

the HERLAND VOICE

JANUARY, 1991

ABORTION, ROE V. WADE, AND OKLAHOMA

by Margaret Cox

Since the beginning of time, women have used abortion to control their fertility; and under common law women were at liberty to obtain abortions when they needed and wanted them. When the U.S. became a nation in 1776, most states adopted the common law, and abortion was just not an issue in America; women were free to terminate pregnancies at will.

Between 1820 and 1880, groups opposed to abortion began to form and gain support. This was, not coincidentally, the beginning of the industrial revolution, when more and more warm bodies were needed in the factories; and also a time during which physicians were striving to bring "irregular" medical practitioners—especially midwives and pharmacists—under their control. Between 1821 and 1840, eight states passed abortion laws, all of which punished only those abortions performed after "quickening"—when movement is first felt—at about the fifth month.

By 1910 every state but one had anti-abortion laws; and until 1967, forty-nine of the states and the District of Columbia classified abortion as a felony. While the general enforcement of these laws curtailed the practice of legal abortion, the laws differed in content from state to state. First, while the concept of "quickening" was no longer used to determine criminal liability, it was retained in some states to set punishment. Second, the states varied as to exceptions in their statutes that allowed some "therapeutic" abortions. Forty-two states permitted abortions only if necessary to save the life of the mother; some other states allowed abortions when necessary to save a woman from "serious and permanent bodily injury" or to protect the "safety" or "health" of a mother; and four states, Louisiana, Massachusetts, New Jersey and Pennsylvania, provided no statutory exceptions for therapeutic abortions even if necessary to save a woman's life.

In 1959, the American Law Institute included in its draft of a Model Penal Code a proposed criminal abortion statute that would allow abortion when childbirth posed grave danger to the physical or

mental health of a woman; when there was a high likelihood of fetal abnormality; or when the pregnancy had resulted from rape or incest.

In the 1960s, the American German measles epidemic and the Thalidomide tragedy (especially the desperate attempt in 1962 by Sherry Finkbine to obtain a legal abortion for what was almost surely a badly thalidomide-deformed fetus) were instrumental in focusing public attention on the whole abortion issue, and in molding public opinion favorably towards having women rather than government make these decisions. By 1971, fifteen states had passed reform laws based on the Model Penal Code; however, there was no uniformity among the states; they all varied from the code in one way or another.

Meanwhile, two companion legal cases were on their way to the Supreme Court and history. *Roe v. Wade* and *Doe v. Bolton* gave the United States a uniform basic law governing most aspects of abortion in all states.

In 1973 the *Roe* decision said that the right to privacy extends to the decision of a woman, in consultation with her physician, to terminate her pregnancy. This invalidated state laws prohibiting abortion. The *Roe* decision established the "trimester" framework for determining when and in what ways the state can interfere in the abortion decision. In the first trimester, during which time there is less risk involved for a woman having an abortion than in continuing the pregnancy to term, the only interference allowed by the state is to require that the operation be performed by a physician. During the second trimester, the state, which now has an interest in protecting the woman's health and safety, may regulate abortion only to further that interest. In the third trimester, when the fetus becomes viable (capable of maintaining meaningful life outside the womb), the state develops a compelling interest in protecting the fetus; and may regulate and even prohibit abortion after that point except when needed to protect the woman's life or health.

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ABORTION, 1959

The following is a true story, given to the Voice for publication, with the provision that names be changed for reasons of privacy.

The year was 1959, and the Pill was still a year away. It was very difficult and usually humiliating for an unmarried woman to get a diaphragm in any state; in one state, Connecticut, it was unlawful to dispense contraceptives even to married people. Like most young women of the day, Jan was too shy and embarrassed to talk about contraception to a lover. Her luck lasted five months.

Jan and her roommate became pregnant the same month. They went to different doctors for their "rabbit" tests, to give themselves two chances of finding a doctor who would "help" them. Two were not enough. Jan's doctor grimaced and looked frigidly into the eyes of the nineteen-year-old girl sitting before him in the direst of straits, and said, "Help you? No, I can't help you. You knew what you were doing, young lady, and now you pay the piper. Good day."

