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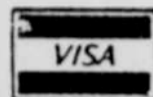


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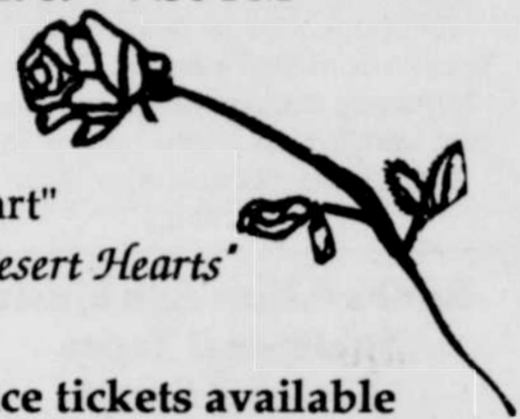


Coming to Portland!

Saturday, January 28, 1989 7:30 PM

Jane Rule

Author of "Desert of the Heart"
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CIRCLE HOUSE



HOME HEALTH CARE

We in the Pacific Northwest take pride in announcing the opening of a new residential care facility for services to AIDS and HIV positive symptom persons.

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We are located in the scenic area of rural Hillsboro, Oregon, on the bank of the Tualatin River, surrounded by 9 acres of peaceful tranquility, yet we are near local medical facilities and the Portland Metro area.

For further information please contact us at

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CIRCLE HOUSE
THANK YOU

Love letters

Sometimes these columns feel like love letters to some of the important women in our lesbian world

B Y L E E L Y N C H

As much as I enjoy and am buoyed by receiving fan mail, I've found it just as exciting to send the stuff. Often, it results in unanticipated joys. Sometimes it doesn't even take a fan letter, just a word or two of appreciation.

A few years ago I was compiling data for a small guide to lesbian publishers. In the process, I wrote a letter to Onlywomen Press, a London-based lesbian feminist company. Lillian

T H E



A M A Z O N
T R A I L

Mohin and Anna Livia are the publisher-editors. But I didn't know this. I didn't know that Anna, the author of one of my favorite books, *Relatively Norma*, was also a publisher until she responded to my business-like query with a gratifying familiarity about my own books. It was probably the first praise I'd ever gotten from a non-American.

"Oh, boy!" I said to Girlfriend. I then wrote a rather restrained fan letter back to Anna. She is, after all, British, and I didn't want to act the gushy Yankee. Though our correspondence has been fun and elucidating, I never thought I'd meet this highly literate, quick-witted writer in the flesh. Certainly never thought to be talking to her across the fold-out table in my trailer.

But there she was last fall, real and with an unexpected warmth and lovely eyes.

It all began when she went to visit her "mum" in Australia. She happened to have one of those tickets which would either fly her back to London after her visit, or, for the same price, fly her home the long way, via the West Coast of the United States. Via Oakland to be exact. So Anna arranged to stay with Alana Dykewomon, poet, author of *Riverfinger Women*, *They Will Know Me By My Teeth*, and editor of *Sinister Wisdom* magazine. They'd met at the 1988 International Feminist Book Fair in Montreal. Both in their thirties, both separatists, both brilliant, both possessing wonderful senses of humor, it seemed perfectly logical for them to expand their friendship by arranging a flight path which would, in the end, take Anna all the way around the world.

When I got wind of this adventure, my first thought was to zip down to Oakland to see Alana again and to meet my longtime correspondent, Anna. What was an eight hour drive, after all, to Anna's marathon, not to mention Alana's hectic balancing of a visitor, a full-time job, and full-time editing. But scheduling made the trip impossible for me; I would be just getting back from the East Coast.

As fortune would have it, Alana Dykewomon turned out to be a trooper. She rounded up a couple of friends, Dolphin and Jasmine, whisked Anna out of the air and into a car, and they all set out for the mountains of Oregon to attend our book party for Girlfriend's re-issued *The Cunt Coloring Book* and my collection of these columns, *The Amazon Trail*.

Alana is a quiet woman, with a beautiful smile and manner. Her poetry is passionate. We had asked the guests to read, too, and Alana

offered *The Fat Woman Poems* to a living room overflowing with forty women.

Anna read from her new book, *Bulldozer Rising*, a challenging science fiction novel about a misogynist and ageist society — frighteningly like our own. She noted that this work, possibly her angriest, has been the first, strangely enough, to attract favorable notice in the straight press.

We all talked about our careers in a kind of panel discussion. As I spoke, I realized I had come full circle that evening, to be reading at Alana's side. There was a time when I'd stopped writing. I worked in a grocery store, drank a lot, refused to give up my dream, but no one wanted to read about lesbians. I was on the shelf. Maybe forever.

Then *Sinister Wisdom* came along. It had the lesbian content and the integrity of *The Ladder*. I sent the founding editors, Katherine Nicholson and Harriet Ellenberger, a story inspired by the existence of the magazine. They printed it. I was on my way again and haven't stopped since.

Now Alana is carrying on that tradition and I sat with her as a peer. Sometimes these columns feel like love letters to some of the important women in our lesbian world.

There is a place on Girlfriend's land, equidistant from the house and my trailer, where a bench sits in a clearing. Earlier in the afternoon, Alana had sat in the sunlight looking at peace, like a Jewish lesbian Buddha, if that's not too much of a contradiction in terms. After leaving my trailer, Anna took her place on the bench, a contrast with her longish dark hair falling over her face, as she intently selected her reading for the night. Poets in our garden, like exotic flowers blooming.

So that's my tale of where one fan letter can lead. Anna is back in London again being a publisher and a writer, and I'm penning her letters as a friend, a new feeling. I look at fan letters a little differently now. Like these from readers of my new book:

A woman in the south (Maybe I shouldn't count this as a fan letter, but I do). I'd written about Hawk Madrone, a friend here in Oregon who, among many other things, hand-knits socks. The reader wanted to order some, as most footwear is not made to fit fat women.

A woman in my own community, basically saying, *Go, Frenchy!* when she read Frenchy Tonneau's expert comments on the butch-femme controversy.

An older woman in the Midwest who surprised herself by telling me her lesbian-life story. That missive reminded me of the letters Ann Bannon and Valerie Taylor refer to so fondly, sent to them back in the sixties when women would read their books and write. *Thank you! I thought I was the only one in the world!*

But best of all, the letter from the shy woman I'd described in an earlier column: she'd hovered in the background at a book signing and finally came to the table for a signature. I mentioned in the column that she was one of the women I most wanted to write for, a reader who, "When she left . . . backed out all the way, grinning, *Toothpick House* against her cheek like a prize." She recognized herself in the column and reached out once more.

As I reached out to Anna, she to me; as the Southern woman reached out to Madrone; as Alana and Anna connected; as we all dare to reach out to one another. This is how we build our community. And our community has no boundaries that can't be crossed, whether it takes a trip around the world to do it or a shy letter saying thanks for being there for me. •

Lee Lynch's newest book is *The Amazon Trail*, a collection of her syndicated columns. (Naiad, 1988, \$8.95)