



FEMINIST
TASK FORCE

Women in Libraries

Volume 25, Numbers 2-3

The Feminist Task Force—25 Years

May 1996

Feminist Perspective on Racism: 1996 Feminist Authors' Breakfast

Breakfast plans

Join Cheryl Clarke, Minnie Bruce Pratt, and Barbara Smith for breakfast at the Loews New York Hotel, Embassy D, Sunday morning, July 7, 8:30—11:00. See page 8 for an order form for your ticket. Remember to buy early! Tickets cost more at the conference.

About the authors

Barbara Smith

Cofounder of Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press with Audre Lord, Barbara Smith wrote about founding the press, "we did decide to be a publisher for all women of color. . . This was one of our bravest steps since most people of color have chosen to work in their separate groups . . . We were saying that as women, feminists, and lesbians of color we had experiences and work to do in common, although we also had our differences." Kitchen Table remains the only resource of its kind in the U.S.

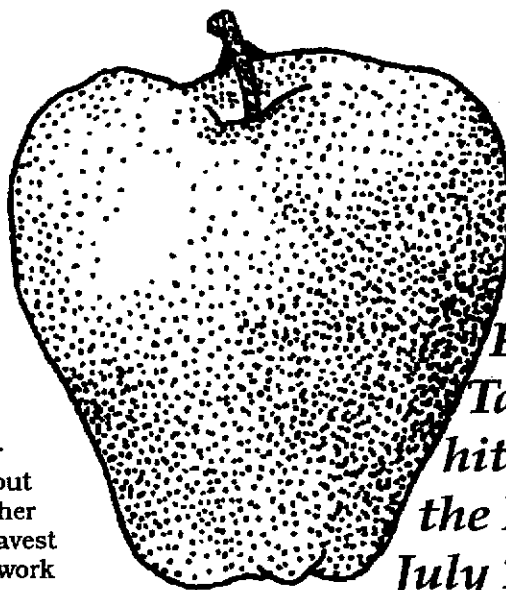
Though she is no longer with the press, Smith continues her work as an editor and author in upstate New York.

Cheryl Clarke

African-American lesbian and poet Cheryl Clarke began writing in college. She took a writing seminar with five or six other students as a junior, she says, and just "kept on writing." It took her a while to find her medium, or form, and she "turned exclusively to poetry in the late '70s."

Clarke is pursuing a doctorate in literature at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey, where she also works full time as Director of Diverse Community Affairs.

Continued on page 2
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*The
Feminist
Task Force
hits
the Big Apple,
July 1996*

Special Double Issue

In this issue :

- *Feminist authors' breakfast update—Page 1*
- *Ticket order form—Page 8*
- *Summer book reviews—Page 2*

Next issue:

- *Authors' Breakfast feature*
- *Annual conference calendar*

Minnie Bruce Pratt

Minnie Bruce Pratt is a well-known lesbian poet and essayist. She has received numerous awards for her poetry collection, *Crime Against Nature*. Her most recent book, *S/He*, a collection of prose stories, was reviewed in the Fall 1995 issue of *Women in Libraries*. These stories are actually "personal vignettes," wrote our reviewer, "brief invitations to witness a woman's private thoughts as she encounters the people in her life. . . Every encounter is laced with the author's attempt to understand the difference between her roles as a female and as a woman. Like her son, she, too, wrestles with bone and flesh as [s/he] balances his fugitive selves."

Pratt's stories appear at the intersection of the feminism of U.S. women's liberation, the writings of women of color in the U.S. and abroad, and lesbian and gay liberation.

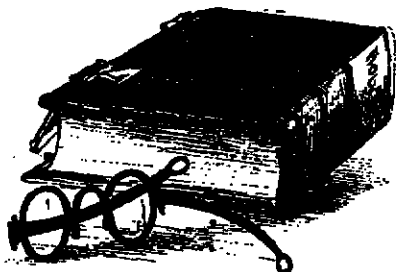
Crime Against Nature, her second book of poetry, describes her relationship with her two sons. The title is a play on the idea that while the phrase is used to describe homosexuality, "the real crime against nature is violence and oppression," as expressed by the judges for the Academy of American Poets, who chose the book as the best second full-length book of poetry by a U.S. author in 1989.

