



BLOOMINGTON, IN.

An Issue Devoted to Mothers

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to Mothers

Being One
Having One

Knowing One

Not Being One

for more information
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July 1977

NOTES AND MAIL

Representative Ed Koch of New York has introduced another federal gay civil rights bill. The bill, HR 451, is identical to the one Rep. Bella Abzug introduced into the last Congress, and would amend the Civil Rights Act of 1964 by adding the words "affectional or sexual preference" to each list of human conditions for which discrimination is prohibited. Write to your congressperson in support of this bill!

A coalition of women's groups in Wisconsin has launched a petition drive to recall a Madison judge who ruled in late May that the gang rape of a 16 year old high school woman was a "natural" response. The coalition, which includes the members of NOW, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, and the Madison, Wisconsin Rape Crisis Center, insist that Judge Archie Simonson, who handed down the rape ruling, has no alternative but to resign.

Judge Simonson ruled that the rape of a sixteen year old woman was a normal reaction to sexual permissiveness and provocative clothing. Simonson stated in his decision that "This community is well known & to be sexually permissive. Should we punish a 15 or 16 year old boy who reacts to it normally?" The judge then sentenced a 15 year old male convicted of the rape to one year of court supervision in his parents' home. Judge Simonson claims he will not resign, stating he has nationwide support for his views on rape.

The sixteen year old woman, incidentally, was wearing tennis shoes, blue jeans, and a blouse over a turtleneck sweater on the day of the rape.

For more information, call Eric Person, Dane County Commission to recall Judge Simonson, at (608) 233-7298.

A brochure describing feminist books for sale, including non-sexist children's books, can be obtained from WOMEN'S EDUCATION PRESS, 280 Bloor St. W., Ste. 305, Toronto, ONT, Canada.

the WOMEN'S FILM COOP has moved. Their new address is The Women's Film Coop, c/o W.I.P., Inc., PO Box 745, Northampton, Mass. 01060.

MIDDLEWAY HOUSE, at 717 E. 2nd street, Bloomington, is a 24 hour crisis intervention and referral center. A free and confidential VD diagnosis and treatment clinic operates each Tuesday between 5-7PM. No appointment is necessary.

THE WOMEN'S STUDIES PROGRAM at I.U. puts out an extensive newsletter listing activities and information relating to women, and also has a good resource center. Their office in Memorial Hall 39 is open M-F, 8:30-5. Go in and get your name put on their mailing list.

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10:00 P.M. 11:00

THOUGHTS ON BEING A MOTHER

readable by

Jen had a dream . . . Both kids in my bed . . . I really like to sleep alone . . . intrusion on my dreams . . . Guilt, Guilt, Guilt . . .

After all, scared children versus privacy!!! Certain people's insensitive actions = Jen's dreams and Jessie's fear of night = intrusion once again on my nights. Mother versus lover -- can I only love every two weeks? While they're with their father? Can I expose them to a strange body in their sanctuary while they're still so scared? Will they never stop being scared? Guilt, Guilt, Guilt . . .

Small, sweet, tender clutching arms versus strong, sensual, warm adult arms. . . . Forget it . . . I will not think about it now.

"Maybe you'll die soon and we could go live with Daddy . . ."

Jen is developing breasts! T-shirts versus bras. My strong, independent woman-child is letting herself be chased around the schoolyard. Exploitation. Can someone please explain to me how I can teach her in an unbiased, nonthreatening manner? I am biased and threatening and often angry and suspicious in my dealing with people I feel are exploiting me.

Cynicism versus Innocence.

"I'm not going to school today." Early morning scenes . . . Get dressed, brush your hair, eat your breakfast . . ." "I can't find my shoes!" You IDIOT! I'll be late for work, lose my job, no money for food, treats, clothes . . . Swear words and tears. Why am I so vulnerable in the AM? Will these scenes affect my children's emotional development or leave scars on their tender souls?

Later the same day: I was so upset with you this morning. Reply, "What?" I must keep convincing myself that it's all

THE WOMAN I NEVER KNEW

worthwhile.

