

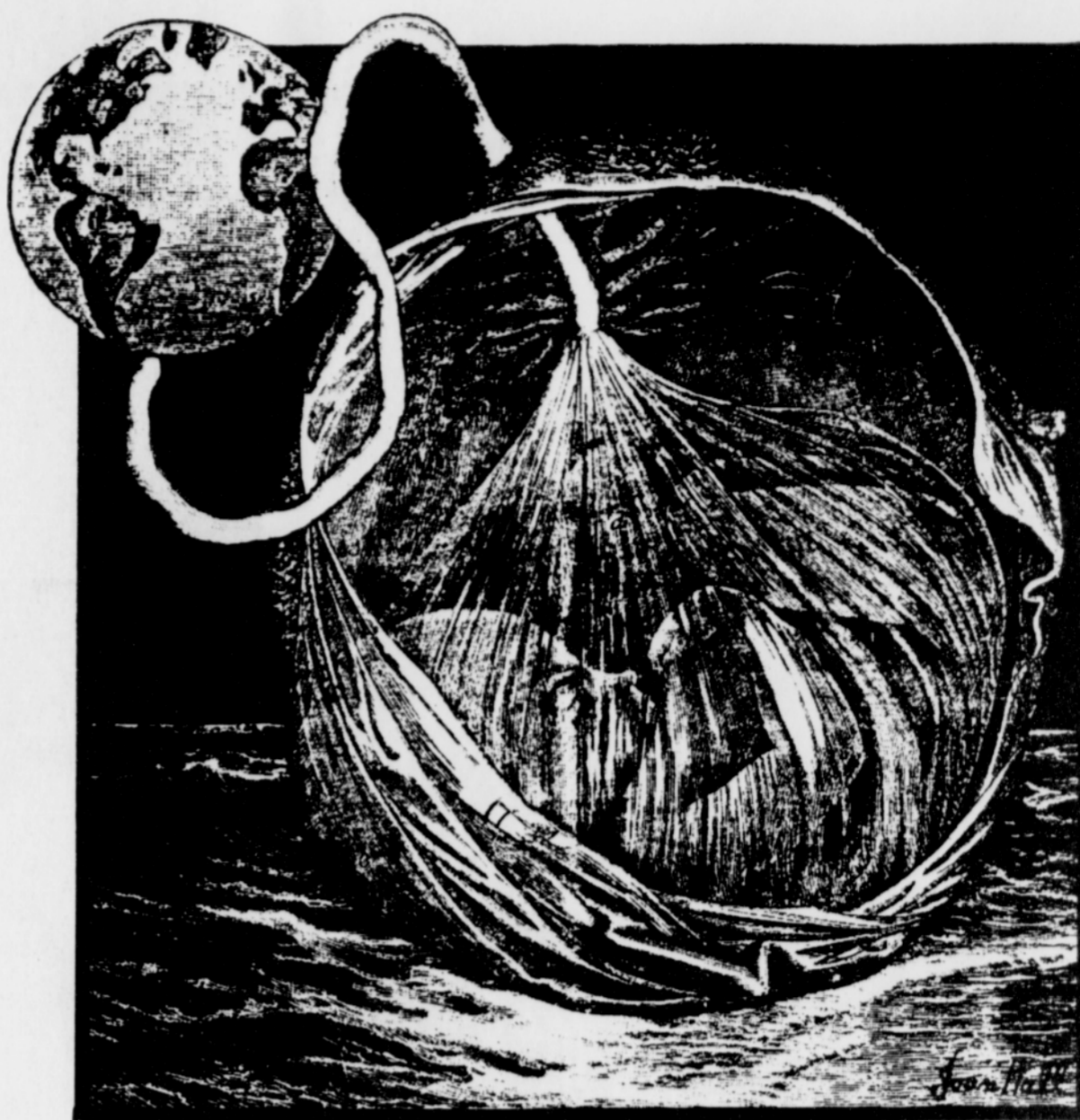
are control freaks who need everything in their perceived order to feel secure. It is impossible to turn the clocks back 40 years. The return to the traditional family isn't going to happen. The modernization of the home has made the occupation of housewifery obsolete. No one is willing to pay a woman to stay home all day and do nothing and as a consequence of this no one is willing to pay women to raise their children." Bunny believes the need for traditional family structure is extinct and the true loss is not family values but a society that has not conceived another way for raising children. Is it any wonder that so many women go on welfare to raise their children in light of how easy it is for men to flee their share of the financial responsibility? The conservative argument is that the poor shouldn't have children. Bunny strongly believes that we need to find a way for raising children that does not take them away from caring parents.

