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# womantide.

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PROVINCETOWN SUMMER / FALL 1983

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## EDITORIAL



At the time of this writing it is August in Provincetown. Most of us are deeply involved in negotiations of all kinds — negotiations needed for the preservation of jobs, relationships, minds, bodies. It is not a peaceful time, but it is a time of tremendous energy and will.

This issue of *WOMANTIDE* attempts to capture some of that collective energy, making visible some intense emanations of the Provincetown lesbian community. Many of us have been working for over a decade at something which is being shared in these pages.

We are especially pleased at the diversity of opinion and expression readers will find in this issue: nu-wave, radical, cynical, idealist, humanist and spiritualist lesbians have all contributed to these pages. Many extremely fine pieces were submitted, which we had no room to publish — we thank you all, and we continue to hold some in reserve for future issues.

Those works we did choose turned out to be an affirmation of passion in the face of death. An appropriate theme, we felt, from the center of a very hot and difficult Provincetown summer. Our centerfold is in more ways than one at the heart of this issue: a poem and a painting both dedicated to Kali, an ancient Hindu goddess in whom the forces of creation and destruction are personified.

A very warm and heartfelt "thank you" from all of us at *WOMANTIDE* goes to those whose special contributions helped to cover the extra costs of printing this issue: Alice Brock, Yvonne Butler, Angela Calomiris, Joy Freeman, Astri Goode, Donna Sabechy and many others who preferred to remain anonymous.

Once again, the businesses listed on the last page of this magazine are the backbone of support for *WOMANTIDE*. Most are lesbian-owned, some are not — all are making independent lesbian expression possible. Please support them whenever you can. □

## SUMMER ISSUE DELAYED

### *Centerfold Causes Controversy*

In an unexpected development which left both the staff at *WOMANTIDE* and our local printing company dumbfounded, our summer issue has been delayed by the refusal of Rhode Island and Massachusetts specialized printers to perform the color-separation process for *KALI*, our centerfold painting by Jane Kogan.

Executives of these firms, mistakenly labeling Jane's work as "pornographic," claimed they would not upset their technicians by exposing them to it. One Rhode Island company president, believing it to depict the aftermath of a castration exercise by a woman on a man, refused it quite violently.

Jane Kogan studied at the Art Students' League in New York City; graduated with Honors in Fine Arts from Brandeis University; lived in Rome for 2 years on a Fulbright in Painting; received her M.F.A. from Columbia University, and in short has been painting all her life. She came to Provincetown as a Fellow at the Fine Arts Work Center, and has stayed ever since. This year she was given a show at the Provincetown Art Association; and she regularly exhibits her work at Ellen Harris Gallery.

Following is Jane's description of the painting in our centerfold:

"In fact, in my painting, the circle on the right encloses a lotus (symbol of life) and what Kali is holding in her hand on left is a transparent womb with vulva in it, symbol of renewal. (In India, Kali's vulva is worshiped by her followers. She is the main deity of Calcutta.)

Kali means "The Dark Lady" and is India's supreme manifestation of the Mother Goddess. She symbolizes the triple cosmic phases of creation, preservation, and dissolution, thus embracing the totality of existence. She is the most powerful of female deities.

She is usually depicted black faced, black-bodied (or deep blue), with blue-black hair, tongue lolling, her fanged mouth dribbling blood. She is hideous to view but must be loved as a manifestation of totality of life. Most often she's shown wearing a necklace of skulls.

In my painting, we see the jackal and the snake, associated animals of Kali. The lotus equals life, and the bloody sword she holds symbolizes death. She holds a transparent womb, with her vulva enclosed, again a symbol of the Creation force of Kali. From her vagina comes a pink umbilical cord, through which one sees blood that then spreads out to plants and flowers as nourishment. In my



image, her blood, spouting from her breasts, or coming from her vagina, is the blood of life. As the bloody sword brings death, so her blood brings life, and the combination keeps the world going, both creation and destruction.

Kali is hard to look at and harder to accept, but must be accepted as part of life in all its violence, brutality, and renewal." □

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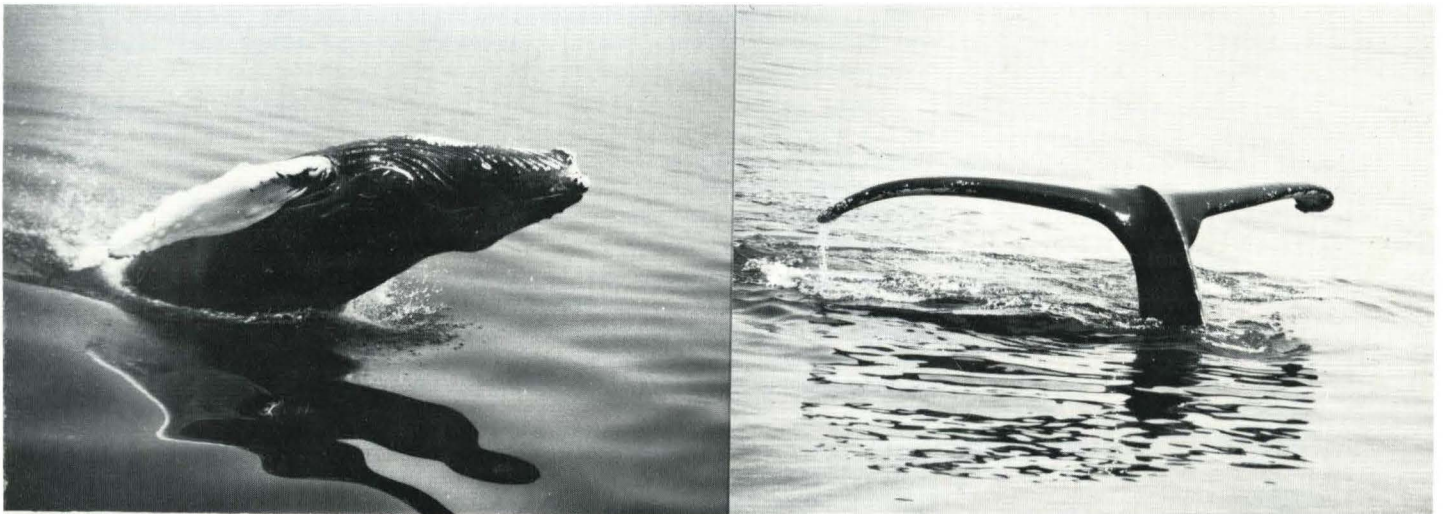
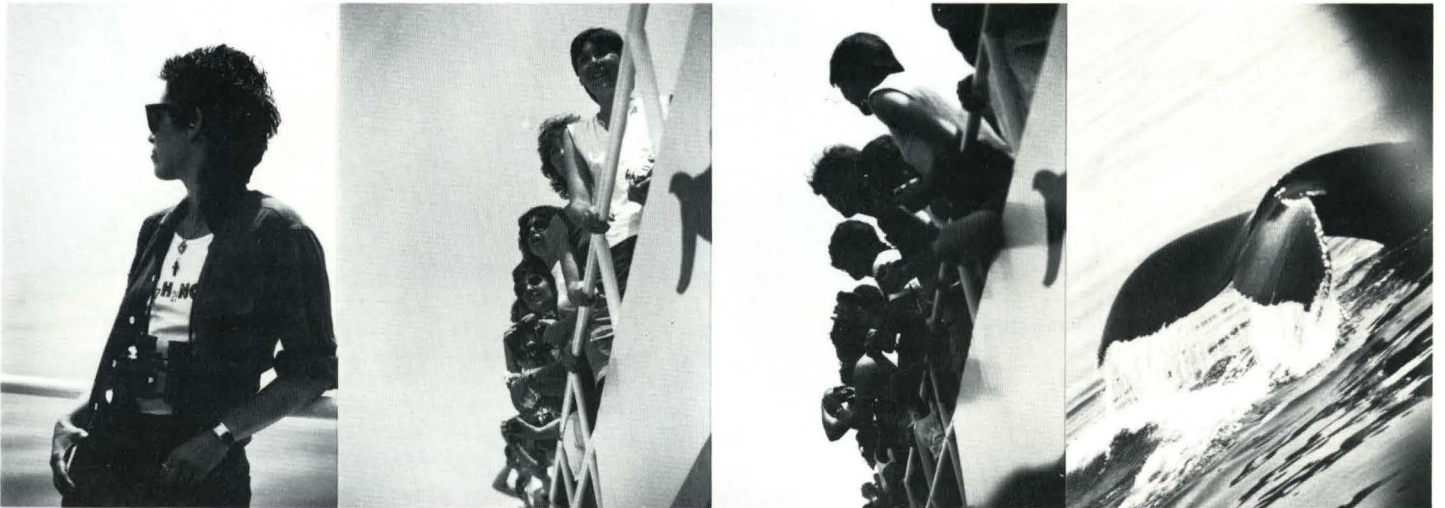
Cover photo: "Working Dykes Hold Up The Cape," by Gabriel Brooke