The Grocery Store Hustle: Hustle! Run! "I want, I want, I want!" How do I stop myself from giving a political tirade about the poor and being broke . . . I'm a consumer . . . I hate capitalism. . . .

I am a capitalist . . . "Do you love me? Do you love my sister? Who do you love more?" Bad dreams . . . both children dead . . . sneaking into the bedroom . . . listening to their breathing . . . cover up those bodies . . . warm, safe reality . . .

She's a prude with my body. Constantly buttoning up my shirts. My walking through the house nude throws her into a frenzie. "Close those curtains!!!" When she was little, she loved waking me up by running her fingers through my pubic hairs. God forbid if someone else should see any parts of her mommy's body!

It's time to clean the house . . . "You slave driver! Always bitching, always making us work. Whose house is this? Whose work? Whose garbage? I'm not a slave-robot-garbage disposal!"

Housework must be shared. Our house is smelly, dirty, not at all like TV.

"Mommies are supposed to . . . I will not let it be easier to do myself . . . I refuse, refuse, REFUSE . . . Tactics turn against me. My shoes get taken away if not put away. My God, it's my turn to empty the kitty box. Thank God I have a sense of humor!!!!

THE WOMAN I NEVER KNEW

The problem with mothers and daughters, it seems to me, is that we never escape from those labels. Mom is always Mom, and we, as daughters, are often incapable of breaking past the role implied by the name, and cannot see Mom as Mary or Joan or Sue or Nancy. And our mothers can't look at us without seeing the childish bodies we have outgrown. We come at each other from radically different perspectives, ones that condemn us to almost certain misunderstanding. We see our mothers only in their roles as mothers--we have never known them when they were not mothers, when they were girls and daughters themselves. And our mothers, for their part, have the mixed blessing of having known us almost from the moment of conception. If we can see our mothers only in their adult roles, our mothers cannot see us without seeing the children we were.

This double vision is doubly frustrating for me (and for many women) because it has colored my expectations of my mother and her expectations of me. As a daughter, my first experience of my mother was of her omnipotence and strength and trustworthiness. She held complete sway over my existence, for good or for ill. As an adult, my mother looked at me in childhood and saw limitless potential and promise, a chance for me not to make the mistakes she did, to fulfill the dreams she had, but which never reached fruition. In earliest childhood I wanted to grow up just like Mommy, and played dress-up and house in imitation of her. She was the only adult woman I knew until I went to school, the only model of female behavior I had, since I was separated from my grandmothers by distance and death. But my mother wanted something more for me than what she had attained.

As I grew older, these expectations gradually changed. I learned that my mother was not omnipotent, but that she felt trapped by a shaky marriage and three children, that she felt as if she had accomplished nothing in life, that she still cried and felt unhappy and couldn't make something that hurt go away by kissing it. I began to determine that I would not be caught in the same trap--I would

BENTON A CHINE NO 6THOUSE

by Daphne Kutzer

be veterinarian, a famous chemist, a journalist, a trainer of famous race-horses. My mother was pleased at these successive schemes and praised my report cards and school prizes, and even bought me a chemistry set. It seemed that her hopes for me were not unfounded, and that I would achieve something more than she had. But at the same time she worried about the clothes I wore and whether or not I was making the boys at school feel inferior. She was much more excited about helping me pick out a dress for the prom than she was about choosing a chemistry set.

Somewhere in adolescence I decided not to grow up like my mother. The thought of a husband, house and family depressed me and filled me with a sense of claustrophobia. My mother was bewildered and upset by my sweeping statements concerning free love and the silliness of marriage. She did not understand that her own wishes for my life were being fulfilled. She had thought she wanted something different, something more for me, her daughter; but once I had broken through the boundaries of her life, she was not so sure. She hadn't realized that by teaching me to reach outwards, beyond her, she was teaching me to fear--if not to despise--the life she stood for, no matter how I may try to disguise those feelings.

