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Chautauquas of Feminism and Lesbianism

Bryher Herak came to Seattle in 1972 from Montana when she was twenty-five. "There's a lot of cowboy hats there," she would tell an interviewer two decades later. "Cowboy boots and big trucks." She was already used to women like her who preferred to dress in boots and denim jeans and jackets. "Bars are where people hung out," she added, "so that didn't change for me [when I moved]. I just had to find a lesbian bar."

Jane Meyerding arrived the same year, when she was twenty-two. She was from Chicago, college-trained and already soaked in political activism, the daughter of Quaker activists who had taken her to Vienna to work with Hungarian refugees, a protester against the Vietnam war, a volunteer for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference headed by Martin Luther King Jr. She had been arrested at age seventeen during a demonstration at the Pentagon, then arrested again in protests at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago in 1968. Before she moved to Seattle, she had been living with a man, but "I felt like I was a lesbian inside." She had not yet found a way to express that publicly. "I didn't think I could be a lesbian in any way that would interact with the world," she said in an interview. "It would just always be inside."

When each of them arrived, hers was the usual search to discover a place where she could belong. In a previous decade, they might have followed the footsteps of those women like Rose Bohanan or Jackie Cachero down the stairway into the underground at Washington and Second, but what is revealing about both of their journeys was reflected in something that Herak said in her interview.

"So what did I do? There was a bookstore, a women's bookstore, It's About Time, there in the U-district. So I went to It's About Time. I heard there was a lesbian party the first week I was in town. That's how you do it. You do it word of mouth. You call the women's bookstore, you call the YWCA. It's actually pretty easy."

For Meyerding, it was a similar story. "I cannot remember the first occasion on which I made contact with lesbians," she said, "but it must have been . . . on the Ave. in the University District, upstairs, over a typewriter repair place." That was the YWCA.[1]

By the time Meyerding and Herak arrived in Seattle, a geographic and politi-

cal shift had begun to occur for the city's lesbians. Bars for women were still operating in Pioneer Square, particularly on South Jackson Street where a bar called the Silver Slipper had opened in 1969, but out in the University District a new place of arrival was forming, one that was going to have as historic an impact on the development of the city's homosexual community as the old underground had.

To some extent, gay women had always been more invisible in Seattle than gay men. When the *Seattle Times* published its 1966 story about the city's homosexual "problem," only gay men had been mentioned as the "problem," not lesbians. When the police threatened licenses and the city council held its first public hearing about homosexuals, the targets were men's bars. When the health department blamed homosexuals for spreading venereal disease, the doctors focused on men. And although it had been the women who had first danced aboveground at the Madison, that had happened at a bar owned by two men. Arguably, even the police had tacitly reinforced the lesser importance, or perhaps lesser offensiveness, of lesbians by their decision to extort fewer dollars from the Madison than they demanded at the men's bars. One of the women's bars had even adopted the name of the Annex, as if bars catering to women were some type of add-on to the gay male space in Pioneer Square.

Within the invisible homosexual culture in the city, then, there was a kind of doubled public invisibility for those homosexuals who were women.

Two who had met in Seattle in 1950 had already spent more than a decade trying to cope with that difficulty of creating a more visible presence for lesbians while sharing a spotlight that always focused, even if negatively, on homosexual men. Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon had fallen in love while working together at a Seattle publishing company in the post–World War II period. They moved to San Francisco in 1953, where they formed an organization called the Daughters of Bilitis. They gathered lesbians in private homes for meetings that were partly social but also political. Then, drawing on their publishing experience, they created what became the most noted lesbian newsletter of the 1950s and 1960s, the *Ladder*. They aimed it at women who were still in heterosexual marriages, who were unlikely to find any nearby lesbian bars in their cities, and who were unable to escape from their economic reliance on men.

The two clashed often with their early male activist counterparts. One tension was over sex. Historian John D'Emilio has noted that the Daughters of Bilitis "found gay male promiscuity and the police harassment that accompanied it an encumbrance that seemed to make lesbians guilty by association in the eyes of society." Martin and Lyon, he says, "resented the time taken in mixed gatherings on problems that had little to do with the lives of women." It was not surprising then that when a women's civil rights movement arose in the mid-1960s, Martin and Lyon quickly joined, writing in the *Ladder* that "the Lesbian is first of all a woman" and needed to ally herself with the incipient feminist movement.[2]

A few months after Herak and Meyerding arrived in Seattle, Martin and Lyon

The Ladder, published nationally by former Seattle residents Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon, became a forum for lesbians in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Lesbian self-imagery at the time was usually far less sexually oriented than that portraying gay men. *(Seattle Lesbian Resource Center, Northwest Lesbian and Gay History Museum Project)*

returned to the city to promote their book *Lesbian/Woman,* which had quickly become famous among gay women. Addressing a crowd at the University of Washington's student union building in April 1973, they reiterated the theme for which they had become best known, the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* reporting Lyon as saying, "I think it's more important for us to work within the women's movement" than to work with gay male activists. "Even if we wiped out all discrimination against gay people, we'd still be women. The gay movement has been dominated by men, and the women in it find themselves in the same position as women in other movements, doing the typing and mailing the letters."

"Gay men are men and just as chauvinistic as any other men."[3]

Lesbian communication and identity were changing, and the saloons on the mudflat with their methods of dancing and butch-femme drag—however pleasurable, traditional, and valuable in previous decades—were simply not big enough to accommodate the new gay woman. The change in geography was part of the shift, and the selection of the University District had much to do with how that neighborhood had developed and what it, like the mudflat, had come to represent in the city's history.

The U.W. had first been housed on the downtown knoll platted by Arthur Denny, overlooking the mudflat that had been surveyed by Doc Maynard. Once it became apparent that the university's land was needed if the city's retail and office district was to expand, the professors relocated northward to a broad, forested slope overlooking Lake Washington on the east and Lake Union on the west. During Denny's time, most people considered the new site a long trolley ride to the boondocks, but the cheaper land gave the university freedom to expand, and the neighborhood that began to develop around the school assumed a character distinct from both the mudflat and the hills bordering downtown. If those living on Queen Anne Hill, like George Cotterill, were concerned with enforcing moral reforms, while those frequenting Pioneer Square aimed to flout them, those who eventually surrounded the university created something more like a tent chautauqua for unceasing argument and exploration.

In 1905, Professor Edward Meany hit on a clever way to secure more support for the still infant U.W. He proposed that the lightly developed campus serve as the site for a world's fair, knowing that Seattle would benefit from the international exposure, while the school would get new buildings and landscaping paid for by the fair's promoters. The theme would be the great gold rushes (which by then had already begun to fade) and the utopian prospect of a new Pacific century. If John Considine and others had found their money in the waves of actual miners and sailors passing over the mudflat, Meany could find profit in tourists who were fascinated by the same adventures but not ready to go beyond the comforts of Seattle in exploring them. In four years, Meany's idea was a reality. A uni-

versity, and a neighborhood, were born on the back of passionate intellectualism combined with unembarrassed boosterism.

Among the exhibition buildings at what was called the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition was one representing the achievements of the Northwest's women. The city's Young Women's Christian Association sponsored a restaurant there, as well as a gallery of women's arts and a nursery for many of the fairgoers' weary children. Once the Expo closed, the women who had been volunteering decided to form a neighborhood YWCA, eventually nesting—in tidy auxiliary fashion—with their male counterpart, the YMCA, on the university's tree-lined fraternity row.[4] That neighborly arrangement lasted for several decades. By 1968, with the national feminist movement burgeoning, that locale among men—fraternity men at that—seemed at odds with the new identity many younger women hoped to forge. A new University YWCA director hired that year, Ann Schwiesow, took a single look at the men's landscaped building and the women's auxiliary office and saw a symbolism she wanted no part of.

