

Bet Birdfish ... SPEECH
Gay & Lesbian Rights March
Northampton, MA
May 14, 1983

AT HOME WHERE I LIVE WITH THE COLLECTION, I HAVE FELT THE FIGHT VERY PERSONALLY FOR THE LAST SIX MONTHS. WALKING PAST THE LIBRARY'S ROOMS ON MY WAY TO THE KITCHEN FOR FOOD, OR THE LIVING ROOM FOR MUSIC, OR THE BEDROOM FOR REST, I'VE HEARD SOUNDS POUNDING INSIDE THE LIBRARY'S SPACE EVERYDAY. IMPOSSIBLE ATTEMPTS AT VIOLENCE AGAINST LESBIANS WHO WILL NOT BE VIOLATED. IN MY HOME, AT MY CORE, I HAVE LISTENED TO A LOUD WAR BETWEEN THE ANONYMOUS, COWARDLY MALE VOICES INVADING THE LIBRARY'S ROOM ON THE TELEPHONE ANSWERING MACHINE THREATENING DESTRUCTION, FEAR, DEATH, ARSON, AND ERASURE - AND THE COURAGEOUS OPEN LESBIAN VOICES IN THE COLLECTION'S LITERATURE, ART AND MUSIC GROWING A VIBRANT WORLD FOR LESBIANS OF SAFETY, RESPECT, SELF-LOVE AND SHARED LOVE, PASSION, POWER, JOYOUS LIFE AND VISIBILITY FOR OUR STORY. AND IN THE BACKGROUND THROUGH IT ALL KEEPS FLOWING THE SOUND OF THE MILL RIVER MOVING UNDER THE LIBRARY'S WINDOW, REMINDING ME OF LESBIAN LIFE, NEVER-ENDING, SWEET AND SACRED.

A "DEADPAN VOICE" IS WHAT KIRIYO CALLS THE HARASSERS' SOUND IN HER CASUAL WAY OF SAYING IT ALL. "VOICES IN THE NIGHT," "SPEAK OUT, MY HEART," "LESBIAN VOICES," "LESBIANA SPEAKS," "THE VARIED VOICES OF BLACK WOMEN," "WORD IS OUT," "TELL A WOMAN," "VOICES FROM THE ASYLUM," "LESBIANS SPEAK OUT," "SAPPHIC SONGS," "SPEAK-OUTS," "VALLEY WOMEN'S VOICE" THESE ARE SOME OF THE NAMES WE'VE GIVEN THE MANY SOUNDS LESBIANS ARE MAKING TODAY.

IN THE LIBRARY ROOM, IN AN ARCHIVE ALIVE FOR ALMOST TEN YEARS NOW, LOUDER THAN THE NOISE OF THE THREATS, THERE ARE LIVELIER VOICES. WE CAN LISTEN TO RED JORDAN AROBATEAU, BLACK CITY BUTCH TALKING ABOUT BULLDAGGERS AND LESBIAN PROSTITUTES ON THE STREETS IN THE '60S ... AND CHERRIE MORAGA, CHICANA LESBIAN TALKING ABOUT SEXUAL IDENTITIES AND GENDER-CROSSING IN THE '80S. THERE'S JUDY FREESPIRIT TALKING ABOUT SURVIVING INCEST ... AND SUSAN MARIE AND DEL MARTIN TALKING ABOUT SURVIVING BATTERING. THERE'S JOAN NESTLE TALKING ABOUT SEXUAL COURAGE OF BUTCHES AND FEMS IN THE '50S ... AND PAT CALIFIA TALKING ABOUT SEXUAL BRAVERY OF LESBIANS IN THE '80S. THERE'S HELEN ON SOBRIETY ... AND ELANA ON SEPARATISM. THERE'S JUDITH SCHWARTZ ON LESBIANISM AND DISABILITY ... MELANIE KAYE TALKING ABOUT JEWISH DYKE IDENTITY.

MA RAINBY SINGING "SURE GOT TO PROVE IT ON ME" IN 1928,
AND JOAN ARMATRADING SINGING WITH HER DEEPEST VOICE
"I LOVE MY BABY SO MUCH." ↑

MARGARET CRUIKSHANK TALKING ABOUT LESBIAN STUDIES ... ANN BANNON, PAULA
CHRISTIAN AND VALERIE TAYLOR TELLING US ALL ABOUT LESBIAN SLEAZE. ↑
MY WORK IS THEIR WORDS. GATHERING OUR DIVERSE LANGUAGES AND PASSING THEM
ON. THE PROOFS OF OUR LIVES AND HOW WE LIVE THEM.

OUR ARCHIVES ARE A GREAT GIFT LESBIANS TODAY ARE PREPARING FOR LESBIANS
TOMORROW. TREASURE-HOMES OF INFORMATION NOT TO BE FORGOTTEN IN THE FUTURE.
KENTUCKY COLLECTION OF LESBIAN HERSTORY, LESBIAN HERSTORY ARCHIVES,
NEW ALEXANDRIA LESBIAN LIBRARY, THIRD WORLD WOMEN'S ARCHIVES, WEST COAST
LESBIAN COLLECTIONS, WOMEN'S MUSIC ARCHIVES, TENNESSEE LESBIAN HERSTORY
ARCHIVES, EAST LANSING LESBIAN LIBRARY, CONNECTICUT LESBIAN ARCHIVES,
ARDYCHE AND ARCHIVES LESBIENNES IN CANADA, THE FEMINIST ARCHIVE AND
SISTER WRITE IN ENGLAND, LESBISCH ARCHIEF LEEUWARDEN IN THE NETHERLANDS ...
AND MORE ... WE'RE BUILDING ARCHIVES, ^{... SPACES FOR THE LIVES OF LESBIANS} EVERYWHERE, WITH THE FEROCIOUSNESS
OF MOTHERS GROWING GRANDER DAUGHTERS.