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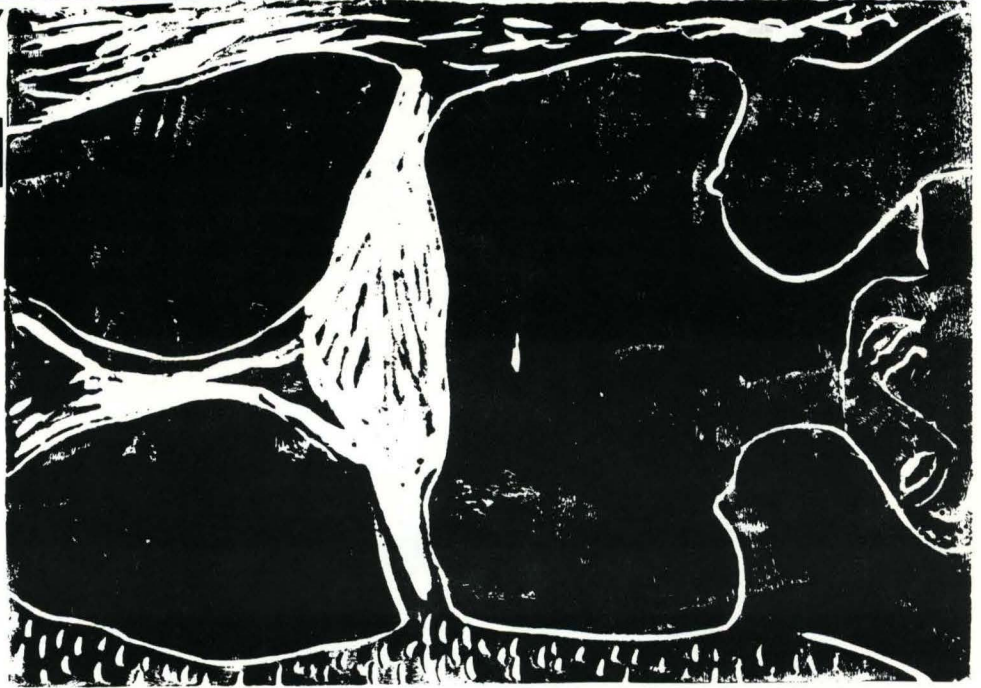
# LESBIAN WHALE WATCH I

## JUNE, 1983

### PHOTOGRAPHS BY LEE BROCK



## BODY FUSION



Woodcuts by Carol Pugliese, 1983

### reshaping the energy

I started feeling like I was painting her body, sculpting.  
Yes, I often feel that. I wrote a fragment many years ago  
. . . the sculptor at work  
in her nearby studio  
releasing a woman's body  
from its pillar of milky loam

That was it, you know, it was reshaping and reforming the energy in her body. I started singing, humming, painting her. She had had an operation on her knee, had a ligament taken out, had been told old age, and it was starting to happen to the other knee, so I was just imagining that I was piecing it back together, smoothing things out and making it whole again, making it vibrant and giving it energy, and I was there with color . . .

### a bond with women

Maybe we feel a bond with women . . . You know, whenever I hear myself say 'I feel this with women' I realize that I feel it with men too. I feel a bond with them, we're human. Yet there's a very deep personal satisfaction about working with women. It's like working on myself, that's it! With men I feel the work, using and giving all my knowledge, making an opening for wholeness and there's service in that, but with women whatever I'm doing to them happens to my own being.

### a body to put my hands into

She was going to 'do me' the way one does acid, she said. I travel people to a place I inhabit in my creativity, a place of deep and active rest. In order to go on doing that I have to safeguard that place in myself, taking time to seek, experience and articulate health. But when I'm not working, I miss it, in the middle of the day I just long for a body to put my hands into, the peace and cleansing of it.

### commitment

And I saw what you do, how you move through your space and how much you need space, your meditating, your whole way of living, your healthiness as very actively a part of the massage that you do, offering your consciousness as a channel for your skills. I always believed that my discipline as an artist was more than a personal matter, that the poem was the vehicle or the by-product of it.

For me the word is commitment; commitment to myself, commitment to my work, it's not separate.