"It was a traditional male-female relationship," she told a *Seattle Times* reporter in 1972. "Just what we're fighting against."

"We knew from the beginning we would be concerned first and foremost with women's liberation."[5]

In 1970, then, the YWCA left and located directly into a second-story office suite on busy University Way, the core of the retail district next to the university. The "Ave.," as it was called, bustled with pizza shops, real estate developers, used-book vendors, and tables of antiwar literature. Schwiesow moved the YWCA next to a fast-food shop called Sandwich a Go Go.

According to the *Seattle Times* story, she next issued a brochure describing the YWCA's mission in terms surprising to anyone with a traditional view of the organization. None of the usual swimming, cooking, and socializing. The YWCA women, the brochure asserted, were not just "volunteers" as they had been in past years, but "workers" who "describe their commitment as one of creating alternatives to those institutions which degrade or humiliate women, institutions which are inhuman, 'overprofessionalized' or unreasonably expensive."

Soon, the small cluster of otherwise nondescript offices embodied the new rhetoric physically, advertising a fount of possibilities. Notices about feminist events, women's services, jobs, and housing jammed bulletin boards. T-shirts flashed "Women are Changing the World." An abortion law reform group that had been ordered off the university campus was invited to set up a new office at the YWCA; soon its referral service was fielding about seven thousand calls a year. The Northwest Women's Law Center opened in the suite to pursue legal challenges. A local chapter of the National Organization for Women came. A rape counseling service began. Women formed a weekly co-op garage to learn how to repair their own cars. Women's artworks hung in a room devoted to a cultural center. Workers,

not volunteers, remodeled a storeroom into a women's health clinic named Aradia. The Women's Divorce Co-operative started giving advice about inexpensive ends to unpleasant marriages. Women's studies classes burgeoned. A newspaper named *Pandora* was added, its name chosen deliberately to challenge male control of storytelling. Women, the newspaper asserted, had opened a box of blessings in mythic times, not the box of troubles that appeared in the male version of the story.

Pandora became one of the new media of communication among the city's women, including its lesbians. In 1976, it would be followed by *Out and About,* a newsletter published solely by lesbians.

In *Pandora*'s very first issue, in December 1970, a writer named Rachel daSilva described a historic gathering for gay women that had occurred in Seattle just a few weeks earlier, on November 19. Women from the Gay Liberation Front in Seattle had called a meeting "to allow us to meet other lesbians and get to know each other, [and to express] our feelings about GLF, the gay scene in general, sexual politics, the gay bars, and hopefully, what we wanted out of GLF or any other organization we might want to start." Forty-five women had shown up, "a surprisingly large turnout."

The idea of starting a separate lesbian group had been discussed. "The consensus was that at this point there is nothing bad about this kind of split. GLF is not on a 'power trip,' the majority of the men feel no antagonism toward women who want to work apart from the larger organization, and in fact they encourage women to do so if unable to relate to GLF as it now exists. It is hoped that, in the event a gay women's group does begin, there will be no hostility between it and GLF. In fact, something on the warm side of indifference might be more in line with our goals."[6]

The gay women wasted no time. Two weeks later, *Pandora* announced the start of the Gay Women's Alliance. In just a few hundred words, the announcement set the three-part mission for a new lesbian movement in Seattle.

First, it created a rationale: "For as long as women have been struggling against the male-domination prevalent in our society, lesbians have been the niggers of the women's movement. Women's liberation has been running scared in fear of the labels 'lesbian' and 'dyke' hurled by men trying to quell the rise of self-determination among women. And, for the most part, women have reacted defensively, and have put down their gay sisters in order to appear valid in men's eyes. But our common goal, as women, must be to write our own definition of woman and womanhood; in order to do this, all women, gay and straight, must work together without fear of one another. To rid ourselves of this fear, we must learn more about our various lives and life styles and by learning, come to accept each other as individuals."

Then it proposed a way for women to communicate: in small affinity groups "in which women can feel more at ease about discussing personal problems and where trust is built between women, a revolutionary idea in itself."

Finally, it laid out a strategy for achieving political changes: building coalitions. "As they begin to get themselves together to understand one another on a human, personal basis, gay women will want to establish contact with other women's groups in the Seattle area. Our goals as women may not be identical, but we have enough in common to warrant communication and common rallying points."[7]

Comparing the rhetorical differences between the GWA statement and the Dorian Society's mission is instructive. The GWA wanted to work as part of the larger women's civil rights movement, rather than independently, as the Dorians had. It wanted to write its own definition of "womanhood." It urged women to build trust and make decisions by discussing personal stories rather than by following *Robert's Rules of Order.*

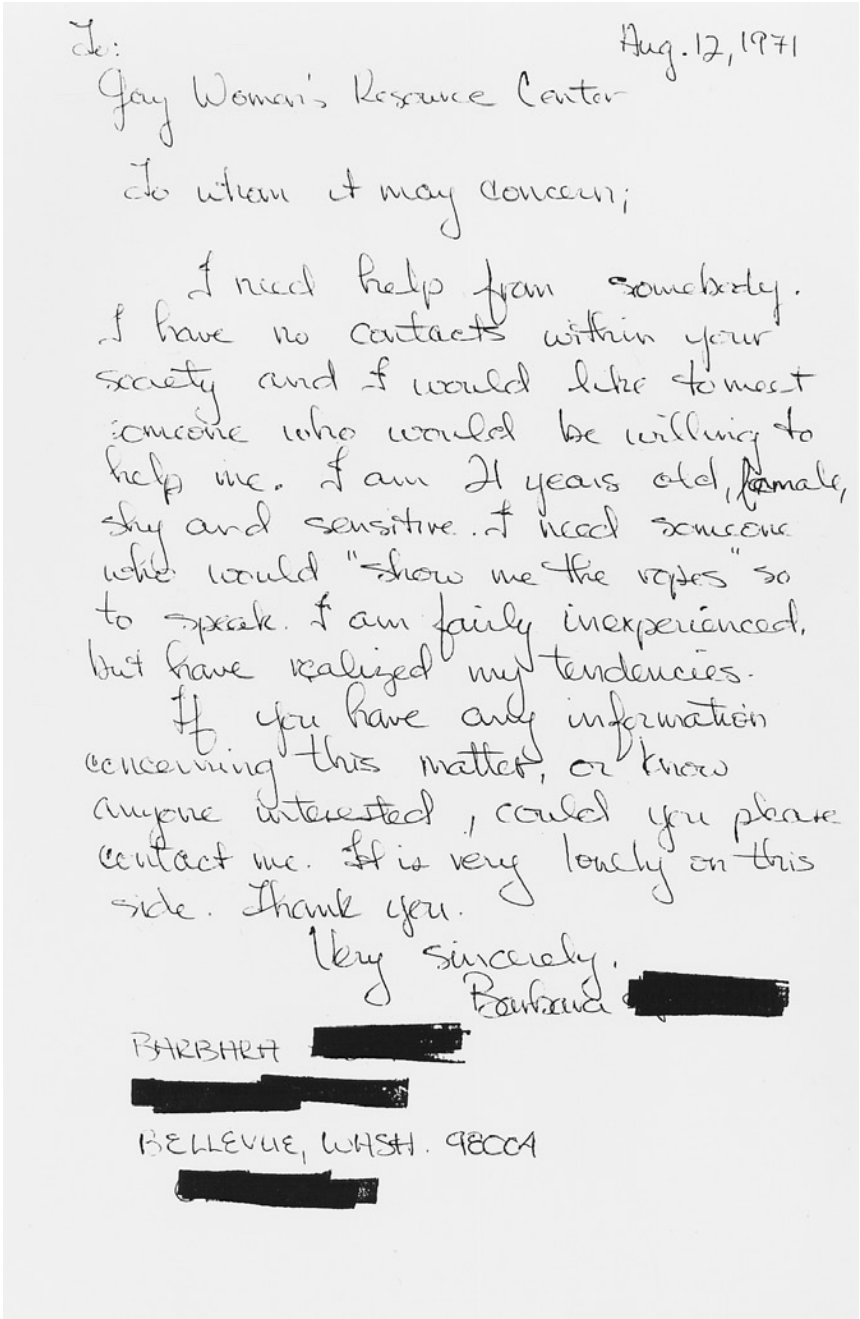
Three months later, in March 1971, the GWA created a permanent organizing space within the YWCA's offices, using volunteers to staff a small Gay Women's Resource Center—the first in Seattle. They set about creating a survival file with the names of doctors, as well as of commercial businesses, friendly to gay women. The group also announced plans to create a speakers' bureau, much as the Dorian Society had done. Most important, though, as the GWA organizers told *Pandora,* was that "there will be a place, outside of the bar environment, where gay women can either come and talk or call and talk to other gay women." It would be open from noon until 10 P.M.—a daytime outpost away from the mudflat.

