good scientist will produce good work, even on

trivial or dangerous subjects. A bad scientist will produce garbage.

Science, just as philosophy, literature, and music, is a tool for apprehending reality. These tools just touch on different aspects of the same reality. It is my hope that women will not deny science because it is a so-called "male field". We need to embrace it and make it our own, do research that will help us as women, and not allow only anti-female research to occur.

This column is for your information and use. If you wish to submit an article or a subject, feel free to do so. If you wish to read about a particular subject, send it to me and I will try to research the information for you.

Bunny Mills

IS THERE A GREEN DOT ON THIS ISSUE OF YOUR NEWSLETTER? if so, then this is your last issue so resubscribe now!!! Subscriptions are \$8 (more if you can, less if you can't).

The deadline for the next issue will be June 15, and the theme is THE ANNIVERSARY ISSUE OF THE COMMUNITY, our third anniversary is in July. The theme for the August issue (deadline July 15) will be THE POLITICS OF MONEY. Please get your articles in on time so that we can stay on schedule.

We can always use more womanenergy to layout the newsletter. See calendar for place and time of meetings. The Task force is still looking for the use of an electric typewriter for 1-2 weeks around the layout dates. If you have one we could borrow, or know where we could purchase one cheap, please let us know.

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