What does the future hold? Special Double Issue
In 2000: Transform the Planet

Letter from Beijing:
Life at Hua Xia Girls' Middle School

Ed. note: Daisy Tainton, now a senior at Simmons College, spent her junior year in Beijing. Part two of a two-part series on her experiences there.

Hua Xia is the only middle and high school for girls in Beijing, and enjoys this distinction due to the eradication of girls' schools at the start of the Cultural Revolution. It is also the only private girls' high school in all of China to receive government aid. Since its conversion to a single-sex school with the option of boarding in 1995, Hua Xia has attracted more than seven hundred students. As stated in the brochure, a colorful and high-quality document, special courses for girls and international exchange are expected to help the students become well-rounded individuals and become well prepared to enter the next century, presumably as part of the work force.

I worked Tuesdays and Thursdays teaching colloquial English to two classes of more than forty 15- to 16-year-olds each. Their usual Chinese English teachers, Bai and Chen Laoshi, translated when necessary. I also observed two art classes and the self-defense class, corrected homework and interviewed teachers and students.

Previously, I thought that any girls' or women's school was by its nature a good addition to a school system, and would be especially useful in a chronically sexist culture like China's. After working at Hua Xia, I discovered that this is not always the case.

Chinese arguments for female education are many but often confused; using single-sex schools to build equality of the sexes is too revolutionary an idea to be grasped firmly in times of upheaval and, well, revolution. In recent years, women's educational disadvantage has still been caused by parents' ignorance, attitudes towards marriage, poverty, and the idea that girls should stay at home to learn household jobs and perform them rather than

Continued on page 4
The following letter concerns:


The letter has been edited to fit.—Ed.

The book is part of Scholastic’s Dear America series of historical fiction diaries and is highly problematic. Set in 1880 at Carlisle Indian School, one of the earliest government boarding schools, where children from across the US were taken from their families to be “educated.” Many died there; many others ran away and died trying to get home.

In her author’s note, Rinaldi says that she visited the school and took many names from the cemetery’s headstones for this story. I do not think it even occurred to her that Native American people would object to this. For her, they were just names. To us (I’m Pueblo Indian), the school is a place such as [sic]?” The senior officer replied, “Not since I was weaned.”

I hope you can read this. Since I had a stroke several months ago, my handwriting has deteriorated.

Eleanor Herling, B.S.
School of Library Service, Columbia University

PART REVIEW, PART LETTER

In view of American men’s fixation on women’s breasts, I think that the illustrations on pages 3 and 8 of the Spring ’99 issue of Women in Libraries was uncalled for.

You perhaps know the old story of the officers at the regimental dance. As they watched the whirling figures, the junior officer said to the senior officer, “Have you ever seen such a site [sic]?” The senior officer replied, “Not since I was weaned.”

Perhaps an Op-Ed page?—Ed.
**ALA Conference Calendar:**

**January 14–18, 2000**

**San Antonio**

**January 14, Friday**

11:30 a.m.–12:30 p.m. ALA Committee on Pay Equity, Convention Center (CC), 213B
2:00 - 5:30 p.m. WSS Awards Committee, Hilton (HIL), La Vista

**January 15, Saturday**

8:00 - 9:30 a.m. Feminist Task Force (part of All Task Force), Four Points Hotel (FP), RioGrandeBR
8:00 - 9:30 a.m. ALA SRRT Action Council All Task Force Meeting, FP, RioGrande BR
9:30 a.m. - 12:00 p.m. ALA SRRT Action Council I, FP, RioGrande BR
9:30 - 11:00 a.m. ALA Committee on the Status of Women in Librarianship (COSWL), CC-216A
9:30 - 11:00 a.m. GLBTRT Off-site Steering Committee I, Plaza San Antonio (PLZ), Cavalier
11:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m. LAMA Women Administrators, Gunther Hotel (GUNT), Yellow Rose
2:00 - 4:00 p.m. Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgendered Round Table (GLBTRT) All Committee, Marriott Rivercenter (MARHQ), Conf. 15
2:00 - 4:00 p.m. GLBTRT Book Awards Committee, Menger Hotel (MEN), Cavalier
6:00 - 8:00 p.m. GLBTRT Social

**January 16, Sunday**

9:30 - 11:00 a.m. COSWL Bibliography Task Force, CC-211
8:00 - 11:00 a.m. GLBTRT Book Awards Committee, HIL, LaCondesa W
9:30 - 11:00 a.m. Feminist Task Force Program Planning, PLZ, Conference Ctr. D
9:30 - 11:00 a.m. COSWL Bibliography Task Force, CC-211
9:30 - 11:00 a.m. ACRL Women’s Studies Section (WSS) All Committee, Radisson, De Gala B
4:30 - 5:30 p.m. WSS Membership, CC-214C
8:00 - 10:00 p.m. GLBTRT Read-Aloud, MARHQ, Conf. 16

**January 17, Monday**

8:00 - 9:30 a.m. Feminist Task Force Membership, CC-212B
9:30 - 11:00 a.m. WSS Discussion, Gunther Hotel, Yellow Rose General
2:00 - 4:00 p.m. SRRT Action Council II, CC-214D

**January 18, Tuesday**

8:00 - 9:00 a.m. COSWL CC-210B
9:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m. GLBTRT Steering Committee II, CC-210A

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**Special Invitation:**

**Share your vision**

This special invitation comes to you from Theresa Tobin, Vice Chair/Chair Elect of ACRL WSS and member, Feminist Task Force and Committee on the Status of Women in Librarianship—Ed.

You are invited to come help the Women's Studies Section review, re-think, re-envision the relationships among the various women's groups at ALA.

Historically, the ACRL WSS has had strong ties and frequent collaborations with SRRT Feminist Task Force, COSWL, and the LAMA Women Managers Discussion Group members. In recent years, our collaborations have fallen off and their shadow can be seen primarily in the annual Introduction to Women's Groups at ALA and occasional co-sponsorship of events.

- Is this what we want?
- Where should we be going?
- Have we finished the work of women and feminism in the organization?
- What is the right balance between the work we do separately and the work we share?

The discussion is Monday, Jan 17, 9:30-11:00, in Gunther Hotel's Yellow Rose Room. I hope to see you there.

December 1999
Next Issue: Swan Song for Editor

This old editor has been hanging on for quite a while, and I can't help but feel it's time for a change, both for me and for Women in Libraries. After four years in my current term as editor, plus a few before this, volume 29, number 1 will be my last. I've introduced a new look with new typefaces this issue, softening the readers up for a bigger change.

If you like books, if you like to set up newsletters and have everyone know your name, step up the Feminist Task Force meetings in San Antonio next month and see how you can help.

If you aren't coming to San Antonio, you may write FTF's current cochairs, Rosemary McAndrew at mcandrew@crab.rutgers.edu, or Adriene Lim at ab7155@wayne.edu.

If you want to work, we want to see you!

—Madeleine Tainton, ed.
go to school. As late as 1989, females made up about 80% of un-enrolled school-age children, more than 80% of school drop-outs, and 80% of the three million enrolled but permanently absent from school. At this time 94% of working women were manual laborers and farmers, and need for raising the educational level of women was admitted to be one of the nation’s biggest problems.

