

Surviving challenges

Being anti-racist is a constant activity not a passive discussion



PHOTO BY ELLEN HANSEN

by Ariel Waterwoman

Living in Portland, Oregon is a challenge for any person of color. Being gay or lesbian only enhances the struggle. Being a mixed-blood and looking "white" to the majority of color and non-color people is sometimes overwhelming. I have been challenged to prove my blood. I have been left out of lesbian of color gatherings. I have been told by "white" lesbians that I pass for "white" so what's the big deal? I know that I am not what the majority of people think a mixed-blood should look like. We were all raised watching Italians play Indians in the movies, because Italians had a better "look." So, no, I'm not Italian.

I know my heritage into the seventh generation. My father is registered as seven-eighths Tsalagi (Cherokee) Indian, and the other one-eighth Welsh. My mother's father was Jewish and escaped from Germany. His blood relatives were all killed in the Holocaust. My mother's mother was a mixture of Welsh, African, and Tsalagi people. This gives me my Clan in the Tsalagi tradition. I know my ancestors well. I know all of the pedophiles, rapists, enslaved people, witches, pioneers/conquerors, the ones who walked the Trail of Tears, and the ones who hid in the Smokey Mountains. I have had time to make peace with them all. I am a product of their efforts and I honor that. That is all the honor I have for some of them.

I am not happy to be such a glaring result of genocide. It hurts to feel so fractionalized. I am constantly reminded that I am a mixed-blood lesbian. Reminded, but not ashamed. I know my cultural heritage, which is something few non-color people know.

I feel a lot of pain and anger towards people, long severed from their own ancestors, who buy, sell and wear the culture of the very people that they oppress. It has been a challenge for me to live and work in the lesbian community and maintain my personal integrity. I do respond to and interrupt racist, genocidal and oppressive behavior. It is very scary to do that, and it is one of the ways I keep my self-respect. I am strengthened when I refuse to be victimized by racism. I feel strong in my commitment not to participate in oppression, my own or others'. Being anti-racist is a constant activity not a passive discussion.

I have been a lesbian all of my life, except those few years when I fucked every man I could

find to prove I could. I started drinking seriously when I was 15, and quit just as seriously when I was 21. I was sexually abused from the time I was six months old until I was able to find my voice and say no at 23. I am now 39-years-old. I survived a marriage. I survived more than one rape as an adult. I am surviving being a battered lesbian. I am surviving genocide. I am surviving the hatred of the Oregon Citizens Alliance. I have survived and out lived my ancestors. These are just some of the challenges that I face every day. They make me stronger, more sure of myself, more myself. And, I do mean strong, not rigid, not inflexible. Stronger, more loving, gentler, more convinced that I have a right to live unmolested by anyone. That belief helps me to survive and gives me strength.

My connection with lesbians of every color is tenuous. Lesbians tend to "glaze" over when I talk about the struggles I have faced as a battered lesbian. There was no talk of community accountability. There is still very little. We are all raised in a violent, abusive society. Do we think that when we came out that we were cosmically cleansed? Uh, no. We all still represent that upbringing, and need to face it head on to heal it.

I live and work in the health field. As a clinical herbalist I offer self-empowering health care to women and animals. I am a licensed massage therapist with a thriving practice. The healing work I have been given to do is a continual source of strength, wonder and magic to me. The intimate sharing of healing with an animal or woman is awe inspiring. As a member of the Beaver Clan, I come from a long line of healers. I draw on a lot of wisdom and experience from all of my ancestors.

I mostly see my life as building bridges. A bridge was built through my genetic background and I use that bridge to span new places. It has taken me my whole life to reach this place. I have become very strong. I am excited and amazed by the life we are given, and this incredible planet we get to live on. I believe in our abilities to change this world into a happy and healthy place. I have a commitment to keep creating a life that is free of oppression for all beings. Sometimes it is awkward or frustrating, sometimes it is just painful. It usually works out that people, especially lesbians, make choices that empower and free us all. That is what keeps me walking those bridges.

Gay myths to guide us into the future

Sexual minorities are the most spiritual lot in every society

by Susana Santos

One day, an Indian woman and I were sitting in a cafe, and two older lesbians were walking down the street. My friend commented that, "those women are the bravest women in the world." Perplexed, I asked why? "Because they will fight for you and because they have been the first to fight for human rights. I wouldn't fuck with their kind."

Another time I read that Carl Jung stated that through all his work with people throughout the world, that sexual minorities were the most spiritual lot in every society he'd come across.

These thoughts intrigued me and began a personal quest to understand more about our human sexuality and its deeper manifestations to the primal experience, the spiritual.

What began as one question soon led to another as I traveled back and forth through space and time. From this journey I learned that the Conquest of the Americas during the European invasion 500 years ago, was first made possible after the rape, torture and dehumanization of native "homosexual religious leaders" and the eradication of matrifocal tribes.

In the Pacific Northwest of the 1800's, a visionary Klickitat Indian woman lived with her lover. She was revered as a prophet and was feared and respected amongst the tribes of the Columbia River basin. The Klickitat woman predicted that the Indian world would die from the evil forces of two great superpowers, and only through death would the Indian World be born again.

During the rise of the White Man Patriarchy, genocide has been committed on the world's indigenous peoples, which began the historical process of the destruction of the earth and atmosphere. The need to fuel a growing materialistic society and expansionist ideals of the industrialized nations increased during the latter half of our atomic century. In just the last 40 years our industrial-technocratic era has traveled past the process of the evolutionary cycle of nature. We have expedited the destruction of nature.

This much we know, our civilization is out of balance with both nature and humanity, and our current world is in an ecological crisis.

At the edge of the world, where do gays and the rest of the oppressed peoples go from here? Can we escape the myths of Armageddon and our death cult. To alleviate the personal and larger social demise lies in our ability to break the historical cycles of abuse, whether the affliction be psychological, or the result of environmental or societal factors.

In our world's darkest hour, the only alternative out of our pending fate and to achieve personal and world balance is through vision. To achieve



PHOTO BY LINDA KUEWER

Susana Santos and her mother fish for salmon from their platform on the lower Deschutes River.

vision requires purification of the heart, mind and spirit. Unfortunately, at the end of the dominant western civilization history, there are few myths, legends and human rituals to guide this culture to relate to the earth and goddess principles within the universal-complex. It is at the end of this civilization's history that we must come to terms with the fact that the oppression of women, gays and indigenous peoples has created the ecologic imbalance of the world.

The power of collective vision of any people, in time and space is to create a future paradigm shift. In native culture, our ancient legends have passed through time and still guide our people today. Behind every Indian struggle are a people protecting their sacred laws and homelands. Today, this living legacy has come to symbolize both the worldwide struggle and is synchronized with a larger world vision for peace and justice.

So where are the gay myths to guide us into the future? Many lesbian activists feel the best approach to undermine patriarchy is to become proactive in both environmental and human rights issues by confronting corporate development on public trust lands. While the Oregon Citizens Alliance keeps one segment of the population consumed with fighting for the illusion of civil rights protections, the New World Order is setting the precedence for massive corporate development on public, treaty and sacred lands. Gays and lesbians are being the first to come to the land's defense, becoming myths in the makings. The visions of gays and lesbians is a serious contribution to the Creation of Our New World.



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