

"personal" article for third section of Baltimore Journal on
"how the women's movement changed my life, etc." -- revised

Title ?

In February 1969 I joined a women's liberation study group in Washington, D.C.. As we read Engels' Origin of the Family I knew I had found other women who shared my anger, frustration, and hopes. I stopped trying to organize "radical teachers" and quit my job as an elementary school teacher to work full time in the women's movement.

~~In the time~~ ^Between September 1969 and the spring of 1970, women's liberation reached its first peak ⁱⁿ in energy, participation, and media coverage. Hundreds of women came week after week to our free university course, ~~on women's liberation~~. We opened an office and were flooded with mail, phone calls, and "new" women. Our projects and actions on daycare, abortion, the pill, and the war kept us out all day and up all night. Our enthusiasm, which we called female life-force, infected the left movement in the city, including husbands and boyfriends of many w.l. women. At softball games, parties, and communal suppers, women challenged men about their chauvinism in a mock-serious way which did not threaten the growing sense of community. My husband ~~paid~~ ^{wanted} our bills, washed the dishes half the time, and ~~had~~ ^{had} to know everything that happened at every women's meeting.

By the spring of 1970 we had developed a descriptive analysis

of the condition of middle-class ^(oppression) ^{white} American wives and mothers, which most of us were. We practiced a fly-swatter, help-your-sister approach to ending the oppression of women. We were confused by guilt feelings about black, poor, and third world women. Where could we go from there?

Several women who had been leaders in W.L. got together to form a working collective. We knew we were beginning to flounder. We had ideas but no ^{overall direction and less} energy. We rejected leadership but were still leaders. We prided ourselves that Washington avoided factionalism, and tried to figure out an individual explanation every time some one dropped out of the group. Most of all we believed "sisterhood is powerful" and that an analysis and strategy for our liberation would ^{simply} come out of our ^{feelings} good ^{vibes} and our renewed seriousness.

~~But~~ In the meantime I had fallen in love with Joan and was scared shitless that I would be kicked out of women's Liberation if anyone found out. At meetings in the W.L. office, women protested loudly whenever the media or men ~~XXXXXX~~ denounced W.L. as a "bunch of lesbians". Each time I looked at the floor and waited for them to go home so Joan and I could lock the door and make love.

Gradually we told our friends, and while we were both relating to my husband, no one was very upset. Bisexuality was seen as progressive. The real threat, and the real contradictions in the women's movement, only became clear when first Joan, and then I, ended our attempts to relate to my husband.

A
instead of understanding that these ~~may have been political reasons why for someone to drop out people did not stay.~~

I had never questioned ~~or~~ thought of ~~heterosexuality~~ as an institution. ^{Now} I began to understand that everything I had thought was "natural" or "true" was a vicious lie maintained to keep women down. I was as disoriented as my friends were threatened. ~~Everything was different, as though gravity stopped pulling, or black and white changed to color.~~

I was very conscious of changing. A crucial part of my conditioning as a woman was to be passive, ~~and~~ to let things happen to me. Now I was deciding to be different and ~~doing it~~ ^{making things happen}. My friends, and their

nusbands, explained to each other that I had been stolen from my husband by a man-hating lesbian. Their hatred of Joan as a "real" lesbian only emphasized their need to continue seeing me as a passive, duped, non-threatening "real" woman. As I experienced the

combined exhilaration of loving a woman and knowing I could change, I thought all women would come out, change and be as happy as I was

^{not TP} Most of my friends didn't ^{change and come out} and I gradually emerged from my "new gay" euphoria to find myself in an alien world. I thought I had been fighting pig America before, but because of my class, ~~and~~ race, ^{white house} privilege, I had fought as a rebel, not as a reject. Everything around me was, and of course, always had been, heterosexual ~~or~~ "men and women together, and men most important". books, movies, people in the streets, my family, my friends, and especially Women's Liberation: Birth control, bad fucks, and abortions! I had belatedly discovered lesbian oppression. I was a queer ~~and~~ and I was going to have to fight in order to survive myself. I had taught myself to shoplift to "practice" for the revolution, but now as a lesbian I had to lie every day to survive in the Man's world.