In October 1971—about the same time that Paul Barwick and Faygele benMiriam of the male-dominated Gay Liberation Front were confronting the city clerk with their demand to be married—the *Post-Intelligencer* discovered the gay women's center and printed a long article explaining why women thought the center was needed. A cautionary editor's note preceded the story: "Lesbianism, a fact of life that's been hidden from public discussion for centuries, has surfaced. Freer discussion of sex and the work of various homosexual activist groups have made this a current issue."[8]

Two lesbians, identified as Tudi Hassl and Carol Anna Strong, were shown in the accompanying photograph. In a parallel to *Seattle* magazine's decision to publish the photograph of Peter Wichern four years earlier, this may have been one of the earliest photos of "out" lesbians to appear in the city's press. Their youth was what was first noticeable—Hassl was twenty-six; Strong, twenty-three. Also noticeable was their choice of clothing. Hassl's long hair fell in front of what appears to be a flannel shirt, and Strong's striped T-shirt was matched by a bandanna wrapped around her hair. These were not stereotypical femmes in gabardine, but neither were they stereotypical butches in workers' uniforms.

Their words first focused on the pain that had brought them to the center.

"I knew I was gay when I was 12 or 13," Hassl said, "but I repressed it until I was in my 20s. I lived in a small town and felt all alone until I read something by a gay woman. For 13 years I went through hell. I went out with men. . . . I had sex



To: Aug. 12, 1971

Gay Women's Resource Center

To whom it may concern;

I need help from somebody. I have no contacts within your society and I would like to meet someone who would be willing to help me. I am 21 years old, female, shy and sensitive. I need someone who would "show me the ropes" so to speak. I am fairly inexperienced, but have realized my tendencies.

If you have any information concerning this matter, or know anyone interested, could you please contact me. It is very lonely on this side. Thank you.

Very sincerely,
Barbara [redacted]

BARBARA [redacted]
[redacted]
BELLEVUE, WASH. 98004
[redacted]

The new Gay Women's Resource Center, created in 1971 at the University YWCA, often drew pleas for help from isolated lesbians. *(Seattle Lesbian Resource Center, Northwest Lesbian and Gay History Museum Project)*

with men and I could enjoy it. I had nothing to compare it to. But in retrospect, I didn't enjoy it as much as with women. I couldn't fall in love with men or get emotionally involved."

Strong added, "Before she can really 'come out,' a woman has to face how she feels and stop thinking she's sick just because society says she is. . . . There are two coming outs. One is personal. You face who you are and how you feel about it. You stop forcing yourself to laugh at 'queer' jokes and stop putting up with words like 'dyke.' The second is when you 'come out' politically, when you stand up publicly and say 'I'm a lesbian.'"

However, their words also revealed a growing divide with gay men in Seattle. Pointedly using a stereotype, Hassl argued that "Unlike much male homosexuality, gay women tend to form lasting relationships." Strong extended the generalization. "[Women] don't go in for a one night pick-up thing as much as men do. We may go to a gay women's bar to socialize and be together, but it's not a meat rack and it doesn't have the pick-up atmosphere of most heterosexual bars."

It was a conflict that was going to grow deeper and more public over the next five years. Quite quickly, for example, the Gay Women's Resource Center would instead become the Lesbian Resource Center, as women decided the word "gay" was too closely associated with male homosexuality.

Housing the city's first lesbian center in a YWCA caused controversy, but not as much as might have been expected. *Redbook,* for example, in an article written in 1975, said that most other YWCAs would rather have merged "with the D.A.R. than admit . . . that there might be a lesbian in their midst." But Schwiesow dismissed the differences. "Nobody knows who is gay and who is straight here," she told the *Seattle Times.* "The Gay Women's Resource Center is just a part of the University YW." Downtown, the better-known Seattle YWCA felt occasional criticism because the two branches were often confused, but its executive director, Dorothy Miller, papered over the differences. "I admire their dedication and commitment," she said. "I don't agree with everything they do, but I don't have to." Even the national executive director, ever respectful of a long tradition of independence among the different branches, publicly tempered any reservations she might have had. "They may be a little ahead of the rest of us," she said tactfully to the *Redbook* reporter, "but maybe we have a lot to learn from associations like theirs."[9]

"It wasn't easy walking in that door." Diane Winslow remembered her first visit to the Lesbian Resource Center about four years after it opened. Winslow wrote about her visit in *Pandora:*

> I was a housewife and mother of teenagers, and some of these women were lesbians. I concentrated on being as inconspicuous as possible, but I soon began to peer out of my turtle's shell of aloofness at the other women in the small pillow-

> lined room. They looked like strong, independent women—delightful, real women. I was soon caught up in the discussions and expressed thoughts that had always raised eyebrows and frozen expressions with others, but these women simply nodded and smiled. I told them that I just wanted a woman friend to hold me. Every counselor I'd ever talked to—and there had been several—had told me that this was "inappropriate" behavior in our society and that I was just going to have to adjust. Short hugs were acceptable, but, in my fantasy of a hug, I was a shriveled, dry sponge, absorbing until I was full. One woman . . . commented, "That's what it's all about!"[10]

Something new began to happen in these "rap groups" at the Lesbian Center, something transformative simply as a result of talking. Winslow, who had been married for sixteen years, found that she "didn't want to be a useful appendage to someone else's life. I wanted to be a complete and productive person in my own right. I was troubled to see women with dynamic personalities compromising their individuality, entering into heterosexual relationships out of sexual need and little more."

Her attitude toward sex with women changed.

> I came into the LRC rap group very much afraid of even the word "sex." I accepted my sensuality but believed I could forego passion if a woman would be my affectionate friend, entering into the giving and receiving of lovingness. . . . There was another inquirer in the group who had a history remarkably similar to mine. Between us, we had produced nine children, had spent a decade apiece in religious involvement and had emerged exhausted from long, unfulfilling marriages. . . . So one night, we got together at my house and talked freely, shared poetry, prose, and copies of letters—memoirs of our despair. As this woman and I parted, I reached out my arms and said, "Let's hug—it's obvious we've both been as hungry as hell." These words seemed to open both of our confined spirits and, like two entombed prisoners, we stumbled into the light. We knew through our womanness what the other felt.

The CR groups—consciousness-raising groups—that arose from the women's movement were a new outlet for discovery and communication. Part quilting bee, part therapy, part caucus meeting, they solidified a form of small-group communication for Seattle's lesbians different from that which occurred in bars or private homes. It was a structured way of talking about new ways of imagining themselves. Best understood as a kind of personalized chautauqua that could also serve as a base for political action, the CR groups were an exciting explosion of voices that suddenly began setting a course for lesbians joining the journey out. What happened was an exposition.