So the search was on. They had heard of someone in Austin who for \$250 would inject a woman with something that would give her labor pains for up to ten hours; but they were a thousand miles from Texas and also were hopeful that they could find something better. Finally Beth's lover's roommate's friend's friend found "someone" in New York City. It would be expensive, but supposedly he was a real doctor, and that would be worth it.

Jan's boyfriend, barely able to hide his relief, was being transferred to Virginia; he gave her some money and a kiss and skedaddled. The week he left, Beth and her lover went to New York; when they returned Beth was no longer pregnant.

The next week was Jan's turn. She took the train from Boston to New York, and from the station took a cab to a midtown address. She was shown into a seedy inner office with an equally seedy-looking man behind a desk. She sat down, and he waited in silence while she mustered the nerve to mutter the codewords which were supposed to rescue her from this nightmare. It sounded so stupid in her mind that she had a hard time getting it out, but finally she did: "Pinky sent me," she said.

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Roe v. Wade (continued from page 1)

The lesser known *Doe v. Bolton* further defined Row's guarantees. It forbids states from allowing abortions only in the case of fetal deformity, rape, incest or medical necessity; and from establishing a bar to a woman's choice for abortion in the guise of protecting her health, for instance, requiring that abortions be performed in accredited hospitals with the concurrence of multiple physicians and a hospital committee.

Clearly, the *Roe* and *Doe* decisions closely involve the medical profession in the process, and a woman's choice is in part dependent on the availability of health institutions and professionals willing to perform abortions. This is a crucial legal issue for low-income and rural women, who still often have no access to or funds to pay for legal abortions.

The United States Supreme Court's July 3, 1989 *Webster* decision, in *Webster vs. Reproductive Health Services* (in Missouri) was not in itself as devastating as it was feared it might be; however, to quote Justice Blackmun in his eloquent dissent, which was joined by Justices Brennan and Marshall, "For today, at least, the law of abortion stands undisturbed. For today, the women of this Nation will retain the liberty to control their destinies. But the signs are evident and very ominous, and a chill wind blows."

The *Webster* decision's "chill wind" has three parts.

1. The five-person majority allowed Missouri to adopt, as a "value statement" with allegedly no impact on abortion or other medical practice, a declaration that life begins at conception. This decision also allows other states to enact any sort of "value statement" into law. This "value statement" has already been used in Missouri to override more than one woman's privacy rights; and could be the basis for outlawing much of the most reliable birth control currently available.

2. *Webster* upheld a provision prohibiting the performance of abortions in public facilities, even where private patients seek to pay private doctors who have hospital privileges at such a facility.

3. *Webster* also upheld a provision requiring doctors to conduct tests designed to establish the viability of the fetus upon any woman more than nineteen weeks pregnant desiring an abortion, this despite persistent medical evidence that viability is not a possibility until around the 24th week; and despite the fact that the woman is required to pay for such tests, although they are not in her health interest.

These last two rulings further increase the financial burden and time constraints on the poor and the rural, who in great measure rely on public facilities.

Oklahoma Anti-Choice Initiative

In Oklahoma, an organization calling itself the Oklahoma Coalition to Restrict Abortion, Inc., filed an initiative petition to put to the vote of the people a measure that would substantially reduce reproductive freedom in Oklahoma. It includes a "values statement" similar to the one upheld in *Webster* decision, declaring life to begin at the moment of conception. This "values statement" could well be used to prohibit much of the most effective birth control in use today: the pill and the IUD.

Additionally, and flying in the face of the *Doe* decision, the Oklahoma petition would make abortion unlawful except:

- When necessary to save the mother's life or to avoid grave impairment of the mother's physical or mental health
- When the pregnancy results from rape or incest;
- When the fetus would be born with grave physical or mental defect.

Further, the petition provides for extreme criminal sanctions. It would subject persons performing unlawful abortions, and those aiding and abetting them, to imprisonment for a term not less than four years, and those organizations aiding and abetting them to a fine between \$10,000 and \$100,000. The constitutionality of this petition is currently being researched and examined by the Attorney General's office. If it is found to be constitutional, it will be brought to a vote of the people sometime in 1991.

Roe v. Wade, The Players

On January 22, 1973, the Supreme Court vote on the *Roe v. Wade* case gave women access to safe, legal, and relatively affordable abortion services. "Jane Roe" was the legal pseudonym of the Plaintiff, Norma McCorvey. "Wade" was Henry Wade, District Attorney of Dallas County, Texas.