I asked Bunny what would be her response to Kelly's statement of despair and hopelessness for Generation X. She replied that Kelly's generation should not believe what they are told and that they should check all supposed facts for themselves. She believes it is natural that they are passionate to reform the world. "Why aren't they rebelling for god's sakes! There must be something they're furious about."

Bunny quoted Eugene Debs: "Years ago I began to recognize my kinship with all living beings...I said then and I say now, that while there is a lower class I am in it, while there is a criminal element I am of it, while there is a soul in prison I am not free." A noble sentiment she sets her life toward.

Our lives are constantly changing but sometimes an event of great magnitude causes a change in our perception, and for better or worse, we are no longer who we were. Such an event took place in the life of Lois Morford and her children several years ago. They had taken a trip to Guatemala and enjoyed seeing it with tourist eyes, but when they decided to return to Guatemala their eyes were open, not to some idealistic agrarian society free from the burdens of the modern world but to the immense suffering and pain of a people being exploited by economic colonization. For the first time she and her family became aware of how rich and wasteful Americans are and the price of their avarice (the U.S. has 5% of the world's population and consumes 40% of the world's resources). Aside from the impoverished conditions she saw all around her in Guatemala, one woman told her that she and other women were locked in a factory at night and given little pills (speed) to increase their productivity. Human rights violations far greater than this have continued to be committed in Guatemala since the democratically elected president Col. Jacobo Arbenz Guzman was ousted by a coup that was organized and directed by the CIA in retaliation for Col. Guzman's expropriation of United Fruit Company lands that he distributed to landless peasants. From this awakening encounter in Guatemala, Lois has continued to educate herself through alternative media and frequent visits to Central America.

Lois feels that our nation is lacking values but she does not credit this to the traditional complaints of the right. Instead she feels it is perpetrated by our capitalistic nature. "After World War 2 the U.S. was the only industrialized nation that had all of its industry intact," she says. "This resulted in the U.S. becoming a very wealthy nation and created a higher standard of living that Americans felt would only continue to increase." Lois believes that Americans turned to their new wealth and its purchases for their feeling of self-esteem. We continue to promote material wealth as the key to happiness as our lottery so aptly demonstrates, but as Lois points out, our abundance of wealth is over. If we continue to promote materialism not only will we continue to foster the mean-spiritedness Lois sees so much of in our society, but also our own destruction. She thinks we are becoming very much like a third world nation. "In third world countries the rich live in guarded houses with huge walls around them to keep the poor out. One can see much the same sort of thing in America." Lois also understands that regardless of what country one lives in, huge international corporations seek to impoverish the people in order to provide the cheapest work force.



JOAN HALL

"Women must get into the political game and stay in it."

~Eleanor Roosevelt

Lois believes that our hope lies in the environmental movement. (Her son is the coordinator of the Green Party in Alaska.) She looks forward to the day when people unite around the world to stop not only the exploitation of Earth but also of each other. "We are spending our children's inheritance," she says. "Instead we should be saving our planet's beauty and resources for future generations." She feels that perhaps the most important preservation of resources is to invest in our children and teach them real values, most notably respect for all living things and a balanced lifestyle that consumes less and wastes little. "It takes a whole community to raise children. They have a natural sense of idealism that we should develop. The media promotes little but materialist values to them. The community needs to invest more time and energy into their children's growth and development and find ways for them to be involved with and contributing to the community. It would be nice to see a job or skills bank; a group of adults who have some free time to share their interests and talents with our youth. Though we as a small community don't have many of the problems that turn children to gangs in larger cities, too much of our children's time is focused towards competition. We have an old system that creates failure by continuing the idea of winners and losers, A's and F's, and other such nonsense. Every child should be made to feel as equally valued and needed as any other child. Encourage them to discover themselves and they will naturally come to roles that benefit both themselves and their community. It is a lot better than building more prisons to lock them up in when they come of age. Perhaps with a common community effort for the sake of our children's future, America will redevelop what poorer nations haven't lost -- a rich sense of culture, community, solidarity, and values other than materialism." Lois was impressed with the values of people in poor nations. Instead of finding self-esteem in wealth, power or fame they valued such traits as compassion, generosity, honesty and simplicity in themselves and each other. "They may not have much but they are a far richer people than us."

