

## Lesbian Community Project Update

The Lesbian Community Project presents Portland's first Lesbian Conference, entitled *Building Community: Common Ground for the Future*, which happens November 8th & 9th at Portland State University in Smith Center.

Admission is sliding scale, suggested donation: \$10-\$40. No one will be turned away for inability to pay.

Registration is Saturday from 8:30-10:00 a.m. and Sunday from 9:30-10:00 a.m. The Conference is Saturday from 10:00-6:00 p.m. and Sunday, from 10:00-5:00 p.m.

**Conference Kick-off**  
Friday, November 7th, P.S.U.  
7:30

Melanie Kaye/Kantowitz will present a reading from the recently released *Sinister Wisdom* book, *The Tribe of Dina: A Jewish Women's Anthology*. The book focuses on the diversity of Jewish women's identity.

A former Portlander, Melanie taught humanities and women's studies at P.S.U. From 1972-1979. She was also active in many women's community projects. Currently, she is editor and publisher of *Sinister Wisdom*, a quarterly lesbian/feminist publication and a teacher at Vermont College.

### Key Notes

Julia Penelope  
Keynote Saturday morning 10-11 a.m.  
Ballroom

Julia is a longtime lesbian/gay and feminist activist, writer and teacher. In 1959, she was



Pat Norman

expelled from Florida State University for being a lesbian. She then spent time in her own words, as a "bar dyke" and a "kept butch." She was a member of Daughters of Bilitis, one of the first Lesbian organizations in the US, and a contributor to its magazine, *The Ladder*. In the early seventies she was a founder of the Southeastern Gay Coalition and the Lesbian Herstory Archives.

Julia will also offer a Saturday workshop called *How We Talk to Each Other*.

### Pat Norman

Keynote Saturday evening 5-6 p.m.  
Ballroom

Pat Norman is conducting a city-wide

campaign, as an "out" Lesbian, for a seat on the San Francisco Board of Supervisors (our City Council). As a Black Lesbian, she is committed to the well-being of women, ethnic minority, and lesbians and gays.

A long-time activist, progressive, and leader in civic affairs, Pat has received many awards for humanitarian service and achievement.

Ms. magazine designated her one of the "Women to Watch in the '80s." In 1982 she received the Bay Area Women's Leadership Award.

Pat is also a homeowner, a neighborhood leader, a mother of four, a grandparent of two, and a Navy veteran.

She will offer a workshop Sunday morning.

### Party

Dance with the Blues Sisters  
Nov. 8th, Saturday 8:00 p.m. - 12:00  
Echo Theatre, \$5.00  
1515 SE 37th Ave.

Dance to the rhythm & blues, soul and funk sounds of the Blues Sisters. A women-only dance.

### Sponsors!

Without the consistent, generous and patient support of P.S.U. Women's Studies and P.S.U. Women's Union, the Conference would not have been able to achieve its present scope. They have been true partners in its manifestation.

### Policy!

Because of state law the conference cannot exclude anyone. Most workshops are open to anyone. However, some workshops are designated "lesbians only." We appreciate your cooperation.

## Lost lesbians found: Or what community?

by Katharine English

I consider myself to be an "old time dyke." My friend, Grace, would object. After all, she's been a dyke 30 years longer than I have. To her, I'm just a "baby dyke."

Which raises the question: "But what is a dyke?" The morning after I first slept with a woman, I put on my lavender T-shirt, drove to school at 70 miles per hour, raced up the stairs of my criminal law class, and yelled joyously to my horrified classmate, "I'm a dyke!" My friend, Chris, disdained me. "Pshaw, you aren't a dyke!" she opined, "and you shan't be accepted into the community until you've been a no-het-sex politically correct dyke for five years." Saddened, but undaunted, I circled the date every year, and planned for the 5th year a Celebratory Feast (vegetarian, of course). It's been ten years, but am I in "the community" yet?