More than three years before the historic decision, in the fall of 1969, Norma McCorvey was a pregnant 21-year-old divorced mother of a five-year-old daughter. She had neither the financial nor the emotional resources for another child, and was seeking an abortion. Linda Coffee, 26, and Sarah Weddington, just 23, were a couple of young attorneys looking to challenge the Texas law outlawing abortion. They were eventually wildly successful, challenging and overturning laws forbidding abortions through the United States with their case. Of the two young lawyers, Weddington was the one who actually argued the case before the Supreme Court; and consequently is today the much better known of the two.

Clearly, the decision came too late to help Norma McCorvey obtain an abortion. After giving birth in 1970, she gave the child up for adoption. Nevertheless, when informed of the Supreme Court's decision, she is reported to have said "I feel like I'm on top of Mt. Everest."

Justice Harry Blackmun was the Supreme Court Justice who wrote the *Roe v. Wade* decision. ■

91% OF ALL ABORTIONS PERFORMED IN FIRST TRIMESTER

The following information is from the NOW Legal Defense and Education Fund's Resource Manual, "Facts on Reproductive Rights:"

The vast majority of legal abortions, a full 91%, are performed in the first three months of a pregnancy:

- 50.8% are performed at or before 8 weeks after the woman's last menstrual period (LMP)*.
- 26.9% are performed at 9-10 weeks.
- 13.8% are performed at 11-12 weeks.
- 5.8% are performed at 13-15 weeks.
- 3.4% are performed at 16-20 weeks.
- .8% are performed at or after 21 weeks.

LMP: This study places the moment of conception at the woman's last menstrual period. This creates a margin for error that in every case, the actual period of gestation can be as much as 4 weeks shorter than these figures imply. That is, a woman may have conceived at any time during the month following her last menstrual period.

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"CREATING CHANGE" CONFERENCE HOSTS 700 ACTIVISTS

Minneapolis—Over 700 lesbian, gay male, and bisexual activists and straight allies immersed themselves in gay and lesbian politics at the third annual Creating Change conference, organized and sponsored by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force in Minneapolis, November 9-12.

The 1990 Creating Change conference was held for the first time outside the Washington DC area and surpassed previous attendance levels by at least 200 participants. The Gay and Lesbian Community Action Council of Minneapolis convened a local host committee comprising more than 100 volunteers. Creating Change '90 was the largest gathering ever held at the Twin Cities' Holiday Inn Metrodome.

The conference featured four jam-packed plenary sessions, 46 workshops, 21 caucuses/meetings, and many related social events and gatherings. Plenary speakers Barbara Smith, C.T. Vivian, Kate Clinton and a panel of five activists from the Midwest inspired and motivated hundreds of women and men from 40 states and several foreign countries with thought-provoking speeches.

Some conference highlights:

- Over 70 gay men and lesbians of color attended a pre-conference daylong **People of Color Organizing Institute**. Attendees called for a national conference for gay men and lesbians of color within the next two years.

CELEBRATING AUDRE LORDE

On October 5, 1990, Audre Lorde (self-described as a Black lesbian feminist warrior poet mother), was honored with a celebration/conference attended by more than a thousand people, including Lorde herself. The I Am Your Sister Cele/conference, three days of worksessions, plenary sessions, poetry and empowerment, achieved the amazing goal of 50% attendance by women of color and women from impoverished backgrounds from around the world.

Two separate, lengthy and sometimes disparate reports of this cele/conference appear in the December issue of *Off Our Backs*. If you are interested in learning more about the cele/conference, stop by the store and read about it in Herland's copy of OOB. We also have books by Ms. Lorde, both for sale and in the lending library. ■

- Over 110 people attended a pre-conference daylong **Fundraising Institute**, led by Kim Klein of the Funding Exchange and Rinku Sen of the Center for Third World Organizing.

- Eight women and men participated in a five-workshop **Campus Track** devoted to strengthening and building lesbian/gay/bisexual student organizations. The campus caucus later requested that the Campus Track be separated from the conference itself and established as a pre-conference institute.