In such gatherings, perhaps five or ten individuals agreed to meet regularly to wonder through certain themes in their lives and then to make decisions about actions, either individual or collective. Importantly, the CR or "rap" group was not a club that passed motions according to *Robert's Rules* or undertook service work such as traditional women's auxiliaries did. Instead it was intended as a safe place to learn to support one another emotionally and then use personal experiences to analyze the causes of suffering and create change. *Robert's Rules* would come in for particular blasts from women who found the traditional and "respectable" styles of making decisions in organizations to be inappropriate for those whose voices had been so silent in the past. Betty Johanna, for example, an activist during much of the 1970s in Seattle, once wrote a letter to the lesbian newsletter *Out and About,* saying that she viewed "*Robert's Rules of Order* as oppressive and [I] do not wish to give them credibility via my participation. I want to resist the classism that requires one to know a specified terminology in order to participate in meetings. I do not want to be told that the only way I can relate to others is in a highly structured, non-flowing, non-human way."[11]

Lesbians were raising questions that the men in the Dorian Society, at least to judge from their minutes, had never considered.

In the CR groups, each woman would speak "her own truth." Indeed, the power of this particular form of group communication lay in its insistent demand that individuals speak from personal experience, as an "I." Yet from the individual stories arose a common narrative about what "we" shared together—the demands to conform to gender roles, the pain of hiding sexual attractions in high school, the early crushes not understood, the movement into marriages, the release when the obvious truth about sexual attraction became a revelation, the striving for a genuine life, even if others felt such a life was not respectable.

It encouraged something else too. In the democratic environment of the CR group, it was the willingness to tell and blend individual stories that was important, not the submission to any single leader. Insistence that any one person or group knew the truth about where gays and lesbians were headed, or what identity should be claimed, or what single path should be pursued, quickly became suspect. A new political value about leadership was emerging that would become a distinctive characteristic of the 1970s in Seattle. It would eventually be a serious point of political division within Seattle's gay and lesbian community.

Winslow again: "In our rap group, we share our fears . . . and the terror of every woman who contemplates stepping outside of tradition. We discuss the implications of keeping one's lesbian identity hidden or 'closeted.' We talk about radical lesbians, their political clout and their public image, and we realize we can place ourselves anywhere on the continuum from sexually independent to social anarchist according to our wishes.

"As we dare to be honest, the rap group I participate in is learning to laugh and

cry together. . . . There is a world to be explored here and I am pleased with what I'm finding."

The fervor of the time reached in many directions, with lesbians becoming part of a web of collective undertakings that were intended to transform how people in Seattle thought, shopped, ate, read, sang, dressed, and lived together. Countless worker and living collectives formed, some only for women, some that included feminist-minded men. Sometimes they were based in the labor or socialist movements that dated back to Seattle's early years; sometimes they were brand new. The Seattle Workers' Brigade served as the umbrella for several of those that became better known to Seattle's public: Corner Green Grocery in Pike Place Market, Little Bread Company in Lake City, C. C. Grains, and Community Produce. Others were independent: Red and Black Books, formed by a women's collective to replace a well-known leftist bookstore in Seattle called Id, and Puget Consumers' Co-op, which headed up what eventually became a long list of neighborhood natural food buying collectives. All offered something that lesbians in the city seemed to be looking for: a receptive new place to work and to belong. A letter to *Out and About* from a woman who signed her name only as Gwen noted that she had been part of a milling team that worked at C. C. Grains. "I look at C. C. Grains," she wrote, "and I see something wonderful. A place where I could learn and grow non-oppressively. A place where I could dare to challenge my own socialization in a supportive atmosphere. The time, the energy, the tears and hurts, joys and laughter all rolled into a group of women committed to finding another way besides hierarchical, capitalistic, imperialistic ways."[12]

Some lesbians emphasized activism that reached many other political issues. Lois Thetford, for example, arrived in Seattle in 1970 at age twenty-four, having grown up in New Jersey and attended Cornell. She and fourteen friends came cross-country in three used mail trucks bought for one hundred dollars each; in Seattle, they used the trucks to help the Black Panther Party deliver breakfasts to children. Eventually, her collective became known as the People's Trucking Company. In 1970, Thetford helped found a women's health clinic in Fremont. By 1971, she was in Cuba with two members of her collective helping workers harvest sugarcane. Then she moved back to Tacoma, helping war resisters and organizing a lesbian rap group, and finally returned to Seattle, where she eventually began working with homeless families needing health care.[13]

Others, like Meyerding, focused on the lesbian community, in her case becoming one of the original members of the collective that published *Out and About.* Still others, like Herak, worked setting up women's coffeehouses so there would be alternatives to meeting in the bars. The best known was the Coffee Coven, located in Lake City next to the Little Bread Company, which was where another lesbian, Jan Denali, had decided to work on the granola team.

"We'd go up once a week," Denali recalled. "There'd be seven or eight lesbians

[on the granola crew] and we would just like torque out with this quantity of granola that was unbelievable. Making it was just a riot . . . and it brought together different kinds of lesbians. The whole cooperative business scene—that was a place where lesbian culture had a place for growth and for struggle with a broader world."[14]

Denali, who was twenty-four when she settled in Seattle in 1973, also had a second entry point to belonging—the new feminist women's music that represented yet another piece of the growing web of change for Seattle's lesbians. She started a string band called LesBeFriends and eventually joined a street theater group called Shelly and Crustaceans that demonstrated against the construction of a Trident nuclear submarine base on the Hood Canal, west of Seattle. Then, in her enthusiasm, Denali joined another collective that produced the city's first lesbian radio show and aired it on a leftist-leaning public station, KRAB. "Amazon Media" covered stories ranging from city politics to lesbian poetry to women's writings on racism.

"It was just such an exciting time for lesbian women," Denali said. "There was so much happening."

Had you taken a hypothetical walk through the different feminist rhetorics present in the University District in 1973, you could have strolled into at least four imaginary chautauqua tents where women argued about how best to recreate their identities and roles. Lesbians were participating in each of the discussions.

In the first such "tent," women labeled "reform feminists" urged a focus on changing laws or business and health practices that discriminated against all women. The speakers argued that men could be allies, just as whites had been allies in the African American civil rights movement. On the subject of lesbians, though, the reformers spoke with mixed voices. Some were befuddled about why lesbian rights should be a concern and were embarrassed by the topic. Others were sympathetic, mostly because they knew that men had always derogated "uppity" women as lesbians as a way to put an end to their political demands. The way to overcome that male tactic was to embrace lesbians as full partners. This was the "tent" of the National Organization for Women (NOW), which, by 1973, had been struggling with the "lesbian question" for several years. Activists like Del Martin had pushed NOW to explicitly embrace lesbian concerns. NOW had passed a resolution recognizing that lesbian relationships were a feminist issue, but until the convening of a national conference in February 1973, the organization had dragged its feet for seventeen months on proposing specific actions. Even a task force appointed to study actions NOW could promote had been innocuously named the Task Force on Sexuality, and a heterosexual woman had been appointed to coordinate it. Only because of pressure the month before the 1973 conference was the name changed to the Task Force on Sexuality and Lesbianism, and a lesbian appointed as a co-coordinator.[15]

The second "tent" of rhetoric housed those labeled "radical feminists." Like reform feminists, they urged civil rights changes, but they also passionately argued to rout sexism from the entire culture, not just from the law or businesses. Art, relationships, language, religion, words—all were grist for change. It was just as important to establish a weekend mechanics course to teach women how to repair their own cars as to pass an Equal Rights Amendment. Radicalism meant dismantling male hierarchies and leaving behind those methods of decision making considered traditionally male—such as the parliamentary procedures dictated by *Robert's Rules of Order*. When it came to lesbians, this radical analysis encouraged women to accept the potential, if not the actual experience, of sexually bonding with one another. To be a lesbian was to make a political choice not to submit to traditional male-controlled relationships.