IN 1983 WE'RE LISTENING TO EACH OTHER, VALUING OUR OWN VOICES MORE AND MORE,
TELLING ALL WE KNOW, SAYING THE TRUTHS WE MUST SAY IN ALL THE PLACES WHERE
LESBIANS MEET ONE WITH ANOTHER, IN ALL THE PLACES WHERE WE GATHER REGULARLY
IN GROUPS. WE LOVE OURSELVES AND WE'RE TALKING OUT LOUD. AND THAT'S MORE
POWERFUL THAN WEAK, WHISPERING COWARDLY VOICES OF HATRED. AND TODAY IN
NORTHAMPTON WE'VE EXPANDED THE RANGE OF OUR VOICES, OPENED UP THE SOUND FROM
OUR HEARTS SO WIDE THAT THE TRUTH OF OUR LIVES IS ECHOING OFF THE WALLS OF
ALL THE BUILDINGS IN THIS TOWN. AND ONCE AND FOR ALL, WE'RE ROLLING OUR
VOICES LIKE THE HILLS ... STRONG AND PRESENT WITH A PAST WE KNOW IS LONG
AND WINDING ... RIPPLING FOREVER ON INTO THE FUTURE.

CONTINUING IN OUR PROUD HERITAGE OF RESISTANCE, THIS MARCH ADDS TO OUR STORY
OF LESBIAN AND GAY PICKETS IN THE SPRINGS AND SUMMERS OF 1965 TO 1969.
IN NEW YORK, WASHINGTON, AND PHILADELPHIA; IN FRONT OF THE PENTAGON, THE
WHITE HOUSE, THE U.N., THE CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSION BUILDING AND INDEPENDENCE
HALL, LESBIANS AND GAYS OF THAT TIME CARRIED SIGNS DEMANDING FAIR EMPLOYMENT,
FAIR HOUSING, SAFETY, AND RESPECT. IN THE SUMMER OF 1969, THE STONEWALL
RIOTS WERE CATALYTIC OF ENORMOUS MOVEMENT GROWTH. AND THROUGH THE 70'S
MASS GAY DEMONSTRATIONS, ZAPS, GAY-INS, KISS-INS AND PRIDE MARCHES CLAIMED
THE MEASURE OF FREEDOM WE WANT MORE OF TODAY.

IT'S MY RIGHT TO TAKE THIS SPACE FOR MYSELF AND I JOIN WITH ERNESTINE ECKSTEIN, BLACK LESBIAN DOB LEADER IN THE 60'S, MEMBER OF NAACP AND SNCC WHEN SHE SAID BACK THEN, " ANY MOVEMENT NEEDS A CERTAIN NUMBER OF COURAGEOUS PEOPLE ... THEY HAVE TO COME OUT FOR THE CAUSE AND ACCEPT WHATEVER CONSEQUENCES COME. THE HOMOSEXUAL HAS TO CALL ATTENTION TO THE FACT THAT HE'S BEEN UNJUSTLY ACTED UPON. THIS IS WHAT THE NEGRO DID. I REGARD PICKETING AS A FORM OF EDUCATION."

TODAY WITH ALL THE SPACE WE'RE MAKING FOR OURSELVES, THE CLOSET HAS BECOME A BAD OLD JOKE. TODAY WE'VE COME OUT FOR GOOD. WHEN SOME BIGOT IN FLORENCE TELLS THE GAZETTE HE THINKS WE WANT TO MAKE NORTHAMPTON INTO THE GAY CAPITAL OF THE EAST I THINK HE UNDERESTIMATES OUR ASPIRATIONS ... WOULDN'T WE REALLY RATHER HAVE IT BE THE LESBIAN AND GAY CAPITAL OF A FREE AND OPEN, LOVING UNIVERSE? TODAY WE'RE NO LONGER WOMEN AND MEN IN THE SHADOWS, BUT A PROUD AND BEAUTIFUL PEOPLE WALKING OPENLY IN THE SUN SHOWING OURSELVES AND ALL WHO LOOK ON THAT THE STRENGTH STRONGER THAN ALL OTHER STRENGTHS IS THE POWER OF OUR LOVE FOR OURSELVES AND EACH OTHER.

AFTER SIX MONTHS OF PRESUMPTUOUS THREATS ON MY PRECIOUS LESBIAN LIFE AND THE LIVES AND WORK OF WIMMIN I LOVE, HERE I AM AND HERE WE ALL ARE. A
 BRAVE PEOPLE WITH A PRESENCE AND PLACE IN THIS WORLD. MY WORK IS OUR WORDS. ^{AND I WILL} ^{NOT BE}
 DISCOVERING, ARCHIVING, PRESERVING AND PROTECTING OUR VOICES. ^{How could I be silent, living with such powerful voices.} ^{SILENT.} HERE I AM
 AFTER ALL. AND HERE I WILL STAY. ^{How could I be silent, supported by truth-loving people}

LET THEM TAKE A LOOK AT US ALL NOW. THIS IS WHO WE ARE... AND HERE WE'RE GONNA STAY. ANYBODY'S GOT TO BE A FOOL IF HE THINKS HE CAN STOP THE MOVEMENT OF A RIVER, THE GREATNESS OF THE HILLS, OR THE ROAR OF AN OCEAN.

THANK YOU.