- Lesbian performance artist and activist **Holly Hughes** and Russian gay activist **Roman Kalinin** made guest appearances during plenary sessions. Hughes urged the gay and lesbian movement to support gay and lesbian artists and called on gay and lesbian artists to form a national association. Kalinin, on his first visit to the U.S. from the Soviet Union, spoke of KGB harassment of his country's only gay/lesbian publication, *Tema*. Kalinin also said he hoped to initiate an Act Up style political organization in Moscow, his home city.

- Creating Change 1990 received extensive coverage in the Twin Cities media, as well as national print coverage.

- **Creating Change 1991** will be held in the Washington, DC metropolitan area at the Old Colony Inn in Alexandria, VA, Nov. 8-11, 1991. ■

GULF REGION MEETING

Dallas is hosting the next gulf regional meeting of the National Lesbian Conference (NLC). It will be held January 25-27, 1991. The Gulf Region includes Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma and Texas. It is a chance for lesbians from these four states to network, get to know each other, attend workshops, and prepare for the NLC, which will be in Atlanta, Georgia in April, 1991.

Workshops at the meeting will cover important issues such as lesbian mothers, lesbian battering, and incest survival.

The purpose of the NLC in Atlanta is to satisfy the Lesbian Nation's need to create, publicize and implement a national lesbian agenda. Through this conference, lesbians can meet each other, identify common issues, have fun, build coalitions, and plan for their collective future. It may also be seen as a vehicle for creating a foundation for empowerment of social and political change in America.

For more information, contact Kathy Rome in Dallas at (214) 841-0375 or 521-8919. Or in Oklahoma City Karen Lewis at (405) 528-3151 or Maria Tahenakos at 525-7996. ■

NLC-GULF REGION TO SPONSOR REGULAR POT LUCKS AT HERLAND

The NLC-Gulf Region will hold a variety of events including pot luck suppers and women's video nights, dances, and slumber parties at Herland, 2312 NW 39th Street every 2nd and 4th Saturday of every month at 6:30 p.m. beginning Jan. 12 and running through April 10, 1991.

The scheduled events for January 12th are a pot luck supper and video night. Videos will be "By Design" and "The Miracle Worker" both starring Patty Duke. "By Design" is an excellent, yet little known film about two professional women in a committed relationship with each other who decide they want a baby and go about doing just that. "The Miracle Worker" is a film classic about the early life of an incredible woman named Helen Keller.

January 26th there will be a pot luck supper and sock hop with music from the 60's. So, bring your favorite dish and don't forget your bobbie socks and come ready to boogie!

Come out and join us for the great home cooked food or just for the fun that follows.

Requested donation for each night of fun is \$5.00-more if you can, less if you can't. Just don't let the lack of funds keep you from joining in the fun.

Herland is a chem-free woman's space. A percentage of all proceeds from NLC fun nights will go to Herland for use of this woman's space. For more information about the fun nights call Maria at 525-7996 or Karen at 528-3151. ■

GULF REGION LOGO CONTEST

The Gulf Region (Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, and Texas) of the National Lesbian Conference (NLC) is sponsoring a logo contest. The logo is to be used on T-shirts as a representation of the Gulf Region. This is to generate education and interest for the NLC in Atlanta in April, 1991.

The logo is to be limited to black and white and of camera-ready quality and will be printed on colored shirts. The finished product will be silk-screened onto the shirts.

The winner will be announced at the next Gulf Region meeting which will be January 25-27 in Dallas, Texas.

For more information on submitting entries contact Karen Lewis at (405) 528-3151. ■

It seemed to sound stupid to him, too. He narrowed his eyes and barked at her: "What?! What are you talking about?" And so he made her sputter and squirm and, as if he didn't know full well, tell him in so many awful, illegal words what she was there for. After making sure that she had the money, he gave her an address to go to on Long Island. Until then, Jan had not known that there would be a middleman—the procedure must have been changed from week to week for safety's sake; she had been told nothing of going more than one place or of leaving Manhattan. It added another level to her apprehension and dread, but it never occurred to her to call it off.

After a long ride to Long Island, the cab pulled into a middle class neighborhood, and Jan walked up to what looked like some family's suburban dream house. A small discreet plate on the door instructed her to come in, and she did.

