

Source of sisterhood

A rural lesbian writes about pride and Womansource, an annual gathering of women in southern Oregon

BY JULIE WEBER



Women head for the hills every September at Womansource

I am proud of our community, even though it isn't perfect. There are problems and struggles and divisions, but for the most part, women in southern Oregon have learned to work together to honor both our commonalities and our differences.

I believe the deep magic of Womansource is in the earth and in women's connections to the land. There is among us a reverence for the earth and a honing back to the source, to our bodies, our spirits and our roots.

Womansource began 27 years ago, at a time when the women's consciousness movements were taking hold. Here in southern Oregon we had a grass-roots anti-domestic-violence movement in which women took other women into their hearts and their homes; we had a women's health movement on the rise; we had women speaking about and healing from sexual abuse; we had local women producing women's music; and we had the constellation of these lesbian land communities rise up: Womanshare, Rootworks, OWL Farm, Cabbage Lane, Fly Away Home, Rainbow's End and Rainbow's Other End. Womansource was the cauldron in which we gathered each year, face to face, and stirred our stories and distilled our lives.

And so it was this voice and presence of rural and small-town womyn loving womyn that infused our gathering and our connections with one another. These connections were born of the moonlight on our breasts and in our hair at night, born on back roads and between blackberry brambles, born into the pages of *WomanSpirit*, born of muscles and tears, laughter and forgiveness.

And the connections have been passed on to those of us who came later, and they have rained down on us and soaked in like a blessing. We, in turn, have opened with our own revelations. These are the songs that bind us together, that spin the web of sisterhood round us like a spell. It's a spell of loving and listening, a spell of honoring and struggling, and a spell of holding our sacred space.

Now, in this time 27 years later, when women's groups are largely disbanding and changing or breaking down, the heart of Womansource has held strong. And a part of that, I believe, is our celebration of one another.

The tradition is that, once a year, for three days and nights in September, we gather together at a camp in the mountains. We don't bring in big-name performers or national acts. It's a calling of ourselves—rural lesbians, allies and friends. And as we come together, we look



Making magic in the woods

around and see who we are. We meet in the fall to reaffirm our bonds as we head into the dark of the year. The gathering is a time to share our stories, our circles, our journeys, our struggles, our celebrations and our songs.

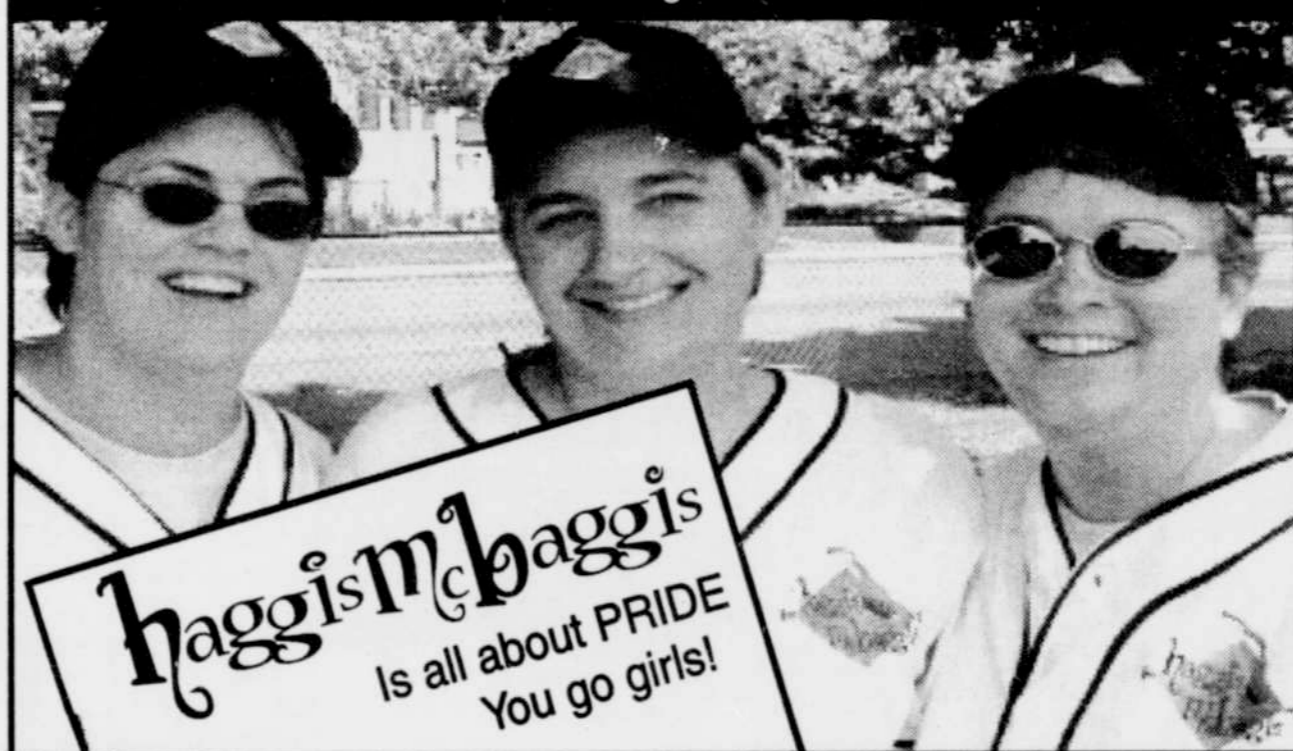
And so, when you ask me what I am proud of, I answer that I am proud of us. I am proud of Womansource. I am proud of womyn's lands. I am proud of the way we reclaim our bodies in all their shapes and sizes. I am proud of our gutsy determination and the artful expressions of who we are. I am proud of the way we live and love and yearn and listen. I am proud of our compassion and the resilience of our hearts. I am proud of the heart and soul of womyn helping womyn. This is the web of sisterhood in action. It's the fabric of community. It's the warp and woof of who we are.

■ The fall WOMANSOURCE GATHERING takes place September 8 through 10. The cost is \$65-\$95 sliding scale; registration brochures will be mailed in midsummer. To get on the Womansource mailing list, call Joan at (541) 482-2026.

JULIE WEBER is a longtime co-coordinator of Womansource. She recently completed both her master's degree in social work and her first novel.



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