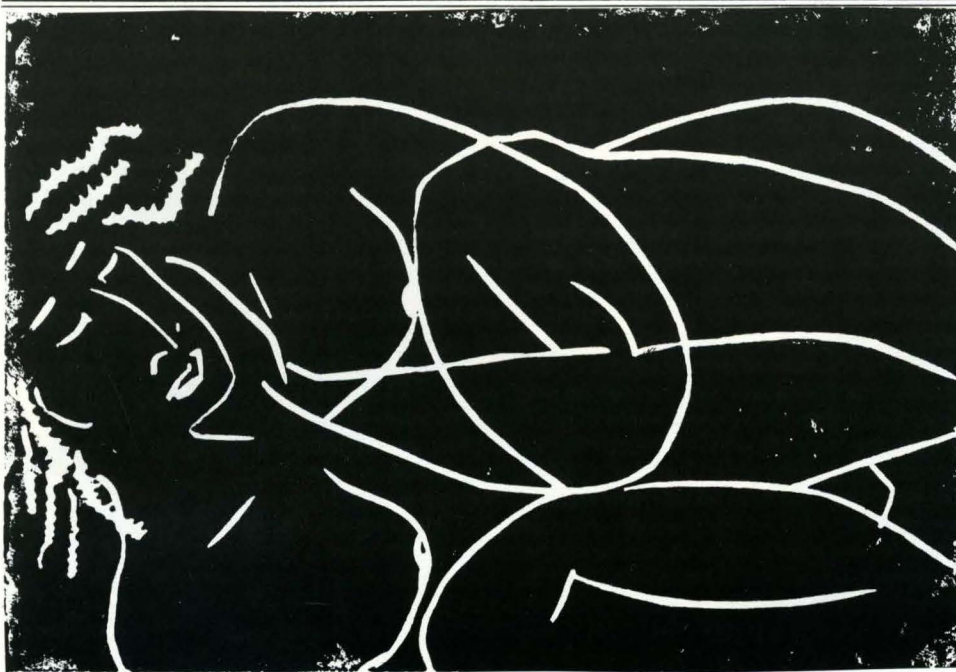
Talk about the feeling of commitment, where it is in your body.

It's my heart. And then it's all over, a physical, spiritual, mental, emotional state.

### to allow your pleasure

What I'm aware of putting out to people as a vibration when I work with them is . . . to open up to who they are, to inhabit that so that they can express and release what's in the way for them. By the end of the day that's where I end up. The more I do this work the more I want to dance, to express, to release.

The message I'm sending through is allow your pleasure. People come in with stores of sadness, fear, anger they haven't dealt with, trauma stored in the muscles,



# THE GOOD PARTS

of a conversation between JACQUI MAC, founder of Wonderful Hands Healing and Bodywork Studio, health practitioner, musician, disc-jockey, and OLGA BROUMAS, poet, founder of Freehand: a learning community of women writers and photographers, and bodyworker at Wonderful Hands.

and that comes through in the first sessions for some people, discharging that, but centrally everyone is going around with a vast source of pleasure that is their own, in their body, and not relative to another being. I'm sculpting and freeing the passages for that central core of wellbeing, which is what pleasure is, to radiate into the person. To me health and pleasure are synonymous.

Tension will chase out pleasure, you have to undo the tension to feel it, and once tension becomes habitual to how we move in our daily lives it becomes embedded in the muscles and not available to conscious control. So people forget, in their bodies, how to feel good. It doesn't take much on the physical level: the passages are open, you feel good. If you sweep the floor, it's clean.

What we're doing is setting up a new dynamic in people. Having felt pleasure intensely, the body turns to it, seeks it out.

What I mean by pleasure is freedom.

I play the energy field of the body as I play the acoustic field of an instrument, letting the vibration go through us and trusting the effect that it has, immediate and deep. Some memory takes over and I watch myself play this piece, move with someone through deep emotion to joy.

Someone lies down in front of you and you sit behind their head and put your hands on their neck, and watch how the energy patterns move, or don't move, through the body. Then you work with what is. And that close attention to what is, moment by moment, is similar to making music. No intending something other than what is. The only words I have to describe what I do is *existing energy*, what is there already: to free that, to add nothing.

Being in the body, its pleasure, its wellbeing — the flipside to that is being attached. What we do when we die is detach, let go the body. To fully inhabit, learn, and honor our body as the site of our life is our responsibility on this physical plane. All the knowledge we have is in our bodies, directly stored in our musculature, our personal maps that we were given.

Sometimes in the beginning you think about the pain, the pleasure, the events, but health is a balancing act, a process. There's no moment of balance except that it be unbalanced the next, to be brought into balance again to be thrown off . . .

When you die the last sense of the five that goes is hearing. I think that sound transcends time. It also transcends, as in traverse, matter, and it goes through matter at matter's pace, it's totally non-invasive. What I was doing in disc-jockeying with the music was working with the energy. Starting in a given place with the crowd, getting rid of all the garbage going on around everybody, bringing them into harmony with

freedom from tension

playing the body

making music

the site of life

balancing

focus and detachment

continued on page 14

## POEM

Kate Rushin, whose poetry has been widely published in anthologies and small magazines, recently was awarded a major lesbian honor in Boston, the Oasis Award. She has worked through the Artists' Foundation as a Poet-in-the-Schools, and taught for three years at Cummington Community for the Arts. She is now working at the feminist bookstore of Cambridge, Mass., NEW WORDS BOOKSTORE.

During her years in Provincetown, Kate wrote, and acted in the Provincetown Theater Company. The photograph on this page was taken by Nini Lyons while Kate was listening to a recording of Carson McCullers reading her own works. We are pleased to present the following new, unpublished poem by Kate Rushin.



## A Pacifist Becomes Militant And Declares War by Kate Rushin

*In the old days  
I'd see lovers  
Strolling and laughing  
I'd watch them and smile  
And almost let myself wonder  
Why I never felt the way they seemed to look*

*Now I walk down the street with you  
And simply because you are always a woman  
I get this teetering feeling*

*Your sudden  
Street-corner kisses  
Accentuate my hesitation  
And I realize  
That in order to care about you  
I have to be everything that is in me*

*Your laughter underscores the  
Sick sinking feeling in my stomach and  
I know once and for all  
If I walk away  
Hide from you  
I run run keep on running from myself*

*Sometimes  
When you kiss me on the street  
I feel like a sleepwalker  
I feel like I just woke up  
And I'm standing on a ledge  
Twenty stories high  
And I don't know how in the hell I got here  
I say to myself  
I say Fool  
Why don't you go home and act right  
You don't have to be here  
Pretend it never happened  
Pretend you never felt a thing  
Except maybe in a nightmare  
Or maybe it was a salty half-shell dream*

*Go home and act right  
But what for  
I can never go back  
To what never was  
I can't force myself to fit  
Somebody else's image of a woman*

*And if I love you  
Even just a little bit  
I have to love the woman that I am  
I have to reach down deep inside  
I have to stand and show myself  
I have to walk in the world  
And I know there is never any going back  
Only going forward  
Into the next day  
And the day after that*

*Your full-length street-corner kiss  
Is seasoned with excitement  
And rebellion  
You incite me to riot*

*O.K.  
Then I'm a rebel  
I'm a crazy niggah woman  
A Kamikazi woman  
Declaring war on my old ways  
On all my fear  
My choking  
My cringing  
My hesitation*

*I break my fast and admit  
That I am hungry  
I am hungry to care  
To become careless  
Careful  
Juicy*

*O.K.  
So I'm a rebel  
Get ready for the insurrection  
Get ready for the  
Rebellion  
Uprising  
Riot of my kisses □*

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# Provincetown June

## The Rose and the Palm



*A Story by Sam Mitchell*

**O**n this sunny Saturday morning as I walk along Commercial Street from the quiet East End to my job in the center of town, the fresh smell of the sea air mingles with the scent of roses blooming behind white picket fences in the locals' yards. Red, white, yellow, pink, apricot, on each block different colors and varieties delight me. There are wild roses, long stemmed elegant tea roses.