In the third tent, "socialist feminists" denounced capitalism as the real problem and focused on economic change as the arena for the most important revolution. Sexism and male domination were inherent in capitalism, so ending sexism meant ending capitalism. Their argument had a strong appeal in the overall tumult of the early 1970s—the time of student protests over the Vietnam War and the American invasion of Cambodia, the rise of the Black Panthers, and the economic crash of Boeing. It was especially appealing in Seattle, with its history of strong labor unions and socialism that dated to the days of George Cotterill. On gay and lesbian concerns, socialists veered, sometimes rejecting them as lacking political relevance to the class struggle and then sometimes embracing them as a new component of Marxist dialectic. For a while, the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) had endorsed an unwritten policy that gays be excluded, and its youth affiliate, the Young Socialist Alliance, had formally adopted such a rule. The policies were later reversed, but the SWP still emphasized that the primary struggle was that associated with the labor movement.

In Seattle, a Marxist feminist group called the Freedom Socialist Party (FSP) had emerged in 1966, asserting that oppressions could best be fought by forging coalitions among all the dispossessed, including sexual minorities. A group of socialist women called Radical Women had also formed—not to be confused with the nonaligned "radical feminists." By spring 1973, both the FSP and Radical Women had settled into an immense former factory renamed Freeway Hall at the bottom of the University hillside. Among the FSP and Radical Women members were several powerfully vocal gay and lesbian activists, among them Sam Deaderick, Doug Barnes, Patrick Haggerty (who had traveled with Lois Thetford to Cuba as part of the same workers' brigade), and Tamara Turner, who had enjoyed dancing at Madame Peabody's and then in 1972 had joined Radical Women. Three other women, Laurie Morton, Su Docekal, and Cindy Gipple, would also become well known for speaking out as representatives of Radical Women.

The relevance of socialism to lesbians was perhaps best explained in a speech that Morton gave in 1975 at a Washington, D.C., conference on the relationship between gays and the federal government. "Through socialist feminism," Morton said, "I have come to understand that we gays are not persecuted as social outcasts because we are sick, or perverse, or child molesters as our oppressors would have us believe. . . . No—the roots of our oppression go much, much deeper. The truth is that homosexuality challenges the most basic social institution in this system of private property and profit: the unit upon which capitalism is built—the heterosexual monogamous family. Two workers for the price of one is a key prerequisite for capitalist production and profit, whether it is free domestic labor in the home, or that kind of cozy slavery combined with low-paying wages in the industrial job market."

It was by understanding the homosexual challenge to the economy and to the patriarchal family structure, socialist feminists argued, that coalitions could be built with workers and other minorities to effect real change. Gays, lesbians, heterosexual women, blue-collar workers, and racial minorities had the same issues: A job and a home, the right to have and raise children, freedom from prejudice, and freedom from police harassment. Socialism, Morton said, was "the connecting link between women, minorities, gays and workers."[16]

In this imaginary walk in 1973, there would have been one final chautauqua tent of feminist rhetoric, supported by lesbians who had sampled the other arguments and found all of them lacking. None of these approaches, they argued, really addressed the question of how lesbians should forge their own story and their own identity: What it meant to love another woman. How a lesbian community could be built. What political or social changes needed to be made for lesbians in particular rather than for all women. All of the other stances simply annexed lesbian concerns to their own political agendas, turning them into a sideshow. Some of the women in this tent began to think about working for a separate lesbian nation—or at least for some lesbian farms out on a Puget Sound island, like Lopez up in the San Juans, or Vashon just a few miles from Seattle. In that regard, they fitted themselves within that long-standing utopian tradition in the Northwest of separating from the cities to pursue a communal life among the trees.

In 1973, one such separatist group in Seattle, identified only as Alice, Gordon, Debbie, and Mary, began to circulate pamphlets entitled "Lesbian Separatism—An Amazon Analysis," and groups of lesbians in the city began to meet to discuss the paper. In it, the four argued that contrary to what reform, radical, and socialist feminists thought, the key problem was male supremacy. Legal reform wasn't enough: "lesbians' basic oppression is NOT due to laws," they asserted, but to society viewing women as men's tools. The socialist approach was not acceptable either, because destroying capitalism would not destroy sexism and its devaluation of women. Alice, Gordon, Debbie, and Mary pointedly noted that even in socialist

Some feminists and lesbians in the early 1970s argued passionately that anti-gay prejudice needed to be seen as an outgrowth of capitalism and that homosexuals needed to join in coalitions with the labor and socialist movements. Laurie Morton (above, left) and Tamara Turner speaking at a Radical Women's conference, 1976. *(Doug Barnes, Freedom Socialist Party)*

Cindy Gipple urged gay and lesbian support for labor workers. *(Freedom Socialist Party Archives)*

Cuba, men still reigned. Also, the four doubted whether the socialist emphasis on forming large groups such as unions would help, partly because large groups always produced hierarchies of leaders. Instead, they trusted the more democratic form of small base communities and CR groups.

Lesbians, the four argued, should work cautiously with other women. Heterosexual women were not the oppressors, they said, but "their interests are often opposite to ours, and, as the agents of men, their behavior is sometimes oppressive to us." Gordon commented in a *Pandora* interview: "I don't believe in working with straight women because they've proven that their interests are often opposite to mine. . . . They've flirted with lesbianism; they've flirted with lesbians; they've kept our attention focused on them while they made 'the decision' and diverted our attention from ourselves."

Working with men was out of the question. Even gay men, the four wrote, "are first and foremost men and have male privilege." They argued that unlike lesbians gay men were neither oppressed nor persecuted because they were, after all, still men.[17]

Besides Alice, Gordon, Debbie, and Mary, other separatist groups began to gather in Seattle in the early 1970s. A group known as the Gorgons, for example, expanded their suspicion to include socialist lesbians, who, the Gorgons said, should not be privileged to identify themselves as feminists. The socialist analysis that the economic structure was the root of women's problems was not true enough to the feminist belief that the real struggle lay between men and women. The Gorgons even launched guerrilla attacks against other women's collectives. For example, the Gorgons objected when It's About Time, the women's bookstore in the University District, sold books about women that had been written by men. "It upsets us," they wrote to *Out and About,* "to have prick [male-written] anti-lesbian books oppress and invade us in women's places." Similarly, they complained that the women's collective running Red and Black Books should not be selling any books about lesbians to its male leftist customers. "We don't want lesbian lives and politics available to men," the Gorgons protested in another letter to *Out and About.* "Lesbian politics and culture is for lesbians and not to be shared with pricks."

One day, the Gorgons invaded both stores, stripped them of the books in question, and then switched the books—taking the male-written ones about women to Red and Black, while moving the lesbian books to It's About Time.[18]

Many, if not most, gay men in Seattle were at least a little confused by what was happening with the women, unless they themselves subscribed to feminist beliefs. Gay men had no comparable national men's movement to influence. Gay men had borrowed most of their public rhetoric from the black civil rights movement or the black pride movement. Few talked about "choosing" to be gay as a political statement, as lesbians did in the 1970s, or about overthrowing male hierarchies in

church or state, or about convincing heterosexual men not to sleep with women as a way of freeing themselves from cultural brainwashing. Male gay activists, at least of the Dorian Society ilk, did not want to change the "power structure" as much as simply persuade the structure to ensure a "civil right": privacy for the bedroom. Also, having been derided as "fags" or "fairies" or "queers," many gay men wanted to be recognized for being as masculine as any heterosexual male. The simple statement "We're the same as any other man" held very different connotations for the men and for women.