Parents of Hua Xia students fear that their daughters will be distracted from studies by boys, this will affect their futures in terms of college and careers, and that training them exclusively for college education could well be a waste of time if they do not pass the all-important college entrance exam. The special curriculum for girls (which includes self-defense, cooking, sewing, art and dance) and the tight schedule at Hua Xia take care of these concerns, but as I observed, many of the girls have boyfriends from elementary school who meet them in the afternoons to walk them home. If the girls live at school, they are watched over around the clock by a kind of “house mother” who locks them in at night and inspects their rooms every morning and evening. These girls are either coddled and isolated or feel forced into a situation that doesn’t suit them, and guilty about their contact with boys. Only the most dedicated, who incidentally chose the school of their own accord, can reap the benefits of attending a girls’ school by taking initiative and working hard to satisfy their own demands. These girls were already independent, choosing something new because of their high expectations of themselves. One girl, Zheng Qi, answered my question about what she likes to do in her spare time by giving me a copy of her daily schedule, copied here with minor spelling corrections (see inset).

According to Zheng Qi, the majority of the students at Hua Xia have very clear ideas of their future. Some students walk the line between giving up their dreams and daring to completely form and pursue those dreams. Even the best students remarked in homework papers that they did not expect their dreams to be realized. For example, one student hoped to become a film director, another to study in the U.S. and become a lawyer, but both were resigned to becoming teachers. One of the teachers told me that those who don’t attend college can probably expect to find low-level jobs like peddling merchandise on the street—jobs with little hope for advancement and that others would not choose.

—D. Tainton

| BOTH ENDS OF THE PENCIL |

**Access for Writers**


This slim volume provides an accessible, readable resource for gay and lesbian writers.

Cross-indexed for subject and general topics, the chapters are laid out in clearly defined parameter: the world wide web, book publishers, magazines and journals, newspapers and newsletters, theaters, and agents.

The essays included in this edition give encouragement as well as practical advice. Patricia Nell Warren lists six points to remember when dealing with small presses; Scott O’Hara shares his expertise with budding porn writers. Shannon Turner dispenses pragmatic wisdom for writers who despair of bland rejection letters. She encourages:

While popular wisdom might have it that the truly great writers got where they are because of their exquisite raw talent, my experience has been that self-confidence and persistence are equally important.

This is a must-have for the library of any gay or lesbian writer.

—P. Crossland

**Access for Readers**


*Counterpoise* is clean, easy to read, and geared for accessibility. Reviews of books, magazines, Internet ‘zines, pamphlets, and videos are easy to locate and cross-referenced by publisher, author/title, and subject. To further aid the reader in locating reviews, each is numbered. *Counterpoise* covers all subjects, including World Affairs, Queer Music, Young People, and IGC on the Net. The journal specializes in the work of the alternative presses; the reviews cover the kinds of materials you won’t find at the big book warehouses, at least, not on display. For librarians and students in particular, this magazine is an invaluable tool for selection and research as well as an intriguing catalogue for browsing. —P. Crossland

December 1999
The book review section starts with a review of "Cherokee Women and Cosmic Order" by Theda Perdue. The review discusses how Perdue's scholarly work provides a foundation to explore the effects of European colonization on Cherokee tribes. The review points out that Perdue builds on earlier work and postulates that gender difference on the culture was neither subordinate to the other. It highlights the complexity of gender roles and how historians failed to appreciate the equal status of women.

The review then moves on to "Women’s Work in America" by Teresa Amott and Julie Matthiae. The book examines the quantitative and qualitative differences of women’s work in different cultures based on cultural norms, co-residency patterns, type of work, and societal change. It explores the diversity of working women’s contributions to U.S. economic history. The review appreciates how it influences women is dependent upon cultural and familial factors.

Next, there is a review of "Settling the Canadian Prairie" by Judy Schultz. The review lauds the book for its narrow range of racial and ethnic groups, and for its coverage of African-American, Asian-American, and Puerto Rican women. It emphasizes the book’s attention to the interconnectedness of race, class, and gender. The review concludes with a quote from J. Kunz: "The authors cover a narrow range of racial and ethnic groups, unfortunately limiting the book. Many smaller racial and ethnic groups are omitted, i.e., Cuban-, Korean-, Indian-, and Arab-Americans and indigenous Hawaiians. While a broader approach would have better suited the multicultural premise, the book gives much-needed attention to the interconnectedness of race, class, and gender, and women’s work through capitalist development, helping redress some of the misconceptions and myths that have clouded our understanding of the historical perspective of women’s work in the United States."
brought to indigenous peoples and wildlife. She does note in passing that traces of the buffalo, the walls and trails, have disappeared.

Mamie had nine children from 1897 to 1918, and worked hard raising them, a workload we can only imagine. An example: on a wood-burning cook stove, she baked 16 giant loaves of sourdough bread twice a week.

One of Mamie's sons, Uncle Ken to the author, describes her reputation as a skillful seamstress:

People at church used to wonder where the Harris girls got their pretty clothes. Pearl, the youngest daughter, had one dress that was so pretty, everybody asked. They were flour sacks, but Mom fixed them so's you'd never know.

The narrative is both professional and personal at once, though more concern for environmental losses would have been well placed. —M. Tainton

**WOMEN WHO SURVIVE**

### JEWISH IN CHILE


Agosín writes about herself and her family in this unusual memoir. More of the story if from her mother's point of view, as she imagines it, than from her own. Agosín's mother, Frida Halpern, grew up in Chile, one of a small group of recently immigrated European Jews. A fascinating and unique account of growing up as one of few Jews in a Catholic country, during a time when persecution of Jews was commonplace. We almost live the lives we look in on as De Rosa describes a sensuous and palpable existence. The importance of family, together with its burdens of guilt, expectation, responsibility, and hard work, are brought vividly to life through smell, taste, and sound:

"Babies were born not in the Italy of the white hot sun, children conceived not among the sweet smell of olive trees and figs, the smell of soot and stucco, the smell of earth rich as a dipper of cream, children whose eyes filled not with the yellow square of sun set into the window with white curtains, but children instead stowed into this tiny closet of a street with pinched back porches, the sky folded and pinned like fabric between the buildings."


*Paper Fish* is an autobiographical novel about Italian-American experience in the poor, ethnically diverse neighborhoods of Chicago following World War II. We almost live the lives we look in on as De Rosa describes a sensuous and palpable existence. The importance of family, together with its burdens of guilt, expectation, responsibility, and hard work, are brought vividly to life through smell, taste, and sound:

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Feminist Press is continuing its mission of rescuing great novels from obscurity. *Paper Fish*, first published in 1980 and out of print for many years, is a driving poetic oeuvre, almost stream-of-consciousness. A new afterword by Edvige Giunta, notes, and a bibliography complete the book's preparation for its introduction into literature courses. Though it is tragic that *Paper Fish* was lost to us for so long, we can be thankful for the revival of this masterpiece. —M. Tainton

December 1999
The Complexities of Stevie Smith


Severin gives a very real sense of the breadth of Stevie Smith's work — her poetry, novels and short fiction, criticism and book reviews, drawings, and "boundary crossing" performance art. It is useful precisely because of this insistence on Smith's breadth, and the fact that unlike other studies, it does not concentrate exclusively on her poetry. Severin focuses on the importance of reading various aspects of Smith's work in relation to each other: the poetry and the drawings, the performances and the accompanying music, for example. Reading each aspect of Smith's work as a complex intertext of the others allows Severin to discuss the complexity which is at the heart of Smith's resistance to the domestic ideologies of early twentieth-century Britain. Also interesting is Severin's engagement with Smith's working life — her clerical job at a publishing house specializing in women's domestic magazines, and later work as a book reviewer.

