

Can You Say "Lesbian"?

Recently I was talking with a straight friend who was concerned that she was not truly open to lesbian issues and asked if "I could try to help her understand what it is like to be a lesbian." (She of course only referred to me as a gay woman.)

I initially offered the standard replies, but they struck me as trivial. I tended to articulate only the more negative aspects of my sexual orientation, such as homophobia and discrimination. I haven't the audacity to speak for all lesbians, in that I know there is more to us than either stereotypes or our oppression. It is a too intensely personal experience to be summed up in a superficial sentence or two.

For me, being a lesbian is the most wonderful part of my life--and the hardest. By acknowledging my lesbianism, I have been and will be able to be more in touch with the real me, but at the same time I am forced to hide myself behind many false faces: single, unmarried, still looking, etc. But one of the greatest parts of being a lesbian is that I am able to really appreciate my womanhood "in my element," and I get to experience being a woman without encumbrance.

In this sexist society, there is so much programming aimed at making women feel bad about their gender. My lesbianism is one of the ways I combat that programming. I find great strength in women and what other women historically have accomplished, and I look forward to a future where women will play a bigger role in our society. To me, then, I cannot separate being a lesbian from being a woman. To be born a woman creates many exciting possibilities, and lesbianism is one of the ways I experience being a woman.

Of course there are trying times too. Some people try to categorize me as immature, unwomanly, mentally unsound, or sinful, and sometimes when I am feeling down I let it hurt me. I do grow tired of using the words roommate and friend for cover. I do grow tired of classes where all that is discussed is heterosexual possibilities. And finally I do grow really tired of seeing more men than women speak out for lesbian/gay rights, often referred to as merely "gay" rights.

The word "lesbian" seems to have some strange stigma associated with it. Consequently, people avoid using it. So if you can say "the L word," if you can vocalize that lesbian utterance, say it! Use it and feel great and comfortable saying it. If it is hard at first, practice saying it alone in your bathroom or while driving. Just repeat it over and over again to yourself: lesbian, lesbian. There is something about that word; make that something powerful

-Jill Duvall



I wish in this mountain haze
of goat world penis promises
that my one true love would

(in delerium)

deliver me from this

house of unknowing evil---

in love's infinite

false wisdom

of wrong-headedness,

politically incorrect as it is--

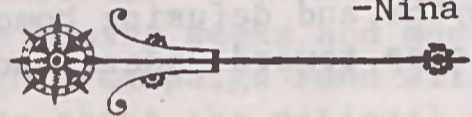
sweep me off my feet

and under the fast tide

of picture-perfect,

romance-novel endings.

-Nina Nahunta



(HARVEY MILK from page 9)

meeting in a candlelight vigil on the night of the killings.

White was convicted of manslaughter rather than the two counts of first degree murder under "special circumstances" with which he was charged. Under a California law which White had supported, he would have faced a mandatory death sentence for multiple political assassinations. His defense was based on a plea of "temporary insanity."

White's attorney successfully used what came to be called the "Twinkie defense," claiming that White's judgment had been severely impaired by his consumption of junk food. He had been depressed about money matters and the Mayor's refusal to allow him to rescind his resignation from the Board.

When the verdict was announced, 5,000 gays rioted for several hours. The White Night Riot caused thousands of dollars in damage. Supervisor Harry Britt, an openly gay man appointed to fill out Milk's term, was charged with inciting the riot. He reportedly said, "This is gay anger you are seeing. We aren't going to put up with any more Whites."

Response to White's death has been quiet. Mayor Dianne Feinstein who succeeded Moscone, said: "This latest tragedy should close a very sad chapter in this city's history." And one gay leader spoke of White's suicide as "a strong and ironic ending to the story." (reprinted with permission from The Front Page, Nov. 5, 1985)