Divisions popped up in small and countless ways. At the U.W.'s Experimental College, an informal class on lesbianism—one of the first in the city—charged women two dollars for admission, but men had to pay five dollars. On the mudflats, relations strained. At the old Madison, the Casino, the Garden of Allah, and many other bars, men and women of earlier generations had casually mingled, or so their recollections suggest. By 1973, though, an unnamed writer for a "Lesbian Flash" special edition of *Pandora* in 1973 complained that the lesbian bar, the Silver Slipper, was not only allowing men to be served in the bar, but also encouraging them.

"The question," she wrote, "is why?" She described several nights at the Slipper, contrasting the way it felt when only women were there to how it felt when gay men showed up:

> Sunday: The bar was unusually busy for a Sunday night mainly because a woman from Fort Worth was singing tonight. The crowd was all women and everyone really got into her performance. We sang along on some songs and there was a general good feeling amongst the women there. . . .
>
> Thursday: Tonight was drag show night and very depressing. Several gay men came to show off their money and flirt with Misty Dawn who was annoyed that the majority of lesbians talked and laughed throughout the show. There is something degrading about strong women shuffling around to arrange the spotlight for a man mimicking who he thinks we are. He was mainly interested in the kisses and money and jeers of the men in the audience anyway. The majority of lesbians either ignored him or observed without much interest. The poor job of lip singing he did was too much. . . .
>
> Friday: The bar was crowded tonight and the crowd included far too many men. The women at our table were getting more and more angry at two voyeurs staring at the dance floor and came up with a plan of action. One woman accidentally on purpose spilled half a schooner of beer in the lap of both men and was followed soon after by another woman who kicked both men so hard she stumbled to the floor. Great! But they didn't leave. We weren't the only lesbians uncomfortable by the presence

of all the men but the management's policy goes something like "We love our brothers as much as our sisters," so much that the bartender is a man.[19]

There were also tensions about the drag styles of older lesbians. "Among the politically oriented lesbian-feminists," Jane Meyerding said, "butch and femme were politically incorrect." Younger lesbians saw no reason to repeat in their own relationships what they took to be the heterosexual idea that one person was masculine and one was feminine. Meyerding added, "We were discarding those mistaken carry-overs from patriarchal culture. . . . It seemed obvious to reject butch-femme roles because they seemed so obviously patriarchal and old-fashioned, and everything we wanted to get away from."

It seemed, she noted, that the community was dividing between what she called the "bar dykes" and the "Coffee Coven dykes."[20]

It was the spring of 1973 when the lesbian chautauquas over new identities reached a climax.

First, at the end of March, the King County Mental Health Board sponsored a two-day forum so social workers could talk with gay men and lesbians. Officially, the American Psychiatric Association still considered homosexuals to be mentally ill, but 1973 would be the last year for that, and, prodded by people like Bob Deisher, King County's mental health system had already begun changing its stance. Most talk at the forum focused on the long-established misunderstandings between the two groups. Gay activist Patrick Haggerty, for example, reviewed other cultures' acceptance of homosexuality as mentally healthy, while a psychiatric nurse named Cheryl Brunner talked of having been fired from a Seattle mental health agency in 1968 for being a lesbian. At one point, Cindy Gipple, of Radical Women, spoke. She was already well known among feminist activists, partly for a blistering attack she had written in 1971 on *Pandora*'s more reform-minded feminists, who had endorsed Tim Hill for city council even though Hill had not responded to a NOW questionnaire about his support for women's issues. *Pandora,* Gipple had said then, had "appalled women radicals" by supporting candidates "who are part and parcel of this sexist, militarist, racist and capitalist system." At the forum, she emphasized that more needed to be done to stop the oppression of sexual minorities and that this could be accomplished through socialism.[21]

The arguments about which feminist approach to homosexuality was best had already frayed tempers, and Gipple's comments—although not especially different from anything that had been said in the past—may have triggered an outburst. The night after she spoke, the home of Radical Women at Freeway Hall was spray painted with huge slogans: "Lesbianism for the Lesbians. Straights out of Lesbian Politics. Lesbianism is not a fad. Amazons will win."

By April 17, *Pandora* had joined the attack, with an editorial severely criticiz-

ing socialist feminists for trying to disrupt the work of the Feminist Coordinating Council, a group that had been set up earlier to ensure cooperation among all the various types of feminists. "The hassling over politics is beginning to take its toll," Pandora's collective said. "Fewer and fewer people are attending the [coordinating council] meetings. . . . The University YWCA has resigned and several other groups are known to be considering the same step. What happened?"

According to *Pandora,* the catalyst was simple: the tactics and strong rhetoric used by Radical Women. Although the paper also acknowledged that there was a second problem—some women just were not accustomed to hearing other women use such "less-than-feminine tactics to get their point across"—the blame was clearly aimed at the socialists. Incensed, Radical Women replied in the following issue of *Pandora* with a letter that can be read either as a dire prediction or as a warning, both to women in general and to lesbians specifically. Titling the letter "The Politics of Terrorism," the socialists compared those who had painted the slogans to "Hitler's gang of cutthroats" and called them "hysterical and cowardly." "We will not be intimidated," the letter said, "or deterred by any variety of political psychopath—right, left, or center, male or female, minority or white, lesbian or straight."

Even the venerable YWCA did not escape indirect criticism. A May 15, 1973, letter from three Radical Women, including Gipple, grumbled that almost a third of *Pandora*'s coverage of women's activities related to the YWCA, even though there were at least forty organizations that were part of the movement. *Pandora*'s brand of reform and radical feminism, the letter said, had caused the women's newspaper to use "manipulative and destructive tactics" aimed at undermining feminists who held other analyses.

Soon enough, a group of lesbian separatists replied in another letter with equally impassioned rhetoric. "Lesbians in Seattle," the separatists bristled, "have been angry and disgusted at the treatment we have received from Radical Women. . . . Many of us were told to our faces that 'lesbianism is not a political issue.'" Radical Women, the separatists went on, was being "opportunistic" in trying to push its socialist line on gays and lesbians. It was trying to "co-opt" and annex lesbian energy into "straight terms such as the nuclear family and heterosexual monogamy." The separatists declared that the socialists defined lesbians only as oppressed. "It never seems to occur to them that we may also be rejoicing in our love of women." The spray painting of Freeway Hall, the lesbians argued, "was an appropriate political response to the exploitative actions of Radical Women." The letter closed by reasserting each of the slogans that had decorated Freeway Hall.[22]

A few weeks later, on May 21, a second incident highlighted other conflicts, this time between radical lesbians and the NOW brand of reform feminists. One of feminism's founders, Betty Friedan, arrived at the University of Washington for a speech. Her views about lesbians were already well known: Lesbians posed a sexual question, she argued, not a political or civil rights one. They were welcome, but only as women first. To Friedan lesbians were an annex.

Angered by what they saw as the insistence that the only way homosexuals could achieve acceptance was to always join others—such as socialists—in their fight against capitalism, lesbian separatists in 1973 targeted Freeway Hall, the home of Radical Women and the Freedom Socialist Party. *(Freedom Socialist Party Archives)*

On the day of her speech, she took her place at the podium and had barely begun talking when eleven lesbians marched onto the stage with signs reading "traitor" and "sexist." A banner mocked Friedan as "anti-lesbian" as the protesters silently formed a semicircle behind her.

"Get them off!" some in the audience began yelling, according to a report in *Pandora.* Others cheered. One of the lesbians pulled out a small sound system she had buckled around her waist. Another took a microphone. "We do not consider Betty Friedan to be a leader in the women's movement," she began. "We strongly protest Friedan's racism, classism, and anti-lesbianism. She would have us, as lesbians, remain hidden in the closet so that our sexuality could not be an issue. She is under the delusion that lesbians are plotting to take over the movement."