In the early chapters of her book, Severin draws on the work of a variety of theorists. She then provides a reading of Smith's work that both pays close and detailed attention to the texts themselves, and takes into account Smith's own life and the broader social context within which she wrote and worked. This insistence on the complexity of Smith's historical position is perhaps most effective in its reading of Smith's complex relation to feminism. Severin locates Smith as both inheriting many of the ideas and attitudes of Victorian and Edwardian suffrage feminism, and anticipating feminist concerns of the later twentieth century.

Understanding the development and contradictions of twentieth-century feminism is an important project, with easy first-wave/second-wave generalizations often substituted for more thoughtful analysis. In this context, Severin's placing of Smith firmly between first and second waves has implications for feminist criticism which go well beyond the single-author focus of this particular text.

—P. Brush

Soon-ah, Comfort Woman/Stolen Woman


Soon-ah is a Korean girl of thirteen when she is taken by the Japanese to serve the Emperor as a 'comfort woman' for Japanese troops during World War II. Gift follows her from her life as a young girl in occupied Korea through her time as a forced sex worker and her eventual return to Korea.

Soon-ah is picked up in her home village by Japanese soldiers. She is initially forced to work in a south seas brothel for enlisted men, but because of her good skill with the Japanese language is transferred to an officer's facility. She meets Sadamu, a young Japanese journalist, who does not support the Emperor's war efforts. She struggles with feelings of worthlessness and overcomes them enough to fall in love with Sadamu. Together they escape to an unoccupied island, and eventually are picked up by American troops who bring them to Hawaii.

Sadamu returns to the war as an American counter-intelligence officer, leaving Soon-ah to face the legacy of her time as a prostitute alone. The brutality of all she has seen and all that has been done to her overwhelsms her. The Americans she meets do not appear to understand what has happened to her or to other Korean women. Soon-ah attempts suicide, swimming out to sea, trying to leave the past behind and to find Sadamu. Gradually, she heals. Soon-ah returns to a dividing Korea when the war is over. She is very much different from the schoolgirl who was carried away. Her new-found strength lies in her conviction that destructive ideologies and violence are evils with no place in her world. —K. Gerhard

Growing Up, Growing Old


Shayna Steinblatt's grandmother Tzeydl is ninety-nine years old and lives in an apartment in Brighton Beach, until Shayna's parents rather abruptly have her put in a nursing home. This story is about Shayna and her grandmother. They have always been very close, and it is difficult for Shayna to understand how her mother could have put her grandmother in a home. At first she tries to understand, then change, and finally make a sort of peace with the situation. It is she, not her mother, who regularly visits Bubbe Tzeydl in the home.

Shayna spends much of her time driving back and forth, arguing with her mother, and worrying. This is not an easy time in her life. Yet amidst all the chaos, life goes on. She has met and fallen in love with Luz. The love story is a new beginning, affirming life even during a time of sadness.

During Shayna's visits and speaking with her grandmother, it's almost as if I cold hear them speaking (the Yiddish glossary at the end of the book is especially helpful). While reading this book I heard definite echoes of conversations with my own grandmother, and doubtless other readers will hear their own echoes as well.

This novel made me laugh, cry, crave matzo ball soup, and call my grandmother. It is touching and very enjoyable.

—B. Jedlicka

Quirky Observations


M. A. C. Farrant is little known outside of Canada, and that's a shame. This collection of short stories is her fifth, and each page is like a song played on a beautifully-tuned instrument. Farrant is often invited to readings, and you can see why: the stories are meant to be read aloud. Each line catches the sound of the voice.

In "Little Zerotta," a girl fantasizes about her wedding:

"I'm going to have a wedding in white," Zero's now telling everyone, all sharp-faced and eager-eyed. "I want someone I can dress up and put in my very own living room; someone I can vacuum around and dust while he's watching TV then carry off to bed come midnight. I want Alfred Angelo Dream Maker."

Farrant is an expert on the little quirks that make people interesting, sometimes more interesting than they deserve to be. And she deserves our attention for it. —M. Tainton

Women in Libraries
Women who love

Hot stuff


Karen Tulchinsky has gathered the work of 69 writers given the assignment of producing a favorite fantasy in 1,000 words or less. The result is a wild romp of a book, suitable for sharing with a lover of long acquaintance or perhaps whiling away time spent in line at the bank, on the train to work, or while stuck in traffic. Those readers who frequent gyms might incorporate this saucy volume in their workout, toiling away on the treadmill, stationary bike, or climbing the stairmaster to eternity.

The subject matter ranges from public nipple piercing and scarification to less intense but equally erotic tales of delicious memories and familiar but powerful sex between long-term lovers. Tatiana Barona de la Tierra writes,

A few really loved me...the sweetest of all, put playful elves on my pillow and left a trail of sparks with every step in “True Cunt Stories.” On a sadder note, Spike Harris remembers irretrievable love in “Your Alley.” On the occasion of a lost lover’s birthday, she muses,

We were two halves of a secret, and now I have just my half....I guess I’m no longer afraid of people finding out about us. I no longer think it’s the worst thing that could happen.

T. J. Bryan sets Ma Bell on her ear with a seductive phone call in “Telephone Strip at Bedtime.” Age is no barrier to satisfaction as Rita Montana demonstrates in her short, “Covering the Grey.” Ages, race, experience, nothing is an insurmountable barrier to these women and the romps they so skillfully and boldly describe in a rainbow of emotions ranging from simple, immediate lust to melancholy love held only in memory. This volume should find a ready audience in the reader. -P. Crossland

Finding wholeness


Intuition is a realization of wholeness which is simultaneously internal and external, an insight which gives us everything at once, if only momentarily.

It starts with nighttime dreams explored by a psychic, a therapist, several skilled poets. The lessons progress through symbols, storytelling, and ending appropriately with healing, teaching, and social action. Blanchard does an excellent job collecting these blocks of work and quilting them into a remarkable work demonstrating the interconnectedness of the journey to becoming fully human. Creativity explored not solely as artist, writer, or poet but as an essential part of problem solving and everyday life.

Vicki Gabriner shares her personal fable, “The Good Fairy,” which danced out of her head as she was eating a bowl of soup. “But when the mind gets quiet and knows it is in a receptive space, it speaks the truth.” Her fairy helps a five-year-old child survive the horrors of sexual abuse, wrapping the memories up for a time when they can be dealt with constructively. The cycle from numbness to re-emergence into light is one example of healing through intuition. Lisa Blackburn relates how a group of high school students raised money for her community’s Thanksgiving food drive:

...we came up with the idea that his students could make enough ceramic bowls to serve a soup luncheon to the faculty and staff and ask them to donate what they would have otherwise paid for lunch that day.