Which raises the question: "But what is 'the community'?" And now, after years of wondering whether I'm in or out of it ('the community' that is), there is going to be a conference November 8-9 at Portland State University to bring together scores of lesbians to talk about 'community.' I, for one, have a hundred questions craving answers: Was there ever 'a community'? Says who? What was it, then, and where did it go? Or did I go? If so, why? Did I walk out? Was I thrown out? Trashed out? Burned out? Is there still 'a community'? Am I in it? Are there rules? Do we even need a community? Why? In what form? And who cares, anyway?

The number and substance of workshops which will be offered boggles the mind with anticipation and excitement. Interestingly, the conference has no rigid premise already defined — we will have the opportunity to define for ourselves the issue of where we fit into the concept of a lesbian community — if it is a viable concept at all.

I will be conducting a workshop — Lost Lesbians Found — in which I hope to discuss from both a personal and an analytical perspective why 'the community' has or has not developed, what brought so many of us together and where did we go, is there a need for (a chance for) another community? Is there a place for us? All of us? Even Republican dykes? Even dykes who worship the Goddess? Dykes who invest in South Africa? Dykes who eat red meat? (Use hairspray? Pay their employees minimum wage? What about dykes who sleep with men (shouldn't we draw the line somewhere?) Dykes who hate children (Even girl children)? Who love children (even boy children)?

The conference may not have a premise, but I do. For me, personally, the 'community' of years ago developed serendipitously, without conscious design. Loneliness, lack of family, need for stimulation, and a new political fervor drew me to women who were more intellectually and sexually exciting than any two-legged creatures I'd met before. As time passed I began to understand, however subtly, that our 'community,' which offered me such positive affirmation, gave more affirmation for some things than others and, in fact, gave no affirmation, or 'constructive criticism' for certain behaviours. We had rules, expectations. And I began to not fit. Of course, others began to not fit — but we didn't talk about it, kept it in the closet.

Could I guiltlessly admit to my collective that I happily ate Kentucky Fried Chicken? To my politically correct friends that I wanted to invest most of my savings in Benjamin Franklin rather than the Feminist Credit Union? I had become a lawyer, hated vegetarian cooking, thought collectivity didn't work, longed for monogamy, and had two sons, one of whom was nearing 12 — the age of exclusion from women's events. Age had crept up on this child of the '60s. Mortality reared up on its hind legs and slavered, "I'm going to get you, Katharine, when you retire, penniless, dying." The economy took a fast leap off a high cliff. I got scared. Not for you,

or: the lesbian 'community,' or ethnic minorities, or the working class — for me. Me. All of which combined to make me a great big foot in a teeny shoe. I limped away, dragging the offending foot behind.

Well, dammitall, that great big foot can kick a sexist pig in the butt just as good as any other. It can walk a mile against racism and trespass on nuclear power plant property. And it gets me to work every day where I earn the money I give to good causes. Should I slink home and soak it in acid because it wears shoes made from the hide of an endangered species? You tell me.

Webster defines 'community' as a "unified body of individuals with a common interest." I haven't found a definition yet that calls it "a body of individuals who are required to believe the same thing and who rate each other accordingly." I think that's a definition of tyranny.

Where my first lesbian 'community' formed as a delicious surprise, it is my thought that another 'community' can happen organically — we plan it, conceive it, carry it, give it life, and raise it. With the same acceptance and nurturing good parents give to their children with genetic, biological, and characterological differences. With the same patient instruction, education, and freedom to make good or bad choices, to learn from experience.

In defining our 'common interest' we can move away from believing that our sexuality is the bond which makes us all the same. We can move to knowing that our sexuality gives us only one truly common interest — the belief that all persons, regardless of sexual preference, should be treated equally, with dignity and respect. This is our commonality. From there, we can accept each dyke's contribution, large or small, to the elimination of bigotry and inequality.

If we start there, can we build a community that has several streets, many houses, alternative families, and people who don't have to move out of the neighborhood because the lawn isn't mowed? I think so. I believe so. Let's talk about it.

November 1st through November 30 we will donate 25% to the Oregon Symphony for every pound of coffee sold.

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