And now we look at each other and expect to be able to talk, adult to adult, woman to woman. But each of us has grown into a creature the other is startled by. I have not grown up the way she expected me to, and she has metamorphosed into a human being, not a "Mother," and I am not sure how to react to her as the person she is, rather than as the person I had assumed her to be. She has shrunk in stature and increased in complexity, and I have grown into a perplexing adult with values and hopes and dreams that at times make no sense at all to my mother, and some of which she finds threatening and frightening. She is interested in my academic life, but avoids asking questions about my personal life, fearful of what she will uncover. And I

am not very good at assuaging her fears. The last time she called, she said, "Is someone there? Your voice sounds funny." My lover was asleep in the next room. "Uh, not really. At least, not in the general vicinity." I could not very well explain to her about the woman asleep in my bed, but I also found it impossible to tell an outright lie. The exchange was typical of our relationship--a series of half-truths and veiled illusions, and when given the opportunity to go further, each of us backs off and says "Not really," or "It's not important," and the other breathes a sigh of relief that the relationship has been kept steady and stable, however narrowly defined it may be--at least for the moment.

I look at my mother when I see her, and realize I don't know her at all, and that she has ceased to know me. I want to ask her who she is, how she got to be the woman she is today, how she felt about her own mother, what things really mattered to her when she was as young as I am today. And I want to tell her that she did OK by me, that I am who I want to be, that she's given me the strength to find myself and live my own life, difficult as it's been. But if I did tell her these things, she wouldn't believe me, she would think I had failed because I do not fit into the traditional heterosexual view of things. Worse yet, she would think she had failed, that somehow who I am is her "fault." And curious as I am about her, I can't get past my image of her as mother, and past the feeling that there are some things we can't talk about. As a child I thought I would grow up to be my mother's best friend. Instead we drift further and further apart, exchanging perfunctory letters and sharing superficial conversation, each afraid to probe beneath the surface of the other in search of the truth. Perhaps as we each grow older and memories of my childhood become further and further away from both of us, we will be able to stop looking at each other through the distorting mirror of the past and of projected futures, and begin to look at each other as human beings.

MY GRANDMOTHER PLANTING

Ann Planting Bates

My Grandmother, Hilma Planting, is a character; and some people, including a few of my relatives, might call her worse names. I have heard a million stories about her and all of them end with a moral about how she doesn't live right, what trouble she can cause, and, especially how I should never be like her.

Hilma Korpela Planting's parents were Finns who immigrated to the United States, and she is decidedly one of the strong, tenacious, indomitable Finns, who fought Russia in 42 wars and lost every one of them. Grandma Planting's mother, my great grandmother, lived to be 96 and my Grandmother is 82 now. That gives me a start. I've always assumed I'd live to the median age for women, which is 72 or so. I can now see I'll probably live at least 10 years beyond that.

My great grandfather, on the other hand, was not so lucky. After coming to America, he fished for a living off the coast of Washington and died at 36 from what Grandma said was heart attack. She said he screamed from the pain, though I don't know if that can happen when one has a heart attack. This left my great grandmother a young widow with six children, my grandmother being the oldest. So, having to support the family, my great grandmother moved inland and began to farm. She later remarried and had three more children.

The Finns appear to me to be a very clannish people, even now when so much ethnicity has been lost. Within this Finnish community, Hilma Korpela met another second generation Finn named Arnold Planting. I once found an old picture of him which he had given her with an inscription saying that he would love her 'til he died. They were married when she was 16. My grandmother was happy with the Planting family who must have been a step up the social ladder. She has told me many times that if I ever meet another Planting I can know they are related to me.

Hilma and Arnold moved to a sparsely populated, almost frontier, region in Eastern

Oregon where much of his family lived. There they had my father and two daughters, one of whom died at the age of 4 of diphtheria. Some time later they moved to San Francisco; and I'm not quite sure why, though my father has told me they went out dancing in the evenings, so maybe they were interested in big city life. I've never heard the real story, but piecing things together now, I know that my grandparents split up and were divorced. I've always wondered if he did love her until he died because neither of them ever re-married.

After the divorce my grandmother ran a "beauty parlor" giving women permanents and henna packs. When she moved back to Washington years later she moved all her hairdryers--the big metal ones that stand on the floor--which my sister and I played with when we visited her. Later she had a fire in her house, and the firemen threw those hairdryers out the second story window. It shows how my grandmother never threw anything away.