Blanchard and her contributors remind us that creativity is an essential part of human nature, one that has helped us survive more than any other characteristic we possess. -P. Crossland

Lovers connect in Tennessee


The Sensual Thread, Stone’s first novel, tells the story of Lee, a lesbian who moves back to her grandmother’s farm on a Tennessee mountain after being involved in a car accident in which her mother was killed. Lee soon connects with her long-lost childhood friend, Kay, also a lesbian, who has recently returned to her family’s house on the same mountain. Shortly after they meet again, Lee and Kay become emotionally involved, first as close friends and later as lovers.

This is a fairly familiar story for readers of popular lesbian fiction, and the plot is predictable from the beginning: old friends reconnect, discover they are attracted to each other, fall in love, have passionate sex, carve out a lasting relationship. Stone has, however, embellished this story a great deal by adding elements of extrasensory powers and time travel. Lee has the capacity to feel what others are feeling, which causes problems in her relationship with Kay. Towards the end of the novel, the two women discover that their relationship mirrors that of two of their deceased female relatives, whom Lee communicates with shortly after being thrown from her horse.

There was little about Stone’s writing that I found exciting, but this novel at least avoids some of the stereotypes of popular lesbian fiction. For example, there are no ‘evil’ male characters, and both women have supportive families. Although the time travel scene—which could have been a fall-induced hallucination—and Lee’s gift of feeling what other’s feel stretched the imagination a bit, these two devices helped to move the story out of the realm of the predictable.

December 1999
**Book Review Section**

**Punchy Poetry**


If you enjoy poetry but are squeamish about the real world or the physical body, then this volume is not for you. On the other hand, if you like to see the inside (and sometimes the underside) of a profession, if you find all aspects of life worthy of your regard, or if you've ever wondered whether the medical personnel you see are truly that socially detached, this will be of interest.

Cortney Davis writes punchy, dynamically physical poetry. Many of the poems center around nursing and sickness, but she also touches on societal ills—the abuse of women and children by men and women, the abuse of men by war, the abuse of mankind by hunger, ignorance and murder. Not all of the poetry is on dismal topics. There are some about love, and the celebration of life. However, the nursing pieces and the ones about death and suffering are the most powerful to me, perhaps because they are closest to the poet's own world, and because many of them reveal things that aren't readily spoken of, for example, being beaten by loved ones (Suffering, 3):

one woman told me it wasn't the blows
but the love lost,
gone as if they peeled your skin,
sucked all the marrow from your bones and now
you walk everywhere hollow.

Cortney Davis is a nurse-practitioner, as well as winner of an NEA fellowship and other awards for her poetry. Nursing and other medical programs could benefit from the kinds of insight that this collection provides. —N. Parker-Gibson

**A Repetitious, Aching Phrase**


Morning dew, I've learned here, isn't morning dew at all—it falls at night, while meteors fall.

Pearlberg says her book is "about what remains after we exit the stage." And for those of us who find Marianne Faithfull sultry, thrilling, beautiful, we can understand Pearlberg’s theme. Eroticism, pop culture, cigarettes, brand names—literary allusion and word play. Pearlberg's poetry moves, hurts, touches. From "Poison Arrow Tree Frogs":

I knew a girl whose fingers widened at the tips,
little suction pads.
In her lush room I climbed the ceiling
while those fingers climbed my wall
and wet rhythmic music sprayed
a repetitious, aching phrase like
all the sex I'd ever have
and ever want
and ever go to jail
and lose my friends
and civil rights
and safety for.

Sexy, funny, the poems call up distant memories, make you remember things you might rather forget, and make you laugh. This is what poetry should be. —M. Tainton

**Fizzy High Heartbeat**


The poetry of Cheryl Boyce Taylor reminds me of many things: sun-warmed melon; starting a novel like Mattiehessen’s *Far Tortuga* and ricocheting between frustration and understanding; and the fizzy high heartbeat one gets going into a party of mixed friends and strangers, with old lovers thrown in who may be either. She has a clear ear for both the vernacular of Trinidad and of the city streets. She writes of love, of sex, of family, and of alienation, of working too hard and long to do anything else:

ah running three jobs
ah still calm see
where de money goin.

(from "Plenty Time Pass Fast, Fas Dey So")

The *Raw Air* of the title could refer to New York City and the lack of support and nourishment that Taylor found there as an immigrant teenager. Although she has made a place for herself in the community, in many of the works she both exposes and revives the barren qualities of hectic urban life. However, the poem with the same title refers to Goree, a Senegalese island where slaves were brought before being loaded on ships, to leaving loved one(s) or lovers, and leaving all home and memory.

Cheryl Boyce Taylor’s poetry is vivid, insightful, and novel. The works are saturated with sensory detail, religious invocation of island gods and goddesses, and a range of emotion, from lust to regret, from veneration to venery. —N. Parker-Gibson

**Her Guardian Angel**


Alice has a guardian angel named Phoebe. Phoebe has been around since Alice was born, but hasn't bothered to manifest herself since Alice's childhood. She's rather a flighty angel, and wants Alice to act as amanuensis, writing down to the stories she tells her. Phoebe wants a touch of human-ness. Alice may have a touch of angel-ness.

Elizabeth Brownrigg’s first book, *Falling* is well worth the cost of admission. She has written engaging, believable characters (which can’t be too easy when you’re dealing with a red-headed angel who may not always be completely truthful and has a hankering for the sensual) taking a surreal, rhapsodic cruise to damnation. Or redemption. Or something like that. Phoebe’s stories could be expanded into books themselves, and seem to attempt that feat on their own. The language is lyrical, the construction well-paced and balanced, the other characters quirky and human. Alice and Phoebe fly and fall throughout the book in a effort to find their desires, without apparently knowing they are searching for them. It is a novel about a lesbian which does not fall into the dismal chasm of a single facet “lesbian novel.”

*Falling* would make a stellar addition to collections of any literature. It is highly recommended. —K. Thompson
WOMEN OF MYSTERY

From out of the past...


This is a different sort of mystery. In fact, for about eighty pages, the reader isn't aware that it is a mystery at all. Six college friends are getting together for a reunion twenty years later.

Tyler Jones is a feminist writer and sometime sleuth living in San Francisco. Over the years she has grown apart from the women in her college "gang," except one, Mary Sharon. She is essentially out of touch with the others: Teddy, Rachel, Grace, and especially Julie. Julie once was the love of Tyler's life but broke her heart when she left with another woman several years after graduation. Even now, it seems Tyler is holding onto her pain.

As the members of the group catch up after gathering, they are all surprised to learn that Julie has gotten married and lives in the suburbs with two children. As the women discuss their issues, they find all have their feminism in common but disagree on specifics such as prostitution, classism, and sexual abuse. Thought-provoking discussion, as well as plot twists, follow.

Finally, the mystery begins. Tyler has been involved in two previous murders, which is alluded to, and soon she stumbles upon yet another crumpled form, with an unmistakable hole in his back. For a long time nobody knows, or will admit she knows, who the victim is. Suspicions run amuck. This has all the makings of a classic mystery: a group of people in a deserted place, rainstorms, no telephone, and a missing weapon; it will definitely keep you on the edge of your seat.