She was in a small neat waiting room, and evidently she was alone. She sat and smoked a while, got up and looked with blind eyes at the pictures and the No Smoking signs, of which there were several. For about fifteen minutes she smoked and looked at those signs; this was as unlike her in those days as it would be for most people today to knowingly park in a handicapped space; and if she had actually seen the signs she would have put out her cigarette. She obeyed all laws in those days. (Does this sound funny, considering her "predicament" and where she was? She doesn't think so; it's just that laws of nature and survival sometimes—always?—supersede man's laws).

In time the man whom she sincerely hoped was a doctor came in. He introduced himself as Doctor _____, and indeed a few years later she was to learn not only that he was in fact a doctor but that that was his real name. He led her into what was clearly the operating room, with a small metal table and the usual stirrups, washbasin, etc. The first order of business was business, and at his request she handed him her envelope with twenty \$20 bills in it. Four hundred dollars; a very decent month's wages in 1959. He was supposed to be the best, and the best was supposed to be worth it.

The abortion procedure itself could have been worse, and would have been if she did not have the capacity to go numb in her mind. She was about seven weeks pregnant, and the doctor performed a simple D&C—basically a scraping of the uterine walls. It was painful, for maybe ten or fifteen minutes, and she coped by enforcing a discipline on herself and allowing herself no sound nor sign of pain. He was mildly abusive verbally just once, with a remark

that confused her more than it hurt; something about her being smart enough to know how to get pregnant but not smart enough to know about ergot. Ergot? To this day, while she knows that ergot is used in drugs to cause uterine contractions, she doesn't know of anyone who goes and gets it and uses it to self-abort. Other than that, he was basically quite decent to her. When he said "That's it," she leaned up and asked to see; "Just a little blood," he said; and that was all it seemed to be. He got her up, gave her a huge kotex and had her lie down in a small side room. The cot was clean and comfortable; she easily kept her mind in its state of numb, as she listened to him cleaning up in the other room.

She bled very lightly afterwards, and after an hour or so he called her a cab to take her back into the city. She bought a couple of apples for her supper at a stand near the hotel, and ran a huge steaming tub while she called her parents to tell them what fun time she and her friends were having in the big City. She steamed herself until the tub cooled, put on a fresh kotex, and went to bed; and thought about how lucky, how very lucky, she was.

And she was very lucky. Having a roommate to go through it with helped; especially having one capable of making hard decisions and moving fast when necessary. On her own she would probably have dithered around into the second trimester, maybe worse. And they did find a decent doctor; they had a good friend in Texas who was raped by the "doctor" before he performed her abortion. And the money! They had managed to raise what was then a huge amount of money; and it did seem to buy them both simple clean abortions with no complications. And extra money, too. The round trip train ticket and hotel room were a considerable added expense; and if she had arrived in New York City with her \$400 but not enough for the cab fare to and from Long Island, what then? Back to Boston and square one?

Yes, she was lucky. About a year later, when her friend Barbara got that look in her eye and asked Jan if she had ever been afraid she might be pregnant, she had no hesitation in sending Barbara to the same doctor; and it turned out well for Barbara too. Lucky.

So lucky, so clean and simple, one might think it hardly worth talking about; except for two things: the first, so few women have or have access to that much money. The fear, danger, pain and apprehension that Jan, Beth and Barbara felt was magnified mightily for women on each step down the economic ladder.

And the other thing: it was maybe three years later, and Jan was thousands of miles away. An envelope came in the mail with no return address but unmistakably in Barb's handwriting, containing a newspaper article about a respected New York doctor who had been performing illegal abortions for years, it seems, when something went wrong and a woman died. His first thought was to hide her body, and he chopped and sawed her up as small as he could; but still his plumbing clogged. He packed his bags, bought a plane ticket out of the country, and for some unearthly reason called a plumber to come fix the pipes. The horrified plumber called the police, and they caught Jan's Doctor _____ at the airport. She doesn't know how much time he served; she never tried to find out. ■

CONTRACEPTIVE FAILURE RATES

The following information is from the NOW Legal Defense and Education Fund's Resource Manual, "Facts on Reproductive Rights:"

Although use of contraceptives greatly reduces the risk of unwanted pregnancy, no contraceptive currently available is 100 percent effective. Many women who have abortions were practicing contraception which failed when they conceived. A study of contraceptive failure rates released by the Alan Guttmacher Institute in 1989 reveals the following facts:

- The actual failure rates for contraceptives used for a 1-year period are more than 1/3 higher than was previously believed, due to error in prior studies.
- The Pill fails 6.2% of the time.
- The condom fails 14.2% of the time.
- The diaphragm fails 15.6% of the time.
- The rhythm method fails 16.2% of the time.
- Spermicides fail 26.3% of the time. (This figure includes foam, suppositories, and the sponge.)