While she was still living in San Francisco my grandfather returned and took my father back to Oregon with him. My grandmother looks on this as almost a kidnapping and it colors all her later relations with my father. Even my aunt, who stayed with my grandmother, speaks sadly of never having seen my father play basketball in high school.

After he was grown, my father returned to San Francisco to live with her again and then the two of them moved back to Washington. There they bought adjacent farms near my grandmother's mother, sisters, and brothers.

I first remember my grandmother on this farm. She ran it by herself, milking cows, raising chickens and selling the eggs, growing vegetables, berries and beautiful flowers, and selling State Farm Insurance. She is fiercely tied to this land even though it is heavily mortgaged. A few years ago a federally funded project was started to drain much of this land which had always been marshy. They intended to put in a large ditch. My grandmother told them if they came onto her property she would shoot them. This tale quickly circulated through the family, who had meekly acquiesced to the project. In the end she

didn't shoot anyone. I'm not even sure that she had a gun.

There are many more of these mildly wild stories about my grandmother that I don't have space or time to relate here. One of them is about my father being drafted into the army during World War II. When my father received his induction notice, my grandmother went down to the Draft Board and tried to get him out by explaining that she needed him on the farm. In addition, she said, he shouldn't go into the infantry because he had training in electronics. Needless to say, she didn't succeed in keeping him out of the army, but he did end up in the Signal Corps.

She also tried to keep him from marrying my mother because my mother's parents were Norwegian immigrants. This has caused undying enmity between my grandmother and mother, but she doesn't appear to have held it against my father. I think she doesn't hold marriage in much esteem for anyone. She tried to get me to put off my wedding another year or even six months. And when I told her my future husband's name was Bates, she said, "Bates? There's a veterinarian in Battle ground named Bates who killed one of my cows."

When I was in college in Seattle she decided to become a real estate agent. So, she moved to Seattle and stayed in a downtown hotel to take a quickie real estate course. She was over 70. I'm rather sorry about that time. It was my first chance to be away from my repressive parents; and I turned down a couple of chances to spend time with her, even though I knew she wasn't part of them. I don't think she ever sold any real estate.

Finally, several years ago, she bought a small house on a busy county highway and opened a second-hand store in the front room. She goes to auctions and buys bits and pieces, cleans them up and sells them. Her brother complains that he can't get through the room without walking sideways. In the backyard she has a garden which grows beautifully in spite of the fact that it is full of stones and she can barely see due to cataracts which she won't have operated on. Her backyard is also full of swing sets. Some time ago,

she put an ad in the newspaper for them and got about eight which she now uses to support her grape vines.

Without a doubt, my grandmother is a crazy lady. She is cantankerous with people around her; and I don't think she gets along well with any of her family, certainly not my mother. On the other hand, she's done something that I hope I can do in my lifetime. She has done what she's wanted to do in spite of what people and relatives say and think about her. She's tried many ways of supporting herself, and she hasn't seemed afraid while doing it. When I lived with my parents, my mother in the heat of anger would accuse me of being just like my Grandma Planting. Even though she meant it as the ultimate insult, I never took it that way. And now I hope it's true.

I REMEMBER MOTHER

Mother, Mom. Mommy. I've called you Mother as long as I can remember. Mother and Daddy. I wonder why the formal for you, the familiar for him? A sign of greater respect or of less love? And if the latter, then why? I think it will hurt me if, in a few years, my own children call me Mother while they call their father Daddy. And yet much is the same in my relationship to them as in your relationship to me. Mother around more, coaxing, cajoling, nagging more. Mother more apparently worried, more concerned with proprieties and appearances, never wholly just having a good time. In a year or two I'll probably be called Mother, too.

I hope it has not hurt you that I have called you Mother, although I couldn't promise that I didn't mean to at the time it became a habit. So many events from our shared pasts seem different to me now from the way they did at the time, or any of the ways they have seemed in between, that I would be hard-pressed to describe our relationship in any simple terms like love or hate or even contradictory pairs of terms like love-hate.