CRIME IN SAN FRANCISCO


In this San Francisco mystery, Beale mixes hate crimes, politics, and murder. Lou Spencer, English immigrant and lesbian, manages an agency providing legal help to victims of "gay-bashing." A wealth of colorful suspects crop up when one of the lawyers at the agency is murdered. Other attorneys, neurotic and eccentric clients, and homophobic neighbors turn out to have different combinations of motive and opportunity.

Domestic violence in lesbian families is an issue in Spencer's life as well as at the agency where she works, and Spencer begins to take her first hesitant steps towards a new relationship as she works to solve the murder. Beale keeps you guessing in this nicely-developed, smoothly-written mystery.

Reading for ALA midwinter?


ALA was never like this, and it's a good thing! This mystery, first published in England and now in a new American edition, describes a visit to a journalists' union convention. While the story is rather obvious, the conference trimmings make it great fun, especially for those of us who have been to many such meetings. At the beginning of each chapter is a juicy little excerpt from a booklet called "Advice for New Delegates." Tongue in cheek, the booklet offers such gems as

we recommend that all delegates study the new conference standing orders carefully. Then restrain all urges to raise points of order, sit back, and let it all sink in in...

ALA really ought to have one. —M. Tainton

DIGGING UP THE DEAD


Lynn Evans is enjoying a working vacation at her friend Sarah's archaeological dig in Belize. The jungle repose is broken when Ann, the loner of the crew, disappears and is found almost unconscious, with a dead poisonous snake next to her. The authorities step in, Ann's body is whisked away, and the next thing Lynn and Sarah hear are autopsy results indicating Ann had cocaine and heroin in her system. At this point Sarah is suspected of using the dig to cover a drug operation, and her well-beloved, ne'er-do-well brother seems to be framing her. Of course, nothing and no one is what they seem, and Lynn can hardly be said to have a peaceful vacation.

This book has a few problems, including weak characterizations, over-abundant coincidence, and a lack of focus. The most glaring problem, however, has nothing to do with the story itself. One would be hard pressed to find many pages in a row without a typo. Spell-checkers just do not catch some things, and they didn't catch them here. Those who know the difference between "your" and "you're" might just be driven over the coral reef by this.

For those readers who enjoy mysteries based on the number of plot twists and hidden identities that are overlaid onto the tale, this might be a pleasurable read. For those who prefer that the twists and surprises actually be woven into the story, frustration may very well replace pleasure. The occasional red herring and obtusary coincidence is expected in the mystery genre, but red herrings alone do not make a nutritious meal. Even with a twist of lime.

—K. Thompson
A New Mexico Storm


Billied as the first in a series, this promising mystery is an interwoven tale of two women. Parts of the story are third person from the point of view of Cordelia Morgan, a complex character and the announced protagonist of the series. The second character and narrator for most of the book, Anna Lee, is a writer who feels responsible for the deaths of a group of women who took her feminist works to heart. After dealing with a bizarre murder and the results of chemical experimentation and ecovandalism, the two women’s paths diverge again, leaving the women much changed.

Johnson has a knack for evoking the lonely New Mexico landscape, hot and silent except for the buzz of insects or the winds of a storm:

I squat among the small suckers that flourish from the roots of the cottonwoods, knowing the insects, the curling pill bugs, the lizards that scuttle along the rough spines of decaying logs, the skeletons of decomposed leaves that look like a miracle of lacework across the palm. I am crouched inside a glad of slender green leaves, their oxygen heavy with forest smells, the cloying odor of earth and dust.

This mystery is like a New Mexico storm, starting quietly and building to a crescendo of rain and thunder. And at the end, breathless, we wait for the next in the series.

—M. Tainton

Malpractice or Murder?


In *Coachella*, Sheila Ortiz Taylor takes common themes and expresses them in an uncommon way. Common themes like abused wives, dangerous husbands, malpractice, and cover up conspiracies. Yet Taylor’s is a tone and a language that make these themes new and fresh, and make us, padded and tired, sit up and think about them in new ways.

Yolanda Ramirez, a phlebotomist in a Palm Springs hospital, discovers new cases of AIDS are mysteriously on the increase. Independent and smart, she and her family of first and second-generation Americans cope with a life of hard work. Her father is a gardener who knows more than a little about plants:

But you couldn’t call the desert dead. Tourists did, with their talk. He heard them in the drugstore where they came smelling of chlorine and coconut oil, their eyes lost behind dark glasses. But if you let her, Is yerma, she had a way almost of making love to you. Surprises. Always some kind of flower coming out of those cactuses: yellow, pink, red.

And in the winter, the palo verde made her blossoms of amarillo and the canyon filled with bright wildflowers. Just for a while, then gone.

And in the end, life doesn’t get any easier. But hope comes.

—M. Tainton

Previously Unpublished


Gilman, best known for *The Yellow Wall-Paper*, was also a prolific essayist, journal keeper, and letter writer. Recently found among her papers at Radcliffe’s Schlesinger Library was an unpublished typescript, a mystery dated 1929, *Unpunished*.

The murder victim is an abusive con-man, ruling his adopted family, the daughter and grandchildren of another man, with an iron hand. The abused woman and children are prime suspects, as are the servants and a plethora of blackmail victims. The story does not stand alone. The major problem with this work is repetition, and earlier or more thorough editing might have saved us from reading the background story three times: once when the daughter is interviewed, another time when her journal is presented in its entirety, and yet again. The chief value of the book is in demonstrating the meaning of domestic violence in days when women were truly helpless, without legal recourse, education, or money of their own. Gilman also has a gift for character development, giving us believable individuals and relationships in a few quick lines. While not a great novel, *Unpunished* is nevertheless an interesting and moving picture of the past.

—M. Tainton

Meet You at the Graveyard


As this mystery opens, it is Thanksgiving weekend in Belleville, Missouri, and Meg Darcy, dyke PI, is reading about the latest in a series of murders in the *St. Louis Post Dispatch*. The victims, homeless women, are found propped in the mausoleum doorways of St. Louis cemeteries. In the account of the grisly crime, we are introduced to Detective Sarah Lindstrom of the homicide division. Meg and Sarah had met briefly while on R & R from the army some years ago and again on home turf.

When a friend’s beloved aunt is the next victim of the serial killer, it changes the profile of the victims and Meg, hired to investigate the murder, is thrown back into contact with Sarah. The attraction between them is strong—as is the competition.

The cast of characters in this novel is rich: there is Uncle Walter, owner of the security company with a problem with alcohol; Ann Yates, friend, teacher of law, and backer of causes; Ann’s brother, Greg Brooks, a Harvard School of Business grad and financier; an attractive but aloof city police detective known as the Ice Queen, or, as Meg’s comrade-in-arms says: ‘a classic closet case’; and Dr. Rolling, the administrator of the Gateway Rest Home, whose financial woes and missing medications serve to thicken the plot.

*Cemetery Murders* is the first collaboration of Jean Hutchinson and her partner Marcy Jacobs, thus the pen name, Jean Marcy, and a fine collaboration it is. Settle in for a good read and begin the process of looking forward to the next Jean Marcy tale.