Much of my new oppression as a lesbian was coming from my heterosexual friends ~~or~~ the women I had worked with and loved in W.L. I was a "nice" lesbian who explained to them over and over, as many times as they asked, why I was a lesbian and now I was oppressed. At first I did not push anyone to come out, even as I began

to see that lesbianism is a political choice, I kept reassuring them, and myself, that we could continue to work together.

I wasted energy and emotion on them too long. They had said "women should love women" -- (men keep women apart) -- (women together can change the world)". Because they wouldn't or couldn't live up to those ideas, ~~change~~, they are traitors to their own vision. They have been bought off by the privilege and security they get from men. They have betrayed women, especially themselves. A women's revolution can be ^[led] made only by women who give their full energy and love to each other, that is, by lesbians.

Only after I had ~~INTELLIGENTLY~~ kicked out my husband and I see how much ^{heterosexuality} had blocked out my real understanding of men and male supremacy. I could let myself remember the disgust I felt about fucking, ~~until I forced myself to like being raped,~~ ^{I realized that} every fuck is a rape even if it feels nice because every man has power and privilege over women, ~~whether~~ whether he uses it blatantly or subtly. My "liberated" husband kept me down not by violence but by making me feel guilty. He wanted me to be a strong woman as long as I worried all the time about his feelings, problems, "oppression". Recently, ^{my main worries were a conversation} when the guilt ~~tactic~~ no longer worked on me, ~~XXXXX~~ ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~ XXX he sat in disbelief, and I saw him consider whether to fall back on the male power which he had always had in reserve. As a heterosexual I had always had to double-think, "well, my man is an exception" every time I got close to the truth -- ~~that is~~, that male supremacy is the source of all oppression, and that every man benefits from it. As a lesbian I have begun to experience how it will be fundamentally different as women begin to build our own world. As long as I gave energies to my man, ~~as long as~~ I had not experienced that tremendous difference.

When I first came out I thought of myself as different, which implied better, than "old" lesbians. I believed in my "superior"

They implies support for bitch-female relationships. Circle we can't support since they are a hetero institution

women's consciousness" and my "revolutionary life-style." I was ^{afraid of} ~~have~~ ^{har} lesbians, and ^{offended by} ~~offended~~ by ^{both-female roles} ~~both-female roles~~ and "sexist" camp humor. In fact I looked at lesbians with all the prejudice and fear I had learned as a heterosexual. I ^{still} wanted to ~~still~~ be "normal" and to keep ~~the~~ ^{heterosexual} privileges, I had as a heterosexual. As I saw through the perversion of heterosexuality, and ~~as~~ experienced the shit that came down from my straight friends, my identification as a lesbian -- a man-hating dyke -- became very clear to me. I cut my hair as a symbolic cut with my past, and because I wanted to look like a "real" lesbian. The bar which had frightened me at first became my refuge too.

^{by becoming}
I gave up some of my privilege ~~as~~ a dyke. But I had only now understanding some of the rest of my privilege and how to change it. about a year ago I joined a lesbian collective that lived together one painful week and broke up, largely because several of us had not dealt with our class privilege. no A

I had thought that eight gay women living together would be heaven after ~~being~~ the isolation of being the ~~only two~~ lesbians in women's liberation. But I was so ^{consumed by} ~~into~~ ^{not} what I thought was "revolutionary" -- communal everything, non-monogamy, dope -- that I resisted any criticism about my class behavior. no A

Class had been mentioned ~~in~~ but not understood in the heterosexual women's movement, because ~~women~~ ^{we} spent all ~~their~~ ^{our} time dealing with men instead of with each other, and because the organization was started and controlled by middle class ^{white} women who couldn't or wouldn't see that our class behavior was the cause of many of the problems that so distressed us.

US or not?

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There are many ways in which I have ~~still~~ not changed enough about class. Some of them I understand and ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ just have to do something about. I know there is a lot I don't understand yet about class, and I have hardly begun to deal with race. I did change from ^aheterosexual to a lesbian, and from heterosexual consciousness to lesbian consciousness. I am frustrated and angry at women who cling to their privilege and refuse to make that change. Working class women are ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ just as angry at me, for the same good reason. The revolution ^{means} ~~is about~~ change...women changing themselves...women changing the world. There is no middle ground and no individual solution. If you, or I, choose not to change, we choose against a women's revolution and against ourselves.

Sharon Beevy