The IUD was not included in this study, as so few forms of it remain on the U.S. market, where the study was conducted.)

CELESTIAL ADVICE

(The spirit of Sybil Ludington, Matron Saint of the Invisible Woman, will be an occasional columnist in the Voice.)

Dear St. Sybil:

Why is it that the third child in a family is often *different* somehow from its siblings—more creative, or funnier, more radical, smarter, more trouble and more joy, or just a bit fey? I've noticed it often, and have never figured out why it is.

Sincerely, your curious friend and fan, Jess Wondrin

Dear Jess,

That's a good question, and one that has stumped all kinds of eminent psychologists looking at the effects of birth order. The simple fact is that the third child is very often a "miracle" child. Why? Because the parents were quite happy with their little family (table settings, cars and prize trips to Disneyland all seem to come for four); and were actively trying not to have another pup. Possibly the mother was on the pill, took an antibiotic for strep or something and ka-boom! the pill stopped working and along come little Fey. Or she was using a diaphragm, gained ten pounds over the holidays, causing a poor fit, and shazam! (And no, doctors almost never think to tell women about the adverse effect of antibiotics on the pill or weight gain & loss on the diaphragm.)

So. Here comes this incredibly determined-to-be-here kid, with sort of an 'In your face, Mama, I'm coming whether you like it or not!' and as a consequence its parents greet it and treat it with an awe and respect which transforms the little critter into someone special and, as you say, "different" and frequently fey as all get out.

So, Jess, remember: don't rely on the pill when you're on antibiotics; don't use the diaphragm if your weight yo-yos; and if you want a different, difficult, weird, wacky and wonderful kid, treat it with all the respect you give your boss and the wonder you give any miracle.

Fondly, Sybil

Dear Sybil:

Where you are, are there men?

Thank you. Hope Knott

Dear Hope:

Certainly, there are men here. Redemption is as possible for men as it is for women. In fact, it was a man, Graham Greene (Patron Saint of Recovering Catholics) who wrote one of the most beautiful lines on redemption in the English language:

*Between the saddle and the ground,
He mercy sought, and mercy found.*

Kisses, Sybil

p.s. Besides, who do you think types my columns?

DAUGHTER OF THE GODDESS

by Deborah Fox

Ah, if only I had a daughter, I've often wished, but the Goddess ordained me a son. This too is a special honor, for the world is in need of such men as I can produce. May She bless me in this task.

Children belong to their mothers—who've borne them of their own bodies, and female is not inferior to male, though these truths have been denied since the men of might began to rule, and many women have become co-conspirators with male dominance...

I have felt I was born into the wrong place in time—surely I am more suited to the life of Priestess or tribal Amazon, which in these times is scarce or unheard of... but there are no mistakes in life and so my life must be a conglomerate for I can fill no role created by men.

It has taken me a long time to fit the pieces of the puzzle of my life in order to understand the impulses and passions that have led me thus far, for, to not fit in has given me cause to think that my nature was somehow wrong, and to not feel "right in the world."

This is the curse laid upon Woman by the sword-wielding men, and those of us who have rebelled against their rules, ethics, values, and aspirations, who would not be boxed into the roles they imposed upon womanhood, nor would join them to compete in the "man's world," have been viciously attacked and murdered.

I have felt the movement of the awakening Goddess, emerging as from a deep cave within me. She calls upon Her daughters, Her call unsettles us from lives of passive acceptance of the so-called "norm," and from the trance-like seduction of familiar (though unnatural) order of the superimposed world of men.

Many of us have feared for our sanity—

the unquenchable longing and restlessness She sends to awaken us puts us out of synch with the life we have been conditioned to accept. Many of us find ourselves in inner conflict, for all these years have internalized the oppressor as well; we ridicule ourselves and feel "silly" for our womanspirit ways.