In 1991, *Crime Against Nature* won the American Library Association Gay and Lesbian Book Award for Literature; it was also nominated for a Pulitzer Prize in Poetry. Pratt also received a Creative Writing Fellowship in Poetry by the National Endowment for the Arts and was one of three writers who received a Lillian Hellman-Dashiell Hammett award given by the Fund for Free Expression to writers "anywhere in the world who have been victimized by political persecution." She was selected because of her experience "as a target of right-wing and fundamentalist forces during the recent attacks on the National Endowment for the Arts."

Together with Barbara Smith, another of our speakers, and Elly Bulkin, she co-authored *Yours In Struggle: Three Feminist Perspectives On Anti-Semitism and Racism*. In the next issue of *Women in Libraries*, we plan to include a lengthy feature story about our other two speakers, Barbara Smith and Cheryl Clarke, and more about Pratt.

At present Pratt lives in the New York City metropolitan area, in Jersey City, New Jersey, and teaches Women's Studies, Lesbian/Gay Studies, and Creative Writing as part of the Graduate Faculty of The Union Institute, a non-residential alternative university.

—M. Tainton



Issue Contributors

For a long time, *Women in Libraries* has aimed to provide information to librarians and readers about the work of the many independent feminist presses. Working with *Women's Presses Library Project*, we received so many books from these presses, we couldn't read them all, much as we wanted to.

Thanks to our Internet Feminist List, however, we were able to find many enthusiastic volunteers, and many writers appear for the first time in this issue of *WIL*. Most contributors are professional and/or university faculty. Several contributors are graduate students, most in library schools, and a number are graduates in communications at West Texas A&M University. Several more new reviewers will appear in coming issues. Our thanks to those listed below whose words appear in this issue—Ed.

Paul Charney, West Texas A&M University (WTAMU); Pamela Crossland, WTAMU; Mona Gregory, WTAMU; Trudy L. Hanson, WTAMU; Rosemary McAndrew, New York University; Jacquelyn Marie, University of California, Santa Cruz; Madeleine Tainton, WTAMU; Wendy Thomas, Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America, Radcliffe College; Priscilla White, Boston Public Library.



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Summer Book Reviews



Net talk

Spender, Dale. *Nattering on the net: Women, power and cyberspace*. North Melbourne, Australia: Spinifex Press, 1995. Paper, ISBN 1-875559-09-4, \$19.95.

Does Dale Spender look intently at computer technology and its potential? No! Not explaining how to use computers, but how women fit into the technological genre of the computer world, Spender uses a historical and innovative approach to explore the earliest print from the Middle Ages, examining areas such as gendered language and "women's words." Spender gives accounts of typical literature written predominantly by and about white males. Education, authors, and libraries are also inspected in great detail. Just as men have historically dominated our culture in other ways, Spender acknowledges the gender barriers present in cyberspace without being discouraged. Despite the fact that sexual harassment, male dominance, pornware, and content often limit women, women are indeed getting involved, gaining momentum, and taking territory. Spender brings great insight and understanding to women's pursuit of power in cyberspace.

—M. Gregory

Fiction for fun

Fantasy and romance in one

Williams, Karen. *Nightshade*. Huntington Station, NY: Rising Tide Press, 1996. Paper, ISBN 1-883061-08-3, \$11.99.

The summer solstice brings magical events to Halfmoon, New York in this enchanting lesbian fantasy. These events transform the life of Alex, a free-spirited lesbian who witnesses a mysterious hit-and-run accident. The accident leaves Alex in possession of a bell, and when she rings it, a womanly apparition appears.

Thus Alex meets Orielle, a beautiful fairy who is bound to a life of servitude by the evil sorceress
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Lilah. Long ago, Lilah had tricked her mortal lovers, Benjamin and Batilda, into using their skills to craft a bell wherein Orielle would stay until summoned for her healing powers. Now Alex finds that she must play a role in a frightening ceremony planned by Benjamin and Batilda, as they seek to destroy Lilah and free Orielle on the night of the coming solstice fairy dance in Halfmoon.

As Alex prepares for the final climactic event, a deep, undeniable passion is growing between her and Orielle, and she finds herself confronting her fears of falling in love and her pain from childhood losses.

Romantic, suspenseful, and often comical, this novel is a delight to read with its cast of memorable characters: Alex, whose womanizing and wry sense of humour serve to bury her pain; Orielle, the fairy with very human passions; Batilda, the old lesbian chemist cursed with bird's wings; Benjamin, the kindly physics expert; Boogawoog, the lovable terrier who talks up a storm after eating her Mumble Munchies; and more. While the author's blend of the mortal with the magical is occasionally awkward, it is sure to please both lovers of fantasy and of lesbian romance. And for those not partial to fantasy, the novel imparts some very human wisdom about the need to face what haunts us inside before we can ward off outside evil, and before we can accept the gift of love.