It is not only a greater sense of community Lois has witnessed in third world countries. Ironically she has seen more democracy in small villages than in the U.S. "Democracy is a word you hear a lot of in this country but you sure don't see much of it," she says. It has been, for her, a deep sense of inspiration to see how these small villages come together and allow and encourage everyone to speak. "They work together and equally. Even under the worst of circumstances they listen to each other and make decisions as a group." For Guatemalans the worst circumstances have been soldiers shooting the men of

the villages, raping then shooting the women and disemboweling or beating the children to death against rocks. Frankly, though the severity differs, many nations are geared to violently exploit their people and this exploitation is supported and often protected by forces promoting U.S. interests. Do you know the true cost of your sugar?

Lois is as Barbara Hansel spoke of her, a quiet saint. She lives on the modest amount of money she makes from renting rooms in her Astoria home to boarders and with this money she goes to Central America to help any way she can. One of her proudest achievements is her friendship with her very conservative neighbor. She always tries to put hatred and anger aside to accomplish what she can and promote tolerance when the opportunity arises. She is one small light looking for the light in others and helping us all to see.

My interview with McLaren Innes was brief and so were her statements. Her brevity made her words no less valid. "Get out and do it. You eat what you work for," is her answer to social and personal change. McLaren does not support traditional ways of approaching problems. She learned from her experience in the peace group Beyond War that anger and aggression, the usual responses to problems, only elicit more anger and aggression and solve nothing. She points to the immense hostility in politics as an excellent example. Because this hostility is promoted through mass media she turns to the alternative press as her source of news and information. She admits that she is not as well informed on many issues as she would like to be, but then Thomas Jefferson said that a person who never looks at a newspaper is better informed than readers whose minds are filled with falsehoods rather than truth.

"I chose to live in Astoria in 1978 having followed a friend here from San Francisco via Tokyo," McLaren says. "I do work that's available including bookkeeping, managing the Community Store and now accounting supervisor at Tongue Point Job Corps Center. The multicultural population at Tongue Point reminds me daily of the challenge in communicating meaningfully between people with different value systems, mores and customs. And it is twice as hard if one perceives themselves as the majority."

McLaren sympathizes with young people and believes that we do not involve them enough in community decisions. She feels that we need to listen not only to our youth but also to each other. Keeping lines of communication open between government and citizens is important to her. She promotes the adage that two heads are better than one; the more opinions that we as a nation are willing to listen and give solid thought to the more likely we are to create a healthy society. "A team of five Presidents would be much better than investing so much power and responsibility into one white man," she says crisply.

McLaren has an optimistic outlook having witnessed remarkable progress in her lifetime. She does not believe we will abandon efforts to move our nation progressively forward. She believes that we are just in a time of confusion brought on by so many dynamic changes in our culture. "The world has become too small a place for us to not get along," she says. Confusing times perhaps, but growth never comes without challenge.

There is probably no tougher struggle than to be a woman in today's society. The pressures directed toward women of what to be and not to be are immense. Yet in spite of all the contradictory demands women are finding themselves, gaining strength in the greater effort required of them. I see Kelly, young but already applying her independent nature and talents to the common good. Bunny, Lois and McLaren are strong independent personalities and have found where they can best serve society. The real work of community and society has usually been left to such women. Women have been the glue of our social framework. The better part of human nature is feminine, the willingness to put personal ego aside and listen, to uplift and draw people together, and most of all to always promote hope. The womb creates new life and humanity's consciousness.

Michael Miller (aka Sasha) lives in Seaside. He wrote about Voltaire's 300th birthday last November for the December 1994 NCTE.



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