This long, narrow street which in one month will be full of tourists and cars, today seems to burst with sunshine and roses.

Glancing up Pearl Street I notice two young women in jeans and T-shirts, their hair carefully cropped and combed, who have stopped in front of a bush of pink tea roses growing over a white picket fence. They stick their noses into the rings of petals and breathe deeply the odor of rose. After they go on their way, laughing and talking, holding hands, I take their place at the fence. Last year a small neat sign on the manicured lawn announced that this was the Olivers' yard. This year a larger sign says that the property is for sale and gives the name and number of a local real estate office. Frank Oliver, Provincetown volunteer fireman, died fighting a fire in a restaurant last October. Through the years I had often seen him working in the small yard he had ringed with tall tea rose bushes of red, white and pink. I stand before the low fence and wonder who will take care of Frank Oliver's rose garden now. I reach to touch a giant pink bloom growing gracefully in the sunshine. I draw it near and bury my face in its fragrance. The June air makes its perfume sharp and sweet.

The beauty of this rose is made more piercing because I know its moment is so brief. This month in June each rose is fresh, every bush along my way covered in perfect blooms. By the time the 4th of July brings the heat of the season, most of them will be overblown. Their colors will still be bright but they will be wasted, their petals will lie wide open and limp. The effort of being so perfectly beautiful this one week of June in a small seaside town will exhaust their strength. They reach their fullness and collapse.

In the back of my mind a soft voice whispers, the voice of a poet from a distant time and place. Against the backdrop of sun and flowers, I hear the voice of a French poet in his Renaissance certainty proclaiming "Just as the rose blooms in the morning and fades at the close of day, so you, my love, will bloom but one brief moment. Gather up your youth before time fades you as quickly as the rose."

When I was younger I was haunted by the metaphor of the woman as a rose, haunted by the certainty that a woman fades after the first bloom of her youth, a certainty I found echoed in male poets. But years of living here in Provincetown have convinced me that though a woman's beauty may at times equal the roses of summer, it continues long after her first bloom. As I look around me at the sturdy and beautiful women who inhabit this colorful town I don't see them fading like roses, I see them growing like strong plants or trees.

I would compare my lover, not to a rose, but to a palm tree. I would write — Her beauty is like the palm tree. She grows slender and strong by the edge of the sea. She gives me shelter from the tropical sun. Her crown of fronds reaches toward the blue sky. She faces the sea and looks outward to watch the changes as the sun appears and sets and the colors and darkness chase each other. She responds to the wind, her fronds wave or dance in the wind. Sometimes the whole palm will bend in a gale. Only the fiercest hurricane can uproot her.

So far from the tropics the image quickly fades. Again the roses, the sun, the quaint narrow street surround me. Standing once again before the white picket fence of the rose garden, I remember who I am and that I must be off to work. Again I press my face to the fresh pink rose before me. With a silent thanks to the master gardener, I slip my jack knife from my pocket and take this beauty with me as I continue on my way. She will sit in a glass of water on the windowsill of the workshop, to bring inside the beauty of June in Provincetown. □

*Sam Mitchell is a professional leather crafter and an amateur writer. She has been living in Provincetown year-round for the last four years. This story is her first published work.*

**KALI: DESTROYER AND PRESERVER**



Oil on canvas: 84" x 43½"  
Jane Kogan 10/78

*kali-fetish of  
The empty body*

1.  
*They sniff my hair,  
my skin, my body,  
my pelt still warm  
with the odor of perfume.*
2.  
*They caress my shoulders,  
frightened by the coldness  
of their own fingertips.*
3.  
*I am the goddess  
I reflect the lust  
of an audience for itself.  
I wear a breastplate of mirrors,  
a tiara of human skulls,  
while beneath my bootheel  
I crush egotistical lovers.*
4.  
*I am the demon lover, death.  
Your mind collapses  
from the weight of your desire  
into mine.  
I leave you  
with nothing.*
- 5.
6.  
*I am the demon lover, death.  
Your mind collapses  
from the weight of your desire  
into mine.  
I leave you  
with nothing.*
7.  
*I am the goddess  
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*They sniff my hair,  
my skin, my body,  
my pelt still warm  
with the odor of perfume.*

by randy turoff



## SUSAN HARRISON SPEAKS CANDIDLY ON LEATHER

Susan "Gina" Harrison is a leather designer and has been a Provincetown businesswoman for fourteen years. Her retail and custom outlet, HALF MOON BAY LEATHER, is probably the most popular leather shop frequented by lesbians in Provincetown. This past July, editor Sherry Dranch of WOMANTIDE conducted the following interview.

**SHERRY:** Susan, can you remember how leather fashions became part of your life?

**SUSAN:** Well, I guess it started out as an obsession, as do most things in my life. I was living in New York and I had a friend who had one of those old braided bracelets and someone unbraided it at a party. And she brought it to me, this woman I was seeing, and she said, "You live in the village, go down there and get one of those hippies to fix it for you," and I said "Okay." And I went to all those leather shops down there and they all sold them but nobody knew how to do them. And I was pretty despondent and I went and bought a pack of cigarettes and a six-pack of beer and I went into Washington Square and I sat down, and I just kept playing with it, and all of a sudden it was done. But I didn't know how I had done it. So I was pretty happy and I was walking back and I met this man on the street and he was selling hundreds of them. And I told him the saga of the bracelet and he said "Oh, it's real easy," and he did it just like that, and it was like magic.

So I went home and I immediately took all my roommates' belts and I cut them all up and I braided them all, every last one of them. I thought it was such a wonderful thing and that they would all be so pleased. And that was it. I was hooked.

**SHERRY:** It seems a long way from braided bracelets to the fashion designs of Half Moon Bay Leather.

**SUSAN:** Well, I played with that for a while, and then I opened up a store here in Provincetown, with a bunch of people, mostly a Mexican store. It was an accident, spur of the moment thing, we came down for a weekend, we said "Wow, wouldn't it be cool to have a store in Provincetown," and we didn't get rich, I think I came out with forty dollars.