Silenced, Friedan watched.

"As long as lesbians are oppressed because of their sexuality," the protester continued, "lesbianism is an issue that cannot be ignored. We will not hide and we will not be co-opted into taking a lesser stance for fear of alienating men.

"We are lesbians and we are proud. We are the 'lavender menace' Friedan has warned us about."

The women then moved around the podium and claimed the floor in front,

according to the *Pandora* account. Finally permitted to speak, Friedan responded icily. "There are enemies of this movement that would like to disrupt it." Gradually, she built from a glare to a shout. "Who's paying you?" the *Pandora* reporter said Friedan demanded. "Who's paying you!"[23]

The marketplace of feminist ideas, which had become so important in helping to rethink lesbian identity, had temporarily become a noisy bazaar.

The changes that happened for Seattle's lesbians in the early 1970s were never solely about political ideologies or consciousness-raising. Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon had been right about their strategy in organizing the Daughters of Bilitis: many lesbians had married in the 1950s or 1960s, had created families, and were not about to meet in bars or even CR groups. Although divorces provided many with a new freedom to explore as single women and to challenge the whole notion of nuclear families, others faced the issue of whether coming out meant losing their existing children—or giving up their hopes of ever having them.

"Many people have never heard of a 'lesbian mother,'" Carol Strong, who had helped establish the Gay Women's Resource Center, wrote in *Pandora* in May 1972.[24] Such individuals, she added, "cannot grasp the concept of a lesbian with children." At a Los Angeles gay women's conference the previous year, Strong noted, no child care had been provided, prompting the lesbian mothers who attended to angrily form a new union. Seattle got its own in 1972, a Gay Mothers' Union that, like so many other feminist groups, began meeting at the University YWCA. Among the most pressing topics: how to stop courts from punishing openly gay mothers by stripping away their children. The notion that lesbians were mentally sick and immoral, and therefore automatically unfit as mothers, had become deeply embedded in the law and was as powerfully frightening a tool as a sodomy prosecution or an involuntary mental commitment.

Strong's story in *Pandora,* for example, told of two women who lived near Seattle raising one of their daughters. To protect the women, Strong referred to them only by pseudonyms. According to Strong's story, a neighbor had claimed the two were "lesbian dopers"; they were arrested for possession of marijuana, and the child was taken by social workers and placed in a foster home rather than with family members. In itself, that might have had to do with the drug charge, but before releasing the child, according to the article, the judge ordered the lesbian lover to move out of the women's home and mandated that the mother receive counseling for her homosexuality. Only when the mother began to tell the social worker that she would find a man to live with was she pronounced "cured."

Since no names were given, it is not possible to verify the *Pandora* account through court records, but the fear that such an intrusion into the family by the courts would occur was certainly a strong presence. An article in *Pandora* com-

mented that the new mothers' group hoped to establish a legal precedent in Washington State that would protect lesbian moms. The chance soon came—but it involved two women who seemed very far in their beliefs from any of the debates about patriarchy that were occurring among other lesbians.

Sandra Schuster and Madeleine Isaacson instead seemed exactly the type of pre-feminist lesbians Martin and Lyon originally had in mind when they started the *Ladder*. Schuster had studied nursing at Stanford, graduating in 1961, joined the navy to help pay her college bills, and then married. She and her husband eventually had four children. Isaacson had also married and given birth to two. At first, Schuster lived with her husband north of San Francisco, slowly growing more alienated.[25]

"I knew there was an emptiness in me, but I didn't know what it was," she would tell the *Advocate* in a later interview. For one thing, her husband did not share her fundamentalist Christian religious beliefs. Schuster prayed for guidance. She told the *Advocate* that one day, in the shower, she thought she heard God say she should move to Seattle to help a friend working in the city as a fundamentalist preacher. At first, she wondered whether she was crazy. A few months later, her husband was transferred to Seattle. Schuster considered it the first miracle.

In April 1970, Schuster was attending an evening service at the friend's church when she saw a woman walking down the aisle with young sons grasping her hands. "I swore that I saw a glow around her head," Schuster said. "I thought, 'Listen girl, you're really sick.'" A few days later, one of Schuster's own sons eagerly dragged her to meet his new Sunday school teacher. It was the same woman—Isaacson. The second miracle.

She, too, had a strained marriage. She, too, had been praying for help. "I remember when we first shook hands," Isaacson would say of that first meeting with Schuster. "My knees got weak. I had this funny feeling all over."

A few camping- and prayer-filled months later, Isaacson confessed her feelings. At first, Schuster resisted by quoting Bible passages. When Isaacson—the Sunday school teacher—was unfazed, Schuster began to reexamine and realized that Biblical condemnations of lust were not condemnations of love. Still, she wanted a more personal sign. She told the *Advocate,* "I said if God will send a prophet, I'll know it's right."

Driving around Lake City one day, the two women stopped on a whim at a Pentecostal church and found a young man from California preaching. In the middle of his service, he suddenly said he felt a great burden from two people in the room and called Schuster and Isaacson forward. "Everything he told us," Isaacson said, "was just what we'd prayed for."

Still, Schuster demanded an even clearer sign before she would agree to act on the feelings that were becoming ever stronger. She told the *Advocate* that she traveled to California to go to her old church, along the way praying, "Lord, are you

really sure you know what I've been thinking?" Standing there on the street, by coincidence or design, she found the same young preacher she had met in Seattle. That was finally enough. The third miracle.

Lesbianism through divine revelation. By a patriarchal God sending a sign through a male preacher. That was something the political analyses had certainly not addressed.

Eventually both women divorced, and in 1972 the ex-husbands filed for custody of their children, citing as harmful not only the women's lesbianism but their fundamentalist religious beliefs as well. By then, Schuster and Isaacson had moved into a five-bedroom home in Seattle. Over the dining table for eight hung a wall poster that said, "Hallelujah! Jesus is Lord!" Once their case became known, a *Post-Intelligencer* story tried to capture what seemed to be the oddity of it all. "Lesbianism, motherhood, and religion—like oil and water, they just don't seem to mix," it said. A social worker named Nancy Kaplan and a psychiatrist named S. Harvard Kaufman soon descended on the home.

What they found was a very well adjusted family. Neither woman was attempting to cloak her newly claimed homosexuality. "It's my understanding," Kaplan wrote in her report, "that the danger of homosexuality is indicated by feelings of guilt and self-rejection and a tendency to withdraw from society. I see none of these traits in either Mrs. Schuster or Mrs. Isaacson. Actually, they plan to reach out and help others." The children, all of them under nine, seemed comfortable with their mothers' relationship. If they had questions about it, Kaplan said, they got frank answers from the moms.

"This is a most happy, well organized, creative family," Kaplan wrote.

For his part, psychiatrist Kaufman zeroed in on the worry of whether the children would have the proper role models of gender and sexuality. "The children certainly are getting good physical and emotional care, are being loved and are able to show love in return," he concluded. "They show no identification problems."

Despite the glowing reports, the King County Superior Court judge assigned to the case, James Noe, had his own unusual test. Knowing that both women were deeply religious, he ordered them to reflect on the biblical passage Romans 1, "as it relates to their understanding of the Word of God and its effect on their lifestyle and pattern." The chapter, part of a letter from the Christian apostle Paul to the early church in Rome, included condemnations of those who "lusted" after the flesh more than after God.