Mainly I see now that I was a much more active force in your life than I thought at the time. Imagine my surprise, Mother, when I learned at age 27 that, in a deep depression immediately after my birth, you tried to kill me and then yourself. Did you know about post partum depression and have the reassurance that your state of mind was, though a little extreme perhaps, not totally crazy? Or have you spent the years since then feeling guilt, trying to make up, fearing your own feelings, and even still fearing that thing in me that you wanted to eliminate?

You went through another bout of depression a few years later. I wonder now how much I contributed to that one. I can recall Daddy's concern about you and his terse though kind words that amounted to a request that I keep a low profile. I was at the time as wild a teenager as I was ever to become. I had bleached an absolutely hideous orange colored stripe in my hair and spent an inordinate amount of time in parked cars with hard-breathing boys. I was a country girl growing up where early marriages

and earlier pregnancies were the rule. Were your old fears and conflicted feelings about me fanned into flame once again? It could be. But at the time I was so involved in the drama of tight nipples and bulging crotches that I was barely aware of your pain.

Was I the catalyst once again? Perhaps and perhaps not. For I know now Mother, that you burst with creativity, with poems and stories, and with beauty unexpressed. The keen observer could see it in a million ways; I just assumed that every egg-candling wife of every hard-working egg-peddling immigrant chicken farmer read those books, listened to those records, decorated the house with beauty and love and good taste. Perhaps sometimes the escape valve just didn't work.

You were proud of me many times, too, however. The local paper ran a photo of you pinning my purple ribbon on me when I won the 4-H dress revue. And you were happy, I know, to pack me off to a good college -- unpregnant and with luck even virginal -- to build a life that wouldn't need an escape valve. And though my marriage after two years of college was probably a disappointment, it looked hopeful at first. Daughter eventually a teacher, son-in-law a professor. But, unfortunately, my husband soon came out as an outright radical nut. And you had taught me too well how to be a good wife. Things reached a point where your joy in my intellectual and social achievements could no longer balance your despair at the bizarre lifestyle we were headed toward.

These are the times that I remember as being the worst. You had lots of migraine headaches -- one every time we came to visit or you came to see us. Visits became less frequent and shorter. There was even a Christmas or two we did not spend together. Once again as I look back, I am puzzled that I did not see myself as an important actor in your drama. But I didn't.

You were not without fault in all this, of course. The worst times might have come anyway, but they were accelerated by the truly shocking response you had to my husband's and my decision to adopt a child of mixed race. All those years of liberal

sayings -- vanished in a half-a-mo at the spectre of a black grandchild. The truth would then out, the fear you had lived with for forty odd years would be realized. One and all would know as you had always suspected that your own mother was part black. It was wild, like a bad scene from a bad Southern novel. Me, an octoroon, on record as Mother to a child no one would ever believe was not flesh of my flesh. Oh, Mother Dear, what foolish structures our fear can build.

We changed our plans, of course. What other response could still-human beings have to your running away from home, your threats of suicide, your despair.

But we've both snapped back from that place. We had a moment of closeness when you revealed you had had an abortion during the Depression (that's a big D) in response to my admitting I had had one shortly after adopting my third baby. And you've been quietly supportive of me during my divorce and remarriage and gradual rebuilding of my life. The migraines have been replaced by colitis, a more treatable cry for help. And I had a perverse moment of pleasure no too many years ago when my sister revealed she had always thought you favored me. Ah back and forth the shuttle flies.

How much more complex a person you are than I ever thought you were. How much more loving, how much more filled with fear than I ever dreamed. Much of your struggle ever woman's struggle, some of it uniquely yours I will never completely understand -- the warp and woof of our feelings too tightly woven to ever unravel completely. But I do love you, and I guess I am writing this to try to capture for a moment a thread I can hang onto. So long as either of us lives our relationship will grow and change but I want to stop that for a second and create a word picture of you that is clear to me so that I can pretend to understand. I do that visually all the time. Except when I am actually looking at the classy, well-dressed, white-haired old lady that you are today, you are the mother of a ten year old me, just about the age I am now. Hands shiny-skinned (it's aging, of course, but I've always found it beautiful,) hair about one third gray. Taller than I am, limber ex-ballet dancer's body. Nagging, coaxing, cajoling. Me, my sister, Daddy. Ah, Mother.