And then I went back to New York, and worked really hard wholesaling all winter. I

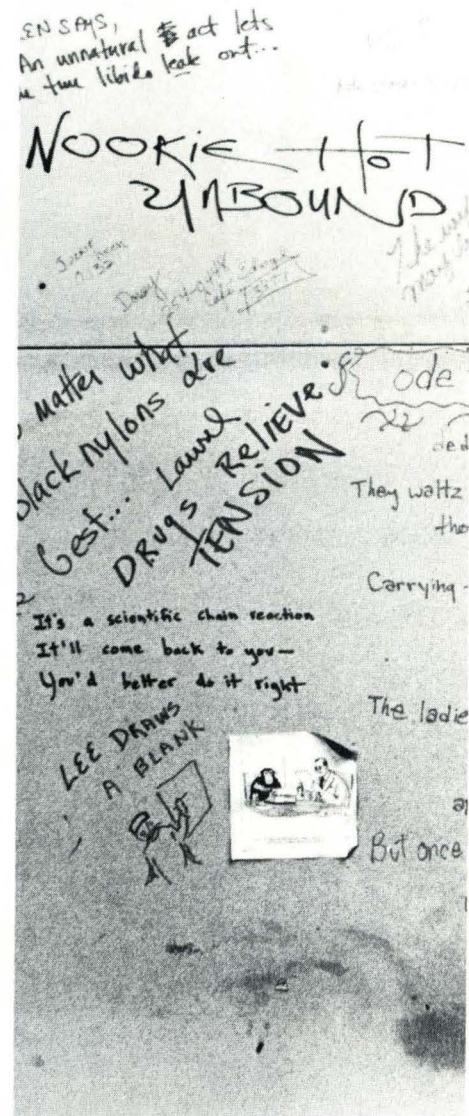
would dress up and go and see buyers, I would sell to Bloomingdale's and Bendel's and all those places — we were just doing belts, we were doing fashion belts — and I would go in and pretend to be the rep, and I would show them the line and say "two weeks' delivery" and then I would rush home and I would work 'round the clock with my partner to make these things. They thought we had a factory.

And then we came back here the next summer, and we had a different store the second year which was a disaster. People used to come in and say "Is this a Drug Rehab Center?" which was kind of demoralizing.

But we made a little more money that year. And we kept going back and forth to New York. I had an apartment on Second Avenue near the U.N., and one on Thirteenth Street and Sixth. Nice neighborhood. Lots of young girls' residences. I used to enjoy living on that block. It was also "only a block from Cookie's." which was *the* dyke bar then, you know, so it was ultimately very convenient. So I kept doing wholesale, and peddling, and I kept coming back here. And every year we'd do a few more things, and a few more things.

And I finally got my nerve up and bought a sewing machine which I was terrified of for the first three months. I used to sweat every time I came near it. It took me that long to get over being afraid of it. Took me two days to learn how to make my first motorcycle jacket. I literally locked myself in the workshop and would not allow *any other person* in there. It was for Chrissie Teubner. It was a red one. She wanted it very badly. I assured her I could do it. "I can do it."

That's how a lot of things came out. People would come in and say, "Can you do so-and-so?" And I'd say "Yeah, I can do that." What the hell. You try it. Either you do it or you don't if you don't you say "I made



a mistake and I couldn't do it. And here's your cheerful money back." That's the worst that can happen. You know, I'd make something and every time I'd make something new I'd bring it out and say, "Does this look like a real thing?" and everybody would say, "Yeah, it looks like a real thing to me."

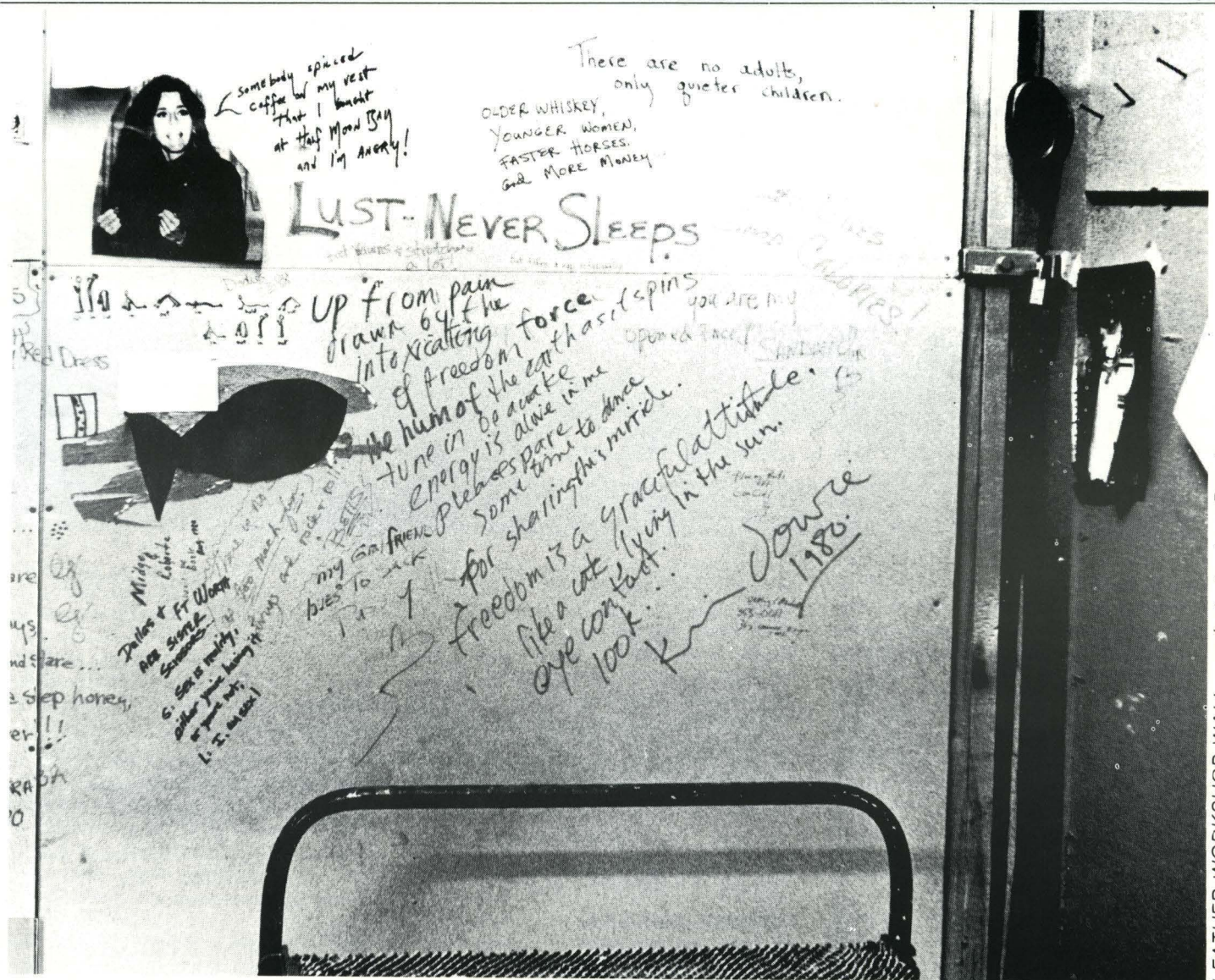
**SHERRY:** How do you know what a real thing is?

**SUSAN:** Well, it's supposed to fit, and it's supposed to have a certain look to it.

**SHERRY:** And how do you know what that look is?

**SUSAN:** Well it fits, basically. It fits and it gives a person a certain air when they put it on. A certain style.

**SHERRY:** What about your workshop? It's been a whole life for you, it's a lesbian space that you've spent many hours working in, and it's fairly unique . . .