The women already knew the passage, but, as Isaacson would tell the *Post-Intelligencer*, "we read it over again to see what he meant." After duly noting all of the letter's references to those who were lustful fornicators, wicked, coveting, malignant, and backbiters of God, Isaacson said she told Schuster, "Sandy, we aren't any of those things!" Schuster added, "God disapproves of lust between people of the same sex or of the opposite sex. But he doesn't disapprove of love."

At least partially content with that response, Judge Noe agreed the women could

keep custody of their children. But, he ordered, they would have to break up their new family. Despite all the praise for the home they had created, he instructed the two women to live separately.

It was a victory of sorts, at least for lesbian moms who could demonstrate they knew their Bible and could maintain a respectable household, but it was also a severe intrusion into the two women's ability to create a good home. The weekend the two mothers were breaking up the house and preparing to move, a *Post-Intelligencer* reporter named Susan Paynter visited. The family of eight sat by the fireplace, "Madel[e]ine and Sandy on guitars, the kids banging tambourines and triangles, [singing] 'What color is God's skin? Well, it's red and it's yellow and it's black and it's white, everyone's the same in the good Lord's sight.'" Paynter noted that even Schuster's four-year-old twins knew the words.

The two women were philosophical about the upcoming separation and about having chosen not to hide their homosexuality. Isaacson said, "We just couldn't live a secret schizophrenic life." They were praying that their God would help with another way.

As some lesbians began the fight to keep their children from previous marriages—a Lesbian Mothers' National Defense Fund would be formed in Seattle two years after Noe's decision—others sought to create families in ways that combined from the beginning their identities as lesbians with their identities as mothers. Even while she was harvesting sugarcane in Cuba and counseling draft resisters in Tacoma, Lois Thetford was also planning a family. She became an early volunteer for the new defense fund. "I always knew I wanted to be a mother before I ever knew I was a lesbian," Thetford would say in a later interview.[26] She turned to the same source for help in conceiving a child and creating a family that many lesbians in Seattle eventually would: similarly feminist-minded gay men, some of whom were members of the GLF or the Freedom Socialist Party. Working through networks of friends who knew friends, lesbians found anonymous sperm donors or, as with the arrangement Thetford chose, actively involved gay men as co-parents.

"It was quite a novelty at the time," Thetford said later. She linked with Patrick Haggerty, who had traveled with her as part of the group that had gone to Cuba in 1971. After his return to Seattle, he had written music for an album of gay liberation music called *Lavender Country,* earned a social work degree from the University of Washington, and was assisting the new counseling service for gays and lesbians. Thetford and Haggerty lived in separate political collectives in Seattle, she recalled. "It took about two years," Thetford said, "from the time we decided to have a child until it came to fruition, and we spent that time persuading our collectives that it really was going to be all right, that it wasn't going to be this terrible thing." After she got pregnant, she visited the Silver Slipper once. "People were really shocked . . . like what is she doing here? . . . It was really considered a contradiction in terms."

That was also part of reshaping the identities of homosexuals. Haggerty told an interviewer for the *Advocate* in 1975 that he had no intention of sacrificing his interest in a family because he was gay. That was an old fear used to scare homosexuals in the past, he asserted. "One of the primary social sanctions against gayness is that you have to give up your right to a family. . . . There's that whole stereotype of the gay men who are old and lonely while their peers have seventeen grandkids over on the weekend. I feel like I'm actively participating in eliminating one of the facets of my oppression."[27]

In keeping with their political beliefs, Thetford and Haggerty eschewed the nuclear family and created instead a collective parenting approach that included one of Thetford's former lovers as well as Haggerty's friend from the Gay Liberation Front, Faygele benMiriam (the name that had replaced his old one, John Singer). After a few bumps—including one in which the child frankly told a few of the parents that she loved them but wanted to spend more time with Thetford—they settled to just three parents. Eventually, that also included Thetford's new partner, a woman with whom she would remain for the next twenty-five years.

The effort lesbians were making in Seattle, then, was not just about changing their own invisibility or their own identity. It was also about changing the public nature of the family.

For Sandra Schuster and Madeleine Isaacson, the final victory would come six years after Noe's ruling, in 1978. At first, they and their children found separate houses, struggling with the new heavy financial burden that imposed. Then, one day, in another insight, they realized that living separately did not have to mean living apart. They rented two apartments in the same building across the hallway from each other. The fathers, who by then had remarried, once again sued for custody, claiming the arrangement violated Noe's order.

This time a different superior court judge in Seattle, Norman Ackley, listened for five days as thirty-three witnesses, including eleven psychiatrists and psychologists, mostly reached the same conclusion that Kaplan and Kaufman had. Ackley noted that the testimony pointed to "healthy, happy, normal loving children." He felt particularly reassured, according to a *Seattle Times* report, because a court-appointed psychiatrist did not think the children were at any greater risk for growing up homosexual—the bias that to do so would be bad still apparent in his consideration. The women could keep the children, he ruled. Most important, Ackley decided that since there had been no harm in the children living with both mothers, Noe's previous instruction that they live apart could be lifted.

The fathers appealed. When the case reached the Washington State Supreme Court in 1976, it stalled there for almost two years, time during which the mothers were able to keep their family together but were always under the threat of having it separated. Finally, in 1978, six justices ruled in favor of Schuster and Isaacson keeping custody. The justices took pains, though, to point out that they were not

ruling that lesbians could be fit mothers. Instead, the majority decision said that Washington State law presumed stability was the most important factor in determining custody of children, so unless there was a major new reason to shift custody, the court would not do it. Three justices wanted to transfer custody to the fathers.

On the second issue of whether the family could stay together, something quite odd happened. Of the six who had ruled in favor of the mothers' keeping custody, only two agreed with Ackley that the lesbian moms should be able to live together. The other four wanted to split the two lesbians up again. That technically left the majority decision in the power of the three most hostile justices—the ones who wanted to transfer the children to the fathers. But those three issued no opinion whatsoever on this second legal question because, of course, for them the question was irrelevant since they were voting to transfer custody to the fathers anyway. That 2-4-3 split meant there was no majority to overturn Ackley's ruling that the family could stay together.

For Schuster and Isaacson, it looked like another divine intervention.

By the 1990s, after she had been in Seattle for more than two decades, Bryher Herak, who had launched her search to belong by going to the new women's bookstore and the YWCA, had come to think of all the fervent explorations of new lesbian identities as an attempt to produce a new kind of integrity: "to have integrity in our relationships, in our politics, in ourselves." For Herak, the debates were "a really important time."

"Are we going to stay separate? Do we live and act as if we hate men? Do we form separate communities? Are we part of a bigger community?"

Herak would eventually find her own role in Seattle's lesbian community in a way that combined the traditional institutions of the mudflat with the new dialogue about visibility. She turned back to the saloons because in them she saw community centers that unified even more women than the new political groups did. "The bar itself," she said, "has played an important part in the lesbian community because it's been a place where we could be ourselves." In 1984, she would open one herself. But hers would be different, a kind of reflection of the changes that had occurred. It would be on Pike Street on Capitol Hill, rather than on the mudflat. It would combine some of the aspects of a women's coffeehouse, with women's music concerts and women's bands, with the usual aspects of a tavern—pool tables and drink. It would have expansive windows so there was little sense of dreariness or invisibility. Quickly, the Wildrose would become the most popular lesbian bar in the city, for daytime lunches as well as night talks. By the end of the century, it would be able to claim that it was the oldest women's bar on the West Coast.

"My mother says 'I'll never come into your tavern because I don't think there

should be women only places,'" Herak said. "I try to explain it's not a women's only place. It's a woman's place, which is different."

As for the name, Wildrose, it was chosen, Herak said, because it reminded her of her favorite Montana flowers and because she thought of it as a symbol about lesbians and the struggle they had had to become visible in Seattle. "It's about our strength," she said. Then she added, "And our orneriness."[28]