I have learned to wait upon the Moon, for She will endow if one seeks in earnest, and I have learned to feel her power in the fullness of my menstruating womanbody instead of the bloated "unattractiveness" designated by patriarchy, and I have remembered our connection to all life—everything is alive with spirit, and I have tasted womanpower and have been awed by its potency (sisters awake! We have been living but have not been 'alive'), and I am devoted to Her. Initiation has begun and the Mysteries so long now obscured are being revealed again within woman's mindheart and bodythought. And though many religions continue to twist and pervert the Mysteries in God's name, She has awoken genetic memory in Woman the Keepers of Sacred Secrets. We are the embodiment of the Great Goddess, we have only forgotten what that means.

And so I have come to trust the 'knowing' we women are endowed with but so long now have ignored, and though I do not always clearly see my path, my feet are as surefooted upon it as my mare's upon a trail or my cat's upon the window's ledge.

Sisters do not fear; our power is One with Nature's and Mother Earth's, but heed Her call, for the Mighty Creatrix has come up from Her descent and She will raise us to our rightful status and we will lead the world to safety.

Perhaps one day I'll have the time for another child and I will have the daughter I longed to raise with Goddess images to sing her praises... or perhaps; I have been she. ■

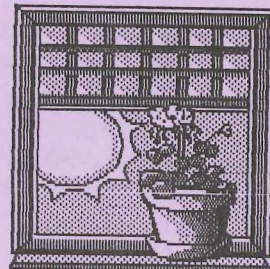
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THE WOMEN'S ISSUE EVERYBODY IGNORES

by Ron Pollack

People talk a lot about women's rights, but there isn't much talk about one serious concern of many women: the right to live a decent life in your later years.

Usually people don't talk about women's issues and the problems of older Americans in the same breath. But the majority of older Americans are women. Women make up about 60% of Americans over age 65; about 70% of those over 85.

The financial situation of older women is often particularly harsh. An unexpected household expense, a sudden siege of illness, a new expensive medication — these can put their limited budgets into the red.

Older women are twice as likely to be poor as older men. One out of every six women over age 65 is living below the poverty line. Among black older women, the situation is even worse: one out of three are surviving below the poverty line, as are one out of four Hispanic elderly women.

Poverty doesn't just happen

If you are an older woman having difficulty making ends meet, look back on your life for a moment. Consider how the financial difficulties you now face may be due to inequities you faced as a woman all through your life. Poverty among older women doesn't just happen; it reflects the economic problems to which women of all ages are vulnerable.

You interrupted your career to raise your children, you couldn't go back to work because there wasn't day care available, you worked for a lot less per hour than the men in your workplace, you had only limited job opportunities as a woman: all these problems translate over a period of time into higher poverty rates for older women.

Look around at the older women you know. Many of the widows with the lowest incomes worked hard as housewives but never participated in the paid work force. Others went in and out of the labor force between children, always having to start new jobs at entry-level wages. When retirement age arrives, their Social Security checks—reflecting only their paid work years, not the work they did at home—are meager.

Still other older women never had much in savings to show for their long lives of hard work because they had been crowded into low paying "women's work" with few if any fringe benefits. Some of the

poorest elderly women today—often black or Hispanic—were domestic workers during the decades when the Social Security system excluded them from participation.

But if many of the neediest elderly are women, women are also filling the ranks of activist senior organizations, the groups who are fighting to improve the well-being of the most vulnerable among us.


They are women like Madeline Helbok of Denver, Colorado, who is crusading for affordable health care. Or Freda Mulkern, who is fighting to block health insurance increases in Massachusetts. Or Lucille Thornburg of Knoxville, Tennessee, a former union organizer who is still organizing; one of her recent struggles was for the rights of nursing home residents. Women like Rose Kryzak of Queens, New York, the fiery leader of a statewide coalition that has helped protect hospital patients from being forced to go home before their health can handle it. Or Mildred Taylor of Charlotte, North Carolina, who is working to make houses available for low-income families. Or the former mayor of Lincoln, Nebraska, Helen Boosalis, who is helping people in her state organize around health care issues.

One issue on which older women are speaking out these days is long term care. Of course, that's not surprising, when you think about the role that many 60-year-old women play as caregivers for their husbands or their 85-year-old parents.

Parenting their parents

After years of taking care of their children, they now are parenting their parents. When it comes to caregiving, they are the "sandwich generation." They know what they're talking about when they speak out for far-reaching reforms in how our society pays for long term care.