LEATHER WORKSHOP WALL — photo by Lee Brock

**SUSAN:** What about the workshop.

**SHERRY:** Have you got any stories about living in there?

**SUSAN:** I have actually lived in the workshop. I . . . was going through an emotional crisis in my life where I was splitting up with a lover that I own a house with. And it was not possible at the time, due to the highly charged emotions, for us to be living in the same space. So I moved into the workshop. We decided to see what we could salvage from the situation. Which we've been very successful at, by the way. I moved into the workshop, and I lived there for about three months, and it was really a trip, it was really bizarre, there was a little tiny . . . smaller than a single bed, it was really cot-sized. The bathroom was outside, around and up some stairs, and you were always running into all the derelicts, all the wharf-rats while trying to get to the bathroom so you really tried to time it just right. No cooking, of course, and I think I kept my

clothes in cardboard boxes under the bed.

**SHERRY:** What was it like there at night? What were your dreams like?

**SUSAN:** It was very lonely. For a while. Then it wasn't lonely any more.

**SHERRY:** Why, who joined you in there?

**SUSAN:** Well actually, Lee joined me in there. And then we *both* lived in this tiny space on this cot-sized bed. And it was just wonderful, they used to come to work in the morning, and open the door and say "Can we come in now?" And bring coffee. All of this in the middle of the summer of course. Summer madness.

The old workshop was very different from the current one. It used to be totally covered with graffiti inside. It was all good stuff. There was nothing there that someone had not actually said in our presence. People would come in, and they'd just be talking about things, and they'd say something and we'd

all look up and say "That's WALL material." At some point Carol decided to bring in nude pictures of herself for some strange reason I don't know why, and she brought them in and put them up and that was amusing for a while. Cards and letters and pictures from magazines and obscure things were on the walls . . . A lot of Trashette's early writings first appeared on the walls of the workshop, before they ever appeared in the newspaper. One of her originals: WHAT THE HEART CAN'T HANDLE THE WHIP WILL, was a workshop wall presentation. And the ever-popular LUST NEVER SLEEPS was created on the workshop wall.

**SHERRY:** Was it really?

**SUSAN:** Yes it certainly was. It was August, it was hot, it was hot and it was hot. And Betts, who silk-screened T-shirts, had this sign that she had thrown against the wall — we'd always throw things back and forth and yell at each other — she threw this sign

*continued on next page*

Sue Harrison continued

against the wall that said GET HOT OR GET OUT. We liked that. And everybody kept kidding us about never sleeping. We were always up. We had decided we weren't going to sleep for the rest of the summer. And someone came in and said something about lust never sleeps, and it instantly went on the wall. And then Sammy told Betts as a joke that she wanted a dozen of those shirts just for the workshop people, and we did it. And people went *crazy* for them. I have sold, let me say thousands of them. Here's to the workshop walls!

**SHERRY:** What were the styles and the roles you created for people that were the most "real?"

**SUSAN:** I don't know, I've created a lot of roles for people I guess. Sex toys cost extra, 'cause I don't like to make 'em. Well, that's not true either. That's a lie. I don't like to make sex toys for some people. Some people I don't mind. Sometimes I get some really charming dykes in, and I just have a real good time with them, and I'm delighted to make sex toys for them if that's what they want, you know. Well, the faggots, um . . . some of them are great and some of them are really a pain in the neck . . . and . . . straight women never ask for sex toys, I don't know why . . . Straight *men* ask for sex toys, I don't like them. I tell them it costs double. I tell them. I tell them the name of every place that sells sex toys, you know here, in Boston and in New York, and then I say, "You can get them there for this much; if you want me to make them here it will cost you this much."

Most of the people are charming. I had two *wonderful* lesbians come in, they were from the Midwest. I tell you, things are not what they seem in the Midwest. They were . . . one of them had the most intense eyes I think I've every seen on a human being. I mean, she walked in the door and like I couldn't breathe for about a minute. Her eyes were like stunning, they were like fried marbles, you know just totally crystalline. Blue with like lines in them. They were just intense, intense eyes. And her friend was also extremely fascinating, magnetic you know, both of them were like very quiet.

And like, all she wanted was just some little leather briefs. But she would not let me measure her. I'm like, "I cannot make this tight-fitting body item for you if I don't measure you." And then finally it turns out that she had this tattoo, and she wanted this tattoo to show. They finally did allow me to see the tattoo, briefly, after I had made everyone else leave. It was something simple, a flower or something, close to her hip-bone, it wasn't odd or particularly low or anything. But you do have to take a measurement, she said I could take a waist measurement and that was all. I said, "I'll do the best I can." So I made this item for her, and she came back and she tried it on, and

I guess she was delighted, she went away I never saw her again, but she was smiling when she came out from trying it on, I said was it okay and she said it was fine . . . you never can tell . . .

**SHERRY:** How do you come up with some of your designs?

**SUSAN:** Like the oxford shirt, it was like the Presidential election, and when they announced Ronald Reagan had won, I turned to Carol, one of the seamstresses, and I said "Carol," — this pattern I did not make, it's like the only thing in the store that I don't make, I've never made one — I said "Carol, I want you to make me a pattern for an oxford shirt." She said, "In leather?" I said, "Yeah." I said, "Ronald Reagan has just won the Presidency, there's going to be a conservative backlash like you've never seen. I want oxford shirts in that store." She said, "You're crazy." I said "Trust me." So she did, and they've been a big hit. Now you see them everywhere.

And that's how a lot of designs come about. It's like something . . . it just comes to you. Just . . . whole, almost, in its entirety. The last two designs I've come up with have come to me like that, while I was cutting something else. And it was like, like seeing a picture in a book. It would just . . . be there in front of me. And I'd have to stop and draw a picture of it.

**SHERRY:** Tell me more about the skins themselves.

**SUSAN:** You see a lot of odd things. If you're squeamish, you probably shouldn't look at your leather too closely.

**SHERRY:** Why not?

**SUSAN:** Well, cows are careless, you know. They're careless, and if they have an itch, they'll rub up against whatever's there, and they'll rub, frequently, until they cut themselves. I mean you'll see a long, jagged scar, and you can see the stitch marks where they sewed them up. Even in the high grade leathers, you're going to find a certain amount of things on them. If you really look, you can see little tiny swirls — that's where the word "cowlick" comes from — where the hair follicles were.

And it used to be with American leather, they were not allowed to tan it and leave the teats on. It was not allowed. They had to cut them off, and the only time you ever saw them was when you got leather from South America. And the first time I got leather from South America I was like, "What is this?" I had no idea what it was. Now I see some American leather that has its teats. And Japanese leather does, frequently.