—R. McAndrew
Coming out in Japan


In Japan, closely circumscribed social, gender, and family roles allow a narrow range of accepted behavior. The editors here have gathered and translated 18 personal narratives; through sharing these intimate experiences, 18 women and men tell us what it means to be sexually "other" in Japan. Each experience is unique, but each tells of the heartbreaking of discovering one's sexuality in a culture where "there wasn't even linguistic space to exist in." The editors give us the example, *okona*, one word representing either a gay male or cross-dresser. Only recently, when our English word lesbian was adopted, has there been a word for women homosexuals. Even single people are rejected.

Women have few rights including in employment. One woman describes how she began to attend feminist meetings:

"It wasn't because I had an interest in feminism, but rather, because I needed an environment in which people would sincerely listen to me, where I could begin to express my concern and anxieties.

How many of us have needed that! There is a great deal of pressure to marry and remain married; the stigma of divorce is not upon the couple involved but upon their children, and may even affect the latter's employment opportunities.

The introduction and three appendices include a survey of Japanese lesbians. *Queer Japan* is an interesting and intimate look at life in a culture in many ways very different from our own and in other ways surprisingly like ours." —M. Tainton

Morton Grove revisited


This third story about Morton Grove, a small New England town, begins with Annie Heaphy whistling while she works. She'd moved from the city to Morton River Valley, made some good friends, and found a job she loves. She is happy working at the Old Herb Farm, a business which works with developmentally disabled people. Annie does odd jobs, such as bussing employees not on regular bus routes to work.

Annie finds her livelihood in jeopardy when a member of the community telephones her boss, claiming that she saw Annie kissing Lorelei Simski, one of the women who works at the Farm, at a softball game. What the woman saw was not what actually happened. Nevertheless, Annie is asked to take a leave of absence from her job. Since Annie is too strong to play the victim, she is unwittingly thrown into the role of activist.

Lynch paints a good picture of a small New England community. Though this is a small town, the people are by no means homogeneous. Annie has friends of all different ages and backgrounds. Even within the town's gay community, there are people who are more closeted than others. There is a lot of homophobia and small-mindedness in Morton Grove. Yet the story is inspirational, showing how ordinary people, who are so different, can still band together and work for change and justice no matter who they are, what they do, and where they live. I look forward to reading the other novels about the people in Morton Grove. —B. Jedlicka

Retreating from the World


Christina Nealson retreated from the world at the age of 40, seeking solitude, insight, and a level of personal and spiritual discovery she could only achieve through the depths of loneliness. She builds a cabin on a remote mountain, cleverly fitting it out with running water from a spring, solar panels, and other innovations, making her as self-sufficient as she could, with a degree of convenience, and her descriptions make her home appear comfortable, personal, and aesthetically appealing. She divides this memoir of her first year on the mountain fittingly into chapters based on a spiritual cycle defined by changing seasons.

"Her life in the mountains is far from easy, her solitude not free of anxiety. A large brown bear appears and disappears throughout the narrative, a thread and a metaphor in life there is death; there must be death in order for there to be life.

Nealson is sophisticated, interested in philosophy and trained as a psychotherapist. She has a poetic and literary flair; she uses her knowledge of history and myth to fill the book with references to ancient spiritual practices. For example, May 1 is now May Day and May baskets, but was once the holy day of Beltane, season of sex and fertility.

Sexual, sensual, and spiritual in her approach, Nealson explores the cycle of life and death, and shares her observations and thoughts on goddesses and their and her own relation to the earth and mortality. *Living on the Spine* encourages and invites us to do more, to be daring, to learn to know ourselves, to make our own place, and to find our way in the eternal cycle." —M. Tainton

Bound by Blood


"Mrs. Kuzo, 75, takes a ride to visit Bebbie Smith's grave in the company of her friend and neighbor, Mrs. Lemack. Along the way she remembers her life and the love of her family, strange characters bound by blood and intimacy. Campbell has a conversational tone in her writing, her characters sharing memory within memory like an intricate tapestry. Full of Mrs. Kuzo's descriptions of her crazy offspring and extended family, of people long gone and of children still causing her confusion, love and pain, *Turnip* takes us for a ride, too. Make an effort to read this one." —M. Tainton
**BOOK REVIEW SECTION**

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**AND IF GEORGIA MET ME . . .**


This work is about the friendship that might-have-been, between Georgia O'Keeffe and Emily Carr. They did briefly meet; Kate Braid genius lies in expanding that meeting with poetry, words from O'Keeffe's correspondence, and narrative, into a three dimensional form of art, on the two-dimensional page. Juxtaposing them as friends allows her to also compare their lives, their landscapes and their mysteries. Delimiting their friendship in this way allows the author to explore the intricate skeleton of a loving but not smothering relationship between complex, nonconformist, artistic women. Recommended for women's studies, art, poetry collections, and to anyone who enjoys a beautifully crafted and challenging volume. —N. Parker-Gibson

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**BREASTS NOW MISSING**


This book consists of two halves that create a whole: the photographs in the first section are intended to be projected as slides during performance of the play in the second section. The anonymous portraits (no faces) are of women who have had breast cancer and been treated by surgery. These survivors express themselves in the photographs, and the spirit that shines through is not the fear, the pain, or the psychological and physical challenges of cancer, but survival despite difficult doctors, pained partners, and the loss of a part of the body that many women identify with or as themselves. Their individuality, style and humor is evidenced in various ways as they display their breasts, their scars and their reconstructions.

The play traces five characters through diagnosis, treatment, and recovery or death. Their dialogue is drawn from letters and interviews with 25 women, except for the character named Abby, whose contribution is based on letters from one individual. The characters are well integrated and ring true, expressing the pett annoyances as well as the larger issues of the illness. It is an effective presentation; the photographs, although initially startling and painful to view, are in their own way artistic and beautiful, and the play depicts the entire process with stylized economy.

The book demystifies a frightening and bewildering experience, allowing us to glimpse the experience, showing us that women can not only survive, but live, through it, sometimes triumphantly. If the saying is true that we are as sick as we are secret, this volume should affect healing for many, as speaking with a survivor after a diagnosis begins the process of recovery. Many women balk at monthly exams or mammograms; they are more afraid of breast cancer than of heart disease, although heart attacks kill many more women in a year. This volume illustrates that while the disease is nothing to look forward to, it is also not necessarily or always the ravaging illness that many of us fear. Proceeds from the book go to benefit women in Alaska with breast cancer, through the Alaska Run for Women. —N. Parker-Gibson

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**TWO FROM MADWOMAN PRESS**


Two books from one author, both well-crafted yet both very different. From the contemporary military setting of the first novel to the century-earlier Old West of the second, Little strikes two chords, both of which ring true and make each novel a page turner.

Elen McNally — arrogant, intelligent, gorgeous, and destined to have had timing in her decision to become a lesbian and in her choices of women. This is the premise of *Thin Fire.* Looking for a way out of rural Maine, Elen signs up for a three-year hitch in the Army and gets much more than she bargained for. After a rape and beating by Craig Hogle, Elen, who declares herself straight, finds herself turning more and more to the comfort of lesbian roommate Nikki Cole.