Once you reach your fifties or sixties, it starts getting tricky to try to distinguish between women's issues and aging issues. But, after all, why try to separate them? The thing to do is to get on with the job of solving the problems that interfere with this basic right of both women and men: the right to live a decent life throughout all of your years.

 Ron Pollack is executive director of Families USA Foundation

SENIOR WATCH IS AN EDITORIAL SERVICE OF FAMILIES USA FOUNDATION

Chatterbox

THANKS TO ALL those who have sent gift subscriptions to Herland. We now receive *M.S.*, *The Progressive*, *Off Our Backs*, and *Science of Mind* as well as newsletters from women's organizations around the country. If there is a magazine or newspaper you'd like to see available at Herland, please consider sending a gift subscription. We'd especially like to receive *New Directions for Women* and *Utne Reader*.....

The Center for Women Policy Studies has announced a new national newsletter for and about young women. The newsletter will be a tool for encouraging young women to take leading roles on feminist issues and a source of information on opportunities available to young women. To subscribe send \$10 to: Center for Women Policy Studies, Feminist Futures Network News, 2000 P. St., N.W., Suite 508, Washington, D.C. 20036.....

NOTE TO J— We are interested in your idea for a column. Please call Margaret Cox (528-0604) or Pat Reaves (524-7510 or 236-1911).....

The Black Gay and Lesbian Leadership Forum is holding its 1991 conference in February. The conference will be in downtown Los Angeles, California, from Wednesday, February 13 to Sunday, February 18. The Program Committee is looking for Black Lesbians and Gays to facilitate workshops and contribute their talents. If you are interested in facilitating or attending, contact Yolanda Whittington, 914 S. Wilton Place, #221, Los Angeles, CA 90019; telephone (213) 735-9881.....

RAPE CRISIS VOLUNTEER NEEDED The YWCA Rape Crisis Volunteer Program in Oklahoma City has scheduled its next volunteer training for January 22, 24, 29 and 31, 1991. Training will be held in the evening. The Rape Crisis Center depends on volunteers to help support survivors of sexual assault. Please call Karen Riddle Sullivan at Crisis Intervention Service, (405) 947-4506, if you would like to sign up for the training, or if you have any questions. It is possible that an all-day workshop on a convenient Saturday will be held if the need is felt for one.....

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WILL PRESIDENT SIGN IMMIGRATION BILL?

Washington, D.C.—The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF) has urged President Bush to sign into law landmark legislation which removes immigration exclusions for lesbians, gay men, and people with AIDS.

Since the 1950's the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) has held that individuals "afflicted with psychopathic personality, or sexual deviation" are ineligible to enter the U.S. Although the American Psychological Association and other groups removed homosexuality from a list of mental disorders over fifteen years ago, the INS continues to deny visas to lesbians and gay men.

The Family Unity and Employment Opportunity Act, passed by Congress on October 27, removes the McCarthy-era immigration restrictions on lesbians and gay men. The bill also effectively erases the AIDS immigration restrictions created by Sen. Jesse Helms in the previous Congress, and empowers the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to delete AIDS and HIV from the list of restricted diseases.

"When President Bush signs this momentous legislation," said Rochelle, "the United States will break from the ranks of Cuba and South Africa, and join the free world in rejecting senseless discrimination against people with AIDS, lesbians and gay men in immigration policy." ■

Things Left Unsaid

Here she comes,
With that stride
Of self-confidence.

My heart races
And without warning
A smile appears.

With infinite patience
And humorous wit,
She talks to me.

an occasional nod,
Here and there,
I am unusually quiet.

A tender hug
And a warm good-bye,
The she's gone
Sadness settles in
For all I have
Left unsaid to her.

michelle j. klukas

11-13-90

BE A PART OF HERLAND

Herland is the collective effort of the women of Oklahoma. You can be a part of creating and sustaining this very special community we call Herland. Join a committee, volunteer to work in the resource center, or make a contribution to help meet the monthly expenses. Herland will be what you make it.

YES, I want to help Herland continue to grow.

- ☐ I'm interested in working on a committee. Please have the committee chair call me.
- ☐ I'd like to volunteer at Herland. Please have the volunteer coordinator call me with more information.
- ☐ Here's my contribution of _____ to help support Herland.

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