**SHERRY:** What would you say that Provincetown women wear the most, in terms of leather?

**SUSAN:** Well, a lot of them like the two-tone jacket, but none of them want their jacket to be like anybody else's. So they all come in with an idea of how they want it to be. And then of course there's Spike. Well, Spike decided she wanted chaps and she came in and they had to be of course skin-tight and they were. And then she had to have a jacket, and it had to be skin-tight and it was. And she was wonderful, because she had come to town in polyester, and then she just like walked into this outfit — her Calvin Klein jeans, and her, her signal, a one-strapped Italian T-shirt, and her leather jacket and her chaps. And that was it. She didn't take it off all summer.

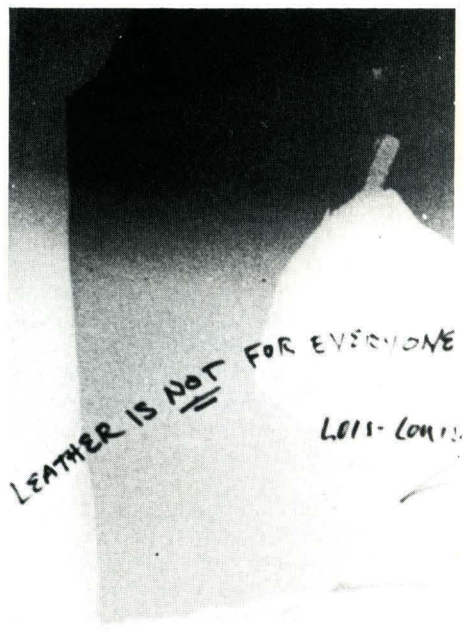
I think most of the women in this town have got a pretty strong idea of what their persona is. I don't think I have to do a lot of creating. You do more creating with women who come from a fairly straight environment where they have to be closeted pretty much of the time — and they want to feel different. And they look around the shop, which is filled with things that I wear or would want to wear, androgynous, and clean, and classic . . . and they look around, and I think they really want to feel like the women in this town, or what they perceive the women in the town to feel like. There's a certain mystique to the women here: "Ooh, you live here *all* the time?"

**SHERRY:** And you're there, you're the front line. You interpret for them.

**SUSAN:** I do my best.

**SHERRY:** You show them how they can become that image they have of a "Provincetown woman."

**SUSAN:** I give it my best shot. That's all you can do. □



# A Land of No Blame

Last summer, **JUDITH ISRAEL**, director and actress in the theater for over twenty years, published an account in these pages of her literary odyssey through the works of Jane Chambers. Her project for the summer of '83 was to direct and star in Chambers' two-act play, *MY BLUE HEAVEN*, a production staged here in Provincetown at the Pied Piper.



Judy and Sherry — Photos by Nini Lyons

The following conversation between Judy and WOMANTIDE editor Sherry Dranch, took place two days before that summer production opened.

**SHERRY:** At this point in your continuing odyssey with Jane's work, you are a performer and director, rather than just a reader. How has this changed your relationship to Jane's work?

**JUDY:** I feel very intimate with Jane Chambers, particularly with her strengths. Coming back to *MY BLUE HEAVEN* is like returning to a favorite place, do you know what I mean, to a childhood place. It's coming back to life-assertiveness, to faith in love. It is a constant lesson in the joyous ways that humor is the super-glue to any relationship. That once you lose your sense of humor, you might as well pull the plug on the raft of love, as it were.

I think with Jane, as with most playwrights, the creation of characters must be somewhat of a dream process. A part of the writer, as well as parts of everyone to whom she feels close, is in each of her characters. So for example in *MY BLUE HEAVEN* Josie probably represents not only Beth Allen, Jane's lover and life-mate, but also incorporates all of the positive aspects of the many women Jane has loved, and been close to, and had ongoing relations with.

**SHERRY:** When you say "positive aspects," what do you mean, specifically?

**JUDY:** I do believe that when entering the world of love, we must enter a land of no blame. And, that's easier said . . . But once we do give over that grace, and there is a trust and mutuality, then there are positive and negative qualities that can be nurtured or dispelled within that mutuality.

On the simplest level, it is very easy to make someone you love feel comfortable within any given situation. For example, in *MY BLUE HEAVEN*, when Molly senses Josie's jealousy about the return of an ex-boyfriend, she *immediately* reassures her that this is not a situation to be insecure in. Once you enter that fragile land, then it seems to me that there are qualities that you begin to reinforce, that you begin to work at. It is work. Strengthening and sustaining love . . . a relationship is work.

And this doesn't have to be such an awesome thing. People are often so very escapist from the responsibility, you know. I think one of the ways people opt out of that responsibility is to enter into the politics of sexuality. For instance somebody asked me once if I "came out" politically. Was it a political decision. So, it's a political decision! You know, I really *have* been out in the woods too long, I do not, I am not hearing right . . . When I realized this was a serious question put to me, after I had stopped laughing over that fact . . . well, I may be old-fashioned, but I think that *that* has nothing to do with the land of love of which I speak, so if I may return to that . . .

**SHERRY:** Yes, back to Molly and Josie, or Jane and Beth . . .

**JUDY:** Yes, they eliminate the negative side of things that happen within that land, the fears and insecurities, the baggage each of them has brought to, and accumulated within, a relationship — they eliminate this with humor. Laughter is such a panacea. To have somebody that you can sit down with and have them laugh with you at the end of a day that has been just horrifying . . . Who wants sympathy, I want somebody to laugh with me!

**SHERRY:** What do you think happened in the ten years before *MY BLUE HEAVEN* opens, between "Molly" and "Josie." What is their theoretic pre-history?

**JUDY:** Their mutuality was the fruition of their independent goals within their relationship. "Married life," or committed mutuality, is so often described as a trade-off. But when it works, I think of it more as a festive exchange . . . Let's see . . . Molly and Josie met in a city, and Josie was working for IBM, probably in low management, but somewhere Molly says Josie could have been earning thirty thousand, which would probably translate into seventy thousand now. And what happened was that Molly wrote a popular book, *Living the Good Gay Life*, and she lost her job in the New York City school system as a result.

**SHERRY:** That's social realism . . .

**JUDY:** It's a fact within the context of the play. So what is Molly's response to that fact? Anger? Bitterness? Cynicism? Does she enter into a decision to write only anti-patriarchal literature? No, she would have dried up. You see, my search, my joy with Jane's writing is exemplified here: yes, Molly lost her job teaching. So the question is, not how to change her writing, but where to go to continue writing the way she wants.

**SHERRY:** For television, politics, theater . . . where to go?

**JUDY:** *Anyplace*. In other words, Molly and Josie's move to the country was not being-led-into-hiding, it was a clear going-for-freedom.

Here we see something "terrible" has happened, a woman losing her job and

*continued on next page*

*Judy Israel continued*

moving away to a dilapidated farm in upstate New York with her lover. And let me add, that as the play put it, the royalties from *Living the Good Gay Life* paid for that farm. For nine years Josie had been wanting to live on a farm, had been living in the city, hating her job there, didn't even know, until she got to the country, how much she simply wanted to work on repairing old clocks and hairdriers and restoring antiques.

I think that somewhere along the line the decision was clear to them. What was important was to be in a place where each of them could attempt, within the spectrum of realities, to realize their separate dreams.