Elen's reluctance to change her gender orientation, however, leads her into more misery than she believed possible until a growing relationship with Major Kate Dillingher — her boss shows Elen the beauty and energy of same-gender sex. The path is still not easy, however, as Elen realizes when she tries to explain her lifestyle to her parents. Yet she continues her journey of self-discovery and education to the point where she becomes a thinker, a writer, a dreamer, and a woman-lover.

Little's crisp prose, careful characterization, and realistic dialog move the reader throughout the highs and lows of Elen's life so skillfully that fiction turns into actual people and places. And the provocative, sexy scenes in which Elen finds and consummates her love bring memories, new perceptions, or both.

Readers who enjoyed *Patience and Sarah* and are searching for a vivid Western romance have a real find in *The Grass Widow.* Imagine sweet, pregnant Aidan, sent from her Maine home after a rape because of her embarassing condition and arriving in Washburn, Kansas, meeting a "whip-slim young cowboy...handsome in that smooth, fine-featured way... of certain l(itan, long-legged, black-haired men." And imagine Aidan's discovery that the "cowboy" is actually her cousin Joss (short for Jocelyn), the only remaining family member after the influenza takes all the other relatives. From there the reader watches these two women create a home and family despite rejection from some neighbors and the hidden anger Joss struggles to fight. As the unborn baby grows, so does their love and understanding. The language provides a feeling of the 1890s the complement the description of the 1876 setting, but once again the characterization and dialog carry readers swiftly through the over changing landscape of the land and the women's love for each other. Little has researched her background as also evidenced by the short bibliography at the end of the book which includes works on historical recipes, homosexual references in the bible, Native American histories, poetry, and lesbian history.

A notation in the beginning of *The Grass Widow* is in the memory of Evelyn Randall Lamoreaux, May 24, 1905—June 20, 1995. I appreciate the woman who may have inspired this novel.

—N. Ward
WOMEN GROWING UP, GROWING OLD

WATCH YOUR WEIGHT, DEAR!


Frances M. Berg, a licensed nutritionist and adjunct professor at the University of North Dakota School of Medicine, is also an author and editor of Healthy Weight Journal. Her tremendous concern for the health of the country in this country is reflected in this thoughtful book in which she examines the pressure on children in our society to be thin. The weight loss industry affects every part of our society starting with the National Task Force on the Prevention and Treatment of Obesity, whose members set the policy on obesity treatment. "Of the nine members, eight are university-affiliated professors and researchers who have financial ties with from two to eight commercial weight loss firms each." It appears that not even former Surgeon General C. Everett Koop can resist the siren song of the diet sellers. Laura Fraser reports "...Koop accepted $1 million each from Jenny Craig and Weight Watchers for his 'Shape Up America!' campaign..."

What is the impact of a political power structure "bent on shaping women into the ultimate consumers, perennially dissatisfied with their appearance"? An increase in eating disorders, an increasingly malnourished population of children and adolescents, and young people whose focus is not on changing the world but on fixing their bodies.

Girls have never had more opportunities to develop their minds, yet they grow up feeling as though their bodies are being constantly watched. They learn to feel disconnected from their bodies, as if observing themselves from the outside.

This is increasingly true of boys as well who are exhorted to lower their body fat from a norm of 14 to 16 percent to 5 or 7 percent.

Berg explores the physical, emotional, and psychological effects of the weight craziness in our society and gives helpful information towards prevention of obesity and acceptance of size differences. Her goals are realistic, though admittedly difficult to sell in a society in which image is touted as everything and substance of body or character dismissed.

SLOW BUT SWEET


Dealing with developmentally disabled people is sometimes hard for others without those characteristics. Gilmore presents a sensitive look at a friendship between Nobby (short for Zenobia), a young girl, and Zilla, a teenage girl who is sometimes slow to understand. In this depiction, the child Nobby is the one who is accepting of Zilla and the adult, in this case Nobby's uncle, who rejects the girl because of her slowness.

The characterizations are somewhat flat, either kind and accepting or harsh and rigid. Yet the insights into getting along with others—for example, Nobby's mother's explanation of why the uncle behaves the way he does—allow for a greater understanding of people. A first chapter book, this novel for children ages 8 to 12 is a choice of the Canadian Children's Book Center.

—N. Ward

LOOKING AFTER THE CHILDREN


Lindenmeyer leads us on an exciting adventure, exploring the United States government agency for children's rights in A Right to Childhood. Following the history of the bureau from its conception within the Labor Department, she conveys the values, goals, and context that "whole child" proponents expressed, to focus social policy on child care and welfare. This is an especially helpful study if we believe today's children are tomorrow's adults and leaders.

The Children's Bureau encountered enormous difficulties, including helping and serving the flood of new immigrant mothers and children who in turn faced significant and complex obstacles, such as poverty and language barriers. According to Grace Abbott, one-time Bureau director, the law that created the Children's Bureau gave it:

a very broad grant of power. The whole child was made the subject of its research. The interrelated problems of child health, dependency, delinquency, and child labor were to be considered and interpreted in relation to the community program for all children.

By 1922, Abbott, in her second year as director, established three major goals: 1, legislation to protect children from exploitation in the labor market; 2, implementation of maternal and infant services; and 3, protection of children from the devastating influence of the economic depression which the country was experiencing at the time."

Lindenmeyer also outlines how the Bureau battled its opponents, for to the Bureau's critics, it was socialism at its worst. The book includes public programs and their leaders and communities participation and responses to these innovative programs. Its arrangement focuses on themes and then covers the details of events, failures, and achievements.

Right to childhood is readable and absorbing; it is also especially timely in covering children's rights, programs, and services as the federal government and Congress grapple with radical reforms to social welfare programs. It makes a valuable contribution to historical perspectives on public social services for children in the United States.

—S. W. Weimer

December 1999
**RITUAL OF SACRIFICE**


This black-and-white photo essay depicts in painful clarity the experience of a little girl in Africa as she undergoes ritual female genital mutilation (FGM). "It's always been done. You have to do it," says her father, as all of her clitoris and labia minora are removed with repeated cuts of a dull razor blade. The day is believed to be the first photographic documentation of the procedure.

Though both Islamic and Christian religions are beginning to influence people of some African countries, FGM continues to be routinely practiced in many regions, particularly Central and East Africa; Kadi's community is probably in this area but it is unnamed. A woman who is not mutilated may not be allowed to marry where FGM is practiced, nor a man to marry an intact woman. In a prologue, Dr. Olayinka Koso-Thomas indicates that the issue is off-limits as far as politicians there are concerned; advocating change may cost them votes. It sounds rather like the abortion issue in the U. S.

The day is mainly photographs beginning with a short essay and prologue and a page describing variations of the procedure. The pictures, arranged in chronological order, portray a girl as she changes from a laughing, cocky four-year-old into a sad and hurt small person with too great a burden of pain. If you didn't hate FGM before, or if you didn't know much about it, this book will change that. If everyone saw this book, the world would be so outraged we'd all be bound to go through improving women's health care and conditions.