THOUGHTS ON NOT BECOMING A MOTHER

Mother. Barren woman. Whether a woman becomes a mother or not, motherhood remains central to how she defines herself and how the world sees her. Women are just beginning to think critically about motherhood, though it's impossible to imagine a period in human history when motherhood, didn't exert a powerful influence on our lives.

As evidence of the recent surge of interest in motherhood, it's the subject of several recent books, among them Adrienne Rich's *Of Woman Born: Motherhood As Institution and Experience*. As Rich points out at the start, motherhood is a complex issue, with many, various, and contradictory meanings that depend, among other factors, on the historical period you're talking about and the class and ethnic characteristics of the mothers in question --and especially on who's doing the talking, men or women. For example, think about a few of the obvious paradoxes of motherhood in the U.S. today: Middle-class women are exhorted (by books on childrearing, by the mass media) to stay home with their young children and devote themselves solely to childrearing because the early years of life are supposed to be the formative ones. Women forced to survive on welfare because of unemployment or because they can't make enough money working to pay for childcare are despised as "welfare loafers" or "cheaters," and no one praises them for taking care of their kids full time. Black women, white women, working-class women and middle-class women are accused of abandoning their children. And if anything "goes wrong" with the kids, guess who gets the blame even though there are hundreds of subtle influences on a child's personality and actions. If you can begin to sort out the facts--to see how and why they coexist and whose interests they serve, you're off to a good start toward understanding motherhood.

Many thoughts about motherhood have been crossing my mind since I began thinking bout it in a personal way--thinking, that s, not about becoming a mother but about ot becoming one. For me the choice not to become a mother hasn't been an active decision, or a reversal of a desire to be

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a mother, but a logical conclusion from the course of my life so far: I'm quite content to continue as I am, childless. It's not that I dislike children, but motherhood: I don't care for motherhood as the experience and the institution, to borrow Rich's distinction, that they are today in this country. I don't care to have to make the great changes in my life that motherhood requires of nearly all women: a huge commitment in time, energy and money the necessity of changing one's whole self-determined pattern of life, of putting oneself second. As Rich puts it, the woman who becomes a mother discovers "the rhythms and priorities of her life changed in the most profound and also the most trivial ways." That experience, precisely, is what I reject. Besides, I don't care to be somebody mother; I'd rather remain just me.

Motherhood, viewed most coldly as an institution, is the means of creating and sustaining workers at no cost to their employers. Mothers, then, are breeders and servants--a sort of combination of the queen and worker bees. So, to some extent, I view my desire not to be a mother as a political act, a refusal to contribute, as I'm expected to, to what I consider a very unjust economic and social system.

Obviously, motherhood is a much richer experience than just that. Undoubtedly many areas of my life will be less rewarding because I won't be a mother. But it's important to remember what women relinquish in becoming mothers--the satisfactions of scheduling your life more nearly as you want to, of having privacy and solitude when you want them, of acting on impulse, of exploring the world, of taking chances, of spending more time with other adults and on all kinds of activities of your choice, of completing a task uninterrupted. All these experiences, which I think are crucial to the full development of a person, are rare luxuries to a working mother--and mothers work harder than just about anybody just being mothers.

That I plan not to become a mother doesn't mean I feel no commitment to the struggles of women who are mothers--struggles for decent childcare, for the right to give birth as you choose, for decent food,

shelter, education and health care for yourself and your children, for the right to be sterilized if you choose and for the right to have children if you wish. These struggles involve each woman's right to self-determination; as such, they affect all of us, non-mothers as well as mothers.

A circular library stamp with the word "BLOOMINGTON" at the top, followed by "JUL 14" and "PM" in the center, and "1977" at the bottom. The number "47401" is stamped at the bottom right.



Martha Vicinus

ВИ 442

Dept of English

City

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