**SHERRY:** How do you feel about playing the role of Molly at this time, so soon after Jane's death?

**JUDY:** Since Jane died, there has been a lot of grief and sense of loss amongst her friends, and of course for Beth. By playing Molly right now, I've been able to re-immense myself in Jane's humor. And Beth Allen recently told me that the very day Jane died, she was laughing. She took medication, she suffered grave human indignity, so that she might be able to continue writing for as long as she could dictate, for as long as her mouth could open, no matter what happened to her. That's how dedicated, how life-assertive, this woman was.

**SHERRY:** There was a specific condition under which Jane could create. And that was with the support of the women she loved and who loved her.

**JUDY:** She loved women. She was a feminist. She wrote about her life. The play is the meshing of many paths that have resulted in some realizations. One of them was that to approach life as a separatist and with anger is counter-productive, though there are justifications for anger. When one inhabits oneself, and lives out the truths of

one's life, it no longer becomes necessary to fight for separatism.

**SHERRY:** How do you view the lesbian experience in Jane's plays?

In *LAST SUMMER AT BLUEFISH COVE* there is a sexual love affair that happens between the characters Lil and Eva, which they both talk about and perform on stage together. It is very life-affirming. All the characters comment on it, saying this is Lil's summer (she is hoped to be recovering from cancer), let's give her this summer with love, let her have the space to be strong and sexual and a lesbian. And I have heard this makes a tremendous impression on the audience. And in *MY BLUE HEAVEN* there is also a wonderfully funny monologue by Josie which goes something like "if we never make love, why not become nuns and get a grant for this place as a spiritual retreat instead of being stepped on as dykes." Lesbian sexuality seems to be germane to the best understanding of Jane's work, it's a central experience.

**JUDY:** It's a central experience between Josie and Molly, just as love is a central experience between any two human beings who have lived together for ten years. Any two people, and this means men-women, women-women, men-men . . . I think it's universal.

**SHERRY:** We're speaking of particular moments that become these plays, not of "any" two people.

**JUDY:** In *MY BLUE HEAVEN*, the situation involves women living together, and loving together. The struggles that they encounter are universal among people who love one another. Jane's political point is that it is not an abnormal state for these universalities to be lived out by two women.

**SHERRY:** The reality is that it's enough of an oppressive state, it's enough to force

Molly into a farm-journal column predicated on gender denial about herself and her "Big Joe." Wasn't this a denial of something central and specific, a dangerous denial for a writer? For Molly?

**JUDY:** Jane's strategy works. Rather than responding to differences, the entire audience will laugh at the complication of that, and the entire audience will approach lesbianism having accepted what is universal in the experience exemplified by the two actresses on stage.

I don't think Jane is side-stepping any political issues, but that rather than dwelling totally in a land of polemics she finds ways to appeal to her audience. It's true that by dwelling in the land of commonalities, Jane in *MY BLUE HEAVEN* can be thought to be employing too indirect an approach. But I feel that equally important is the effective response the play evokes in an audience.

Let me end with a story Beth Allen told me that exemplifies, I think, Jane Chambers' humanistic goals, which I share.

It seems that when *A LATE SNOW* was being produced at a theater in a YWCA building in Manhattan, Jane and Beth were standing in the lobby of this great stone structure after the play was over. And they overheard a straight couple speaking, obviously stray tourists from a nearby Howard Johnson's Motor Inn who had gone to see a play near their hotel. And the man said, "I liked that play so much!" And the wife said, "You did?" And he said, "Oh yes I did! I like the way the man and the woman went off together in the end." The wife then said, "But, but dear . . . that wasn't a man!" And he replied, "Oh that doesn't matter. It was a happy ending, and they went off together. It doesn't matter!" Point being, that Jane through her art had communicated that love is a positive feeling. When it is shared by any two people and given the freedom to exist without oppression, that it is a good thing. □

## BODY FUSION

continued

themselves, and then really allowing them to crest, to release.

You did a lot of that through pacing.

And it was the same kind of psychic attention that I give now in massage. I had the same kind of focus and detachment and a way of psyching out the body and its language from spinning.

My parallel experience was walking onto a stage before 300-500 people for a poetry reading, and standing there and closing my eyes and allowing a wave of collective energy to hit me from the room, and then transforming that by choosing what poems to read, building up and building down. I think of my poems as brain massage, especially in an oral context.

**journey** I feel no personal power. I feel I'm making way for rightness, I feel I'm in my place, I'm on my journey. In terms of community, of rooting, I feel I belong here and this work is a large part of the reason I feel this way. □

# ANNOUNCEMENTS

## womantide.



### LESBIAN WHALE WATCH II

On Friday, September 23rd, 1983 at 9:00 A.M. the Dolphin IV will leave Provincetown Harbor in search of Sapphic whales. If you missed the first lesbian whale watch or would like to sail with us again, this will be our last trip of the year. Tickets for this 4-5 hour journey may be purchased in advance at Womencrafts, 373 Commercial St. (487-9854). \$13.00 adults. \$10.00 children. Depart from Macmillan Wharf.

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### LAST SUMMER AT BLUEFISH COVE

It was an excellent summer for lesbian theater in Provincetown this year, with two of Jane Chambers' plays produced and held over.

Congratulations and our fondest thanks go to Roberta Sklar and Sondra Segal, who brought their feminist aesthetics, their great dyke energy and their vast theater experience to us, in a very fine production of Chambers' LAST SUMMER AT BLUEFISH COVE, directed with verve and skill by Roberta. Congrats to Sondra as "Lil," and to the whole cast, too, for their warm, expressive ensemble work.

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### Buy A T-Shirt

WOMANTIDE T-shirts and sweatshirts may be purchased at Womencrafts, 373 Comm'l. St., Provincetown.



Photo by Linda Weinstein



### Died July 28, 1983

Carol M. Grant was a fine artist whose watercolors have been widely exhibited and lauded across the United States. She was represented in the N.Y. Metropolitan Museum of Fine Arts' "One Hundred Years of American Watercolors" show. From 1970 to 1973 Carol was one of four local women artists to run a cooperative gallery, The Little Gallery, with founder Gayle Lovett and partners Bonnie Whittingham and Phyllis Campbell. It was Gayle who happened to see her work, and invited Carol to show at The Little Gallery. Carol then fell in love with the gallery and with the seaside village of Provincetown, and decided to stay. In Provincetown, her work has been shown at Lenore Ross Gallery, Ellen Harris Gallery and Rainbow Gallery, and at the Provincetown Art Association Museum.

An exceptional artist, Carol Grant was also different from many in another respect — she was deaf. She was the first deaf student to enter and graduate from Seton Hall High School, and she was also the first deaf student to attend Parsons School of Design. In later years she became a private student of Edgar Whitney of the Pratt Institute, who wrote: "In twenty-five years teaching watercolor painting, I have had no student whose work interested me more, no student more original, no student more dedicated or better motivated than Carol Grant . . . ."

Carol M. Grant died this past July, at the age of 52, in Toronto.

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