Koso-Thomas concludes that, with improved education and communications, "The African girl-child may be free from mutilation... sometime in the 21st century." Should anyone have to wait so long? —M. Tainton

**DIFFERENT BUT STILL FAMILY**


The narrator of this children's story, Angie, tells the reader about a variety of contemporary, multicultural, multiethnic families. In a warm and humorous way, she discusses such realities as adoption, divorce, stepfamilies, single parenting, and gay/lesbian parenting. The book's message is as Angie tells us, "Families are who you live with and who you love." Full-color drawings illustrate the text. Originally published by Little, Brown in 1981. Highly recommended for most juvenile collections. —B. Redfern

**FROM INDIA TO ENGLAND**


Meena Kumar is not really a liar. Her parents immigrated to England from India and adopted other Indian immigrants as family, to the mystification of their neighbors, most of whom assumed they really are related by blood rather than choice. Meena's gift for embroidering everyday events is not meant to be malicious, just a way to spice up the too often bland slice of a school girl's life. "I'm really not a liar, I just learned very early on that those of us deprived of history sometimes need to turn to mythology to feel complete, to belong." And the group Meena wants most to belong to is Anita's clique of rough-around-the-edges British school girls. Her memories of India are those bequeathed her through her adopted Uncles and Aunties, as well as the stories her parents keep in the photograph album. The Aunties were the eyes of the neighborhood, nothing passed their hawkish gazes:

Individually, the Aunties were a powerful force, my mother was an Auntie to several kids in her own right too, but together they were a formidable mafia whose collective approval was a blessing, and whose communal contempt was a curse wrapped up in sweet sari-shaped packages.

Rather than the sweet Indian girls, courtesy cousins provided by numerous Aunties, Meena seeks out Anita because Anita never looked at me the way my adopted female cousins did; there was only the recognition of a kindred spirit, another mad bad girl trapped inside a superficially obedient body.

Both Meena and her parents struggle to fight their own battles with racism and the delicate balance between assimilation and identity with their abandoned homeland. This beautifully written novel captures the coming of age of each.

—P. Crossland

**ADOLESCENCE AND BEYOND**


In these 18 stories, both sensuous and real, Randeane Tetu explores the experience of a quirky crowd of country people. Through them, she looks at the difficult times of adolescence, an emotionally intense period of discovery, and similarly the difficult times of old age with its own discoveries. Tetu's words see into the depths that lie under pregnant silences, the tautness of moments.

In the longest of these, the title story, a girl goes visiting with her grandmother:

We visited Grandma's friends, taking them bunches of flowers or vegetables. And I learned from older people the comfort of breaking long-strung, circling memories into pieces that can be borne. Learned that knitting breaks the same round of thought into rows and stitches, walking into miles and footsteps. I was willing to learn from them for they had had grief and memories that circled to the beginning and then replayed.

These well-written, tender stories reveal lives off the beaten path, somewhere in rural America. Mostly from the point of view of young girls, in lines both simple and poetic, Tetu looks into the souls of her characters and reveals us to ourselves.

—M. Tainton

Women in Libraries
One of the Crowd


Growing up in the '60s, Mollie has the same problems as her junior high school friends—problems in cooking class, body shapes, etc. But one day her friend Phyllis starts worrying about "looking Jewish," and Mollie begins to worry about rejection by her non-Jewish friends. Then her teacher decides to make Mollie stay after school every day until she learns to write with her right hand, making Mollie miss her Hebrew class.

All these problems seem insignificant, however, when Mollie discovers that six million Jews were killed in the Holocaust. She cannot understand why Jews were chosen for elimination and wonders if this can happen again.

In this pivotal year, Mollie learns about some of the worst parts of life and manages to cope with her fears, learning to make up with friends who have been alienated. Most of all, she learns that "fitting in" is not the most important thing that she can do in her life, that sometimes she must think for herself.

The author, a psychologist who grew up in a community with a very small Jewish population, has written a gentle yet thought-provoking novel about coming of age. Although set three decades ago, the situations and characterizations can be current, dialog is believable, and the book is worthwhile for young people ages 8 to 12.

—N. Ward

The Color of Flowers


Color came first, before things, before words, and more than any other color: yellow. Yellow was pale and bright, butter and fire.

Cory is a little girl with a loving, happy family. Her mother loves life and exuberant flowers, her little brother adores her, and her father is the image of security. When her maternal grandmother comes to visit, the vibrant shades begin to be sucked from Cory's existence. Devastating events gradually paint her life a dull brown, and shades of grey. As she grows older we find her rediscovering the shades of her life and coming to terms with the childhood she lost and the new palette she learns to use.

Wilson deals with a series of sensitive issues in this work, without becoming sentimental or strident. Loss, abuse, lesbianism, anger, and loneliness are all dealt with matter-of-factly, but with compassion. Family relationships, or their lack, intertwine with the way the main character represents her world in colors, paint, and clay. The result is a tightly woven mat of words, with distinct, interlocking designs. The chapters seem to have been written for separate publication, but that is not usually a distraction.

—K. Thompson

Following Their Own Paths


Combining two traditional Athabascan legends, Wallis has recreated the stories from Native American folklore, of two rebellious youths who choose to defy tradition. Wallis is the author of Two Old Women, 1993, which was a more acceptable story, because of the triumph of the old women abandoned by their people, as was the custom, and the final outcome: they survive and cause the tribe to change the harsh and cruel practice centuries old. By modern standards, the treatment of Bird Girl and Daagoo is equally cruel, because they choose not to follow traditional ways, and suffer the consequences for living outside their prescribed roles in old Athabascan culture.

Bird Girl follows her own path, defying the ancient way of becoming a wife and mother until forced into it, choosing instead to hunt and follow the men on expeditions to find caribou, the staple of the people's diet. Rejected by both men and women, she sets out to prove that she can survive on her own, only to be forced into slavery, then taken as a wife by the Eskimos. Ancient enemies of the Athabascan, the Eskimos are depicted as cruel and barbaric, with no social system and little humanity. Wallis explains this was the traditional attitude in her tribe, though she depicts women who are kind to Bird Girl and make the captive's life bearable. Bird Girl, at the end, wishes for a return to her family, but, as most cautionary tales go, it is not to be, and she is trapped in a life of unhappiness and misery.

Daagoo, the young boy in the parallel story, is equally defiant, preferring to explore and wander the countryside than to hunt and help his band survive. His path through life forces him into isolation and alienation, even though he travels far and learns many things from the other tribes he encounters. An outcast in his own family, he struggles to make a new life, eventually returning to the people he had left so long before, a wiser man, willing to accept his prescribed role. The parallel stories intertwine as the protagonists follow paths separate but linked.

Modern men and women may find the story old-fashioned, but as Wallis explains in the afterword, she chose not to alter the outcome to make it more politically correct, but kept the ancient story as intact as possible for authenticity. Taken from her own heritage, Bird Girl comes across less than a folktale and more as a novel, but the characters are shown in a sympathetic light throughout, which was probably not so in the original tales told to children to keep them from deviating from the traditions of their ancestors. The value of the oral tradition in understanding native peoples is immeasurable, and it is important to preserve these old tales.

—L. Meyers
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( ) I wish to be billed, for $2 additional.

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Make check payable to ALA/SRRT/FTF, and note on the check, "For Women in Libraries."