—P. White

Amazon adventure

Rios, Stevie. *Playing for Keeps*. Huntington Station, NY: Rising Tide Press, 1996. Paper, ISBN 1883061-07-5, \$10.99.

From the start, Becca Neal resists the idea of the Olivia Cruise, so we are not surprised when she misses the boat at one of the first port-of-calls in a tiny town on the Venezuelan coast. In an effort to elude a particularly persistent admirer, she hops a cab and heads for Caracas. There, in a used book store, she finds a notebook about another woman's journey, more than two decades ago. The notebook takes Becca back in time to the gay and lesbian subculture of a foreign land in a time of bar raids and police pay-offs and the spiritual growth of the journal writer, Lindsay West. Lindsay was a graduate student from Bloomington and oboist for the Filarmónica de Caracas. The journey lives on several levels: Lindsay's spiritual life as well as her physical one (she falls in love with a woman she thought was involved with another); the group's growing realization that they are losing one of their own to a then mysterious disease (AIDS before it has a name); and the adventure to a land named for the Amazons—folkhera to lesbians and straight women everywhere. It involves a Miss Universe and a magical crone who has lived in the rain forest for forty years. The story weaves from Becca in the present to Lindsay in the past and the fabric that forms feels "ever-present."

—R. McAndrew

Summer Book Reviews



A two-page, two-panel cartoon from the latest entry in Alison Bechdel's series, *Dykes to watch out for*. © 1995 Alison Bechdel and Firebrand Books.

Women on the lighter side

Bechdel, Alison. *Unnatural dykes to watch out for*. Ithaca, NY: Firebrand Books, 1995. Cloth, ISBN 1-56341-068-0, \$22.95; paper, ISBN 1-56341-067-2, \$10.95.

Allison Bechdel has done it again. *Unnatural Dykes to Watch Out For*, Bechdel's sixth book of cartoon strips describing the smusing trials and tribulations of a diverse group of lesbians, is timely, funny, and a good, quick read. *Unnatural Dykes* features the usual cast of characters in this series: Mo, perpetually single but searching; Toni and Clarice, representing the lesbian baby boom with their newborn son, Rafael; Jezanna, owner of Madwimmin Books; Harriet, Mo's ex, and her new lover, Ellen; and a host of others.

Bechdel's cartoons are notable for their attention to detail and references to current political and cultural events, and *Unnatural Dykes* continues this tradition. For example, Madwimmin Books, like many women's bookstores, is facing stiff competition from a new chain bookstore, 'Bunns & Noodle;' several scenes feature the backdrop of events like the O.J. Simpson trial, and one character mentions her plans to attend the UN women's conference in Beijing.

Unnatural Dykes includes more than fifty of Bechdel's strips which follow the lives of these women in serial fashion. In fact, the last strip is a cliff-hanger. This volume concludes with "Sentimental Education," a cartoon-novella, which gives flashbacks on the women's lives. Unfortunately, this part is a bit weaker and seems to lack the energy and flow of the strips. Still, this is a small criticism, and it doesn't detract from the overall impression of this volume as delightful.

—W. Thomas

Summer Book Reviews



For the mystery lover

Minnesota mystery

Bohan, Becky. *Fertile betrayal: a Nedra Wells, D.V.M., novel*. Northboro, MA: Madwoman Press, 1995. Paper, ISBN 1-886231-00-1, \$10.95.

The small town vet, Nedra Wells, is looking to fulfill her dreams. With her lover, Annie Callahan, she has moved to Lake Amelia, Minnesota to set up her practice and live her perfect life. But Annie's not at all sold on small town life, the other residents of Lake Amelia are often polite but cool (homophobia at work), and there's a health crisis at one of the local farms.

As this story unfolds, the residents come to life. These characters are interesting and multi-dimensional and, as they reveal their secrets, the reader is drawn into their lives. In the end small town life is more complex than we had ever imagined. This, Bohan's second novel, is a very good read.

—R. McAndrews

Stormy weather

Silva, Linda Kay. *Storm Front: A Delta Stevens Mystery*. San Diego: Paradigm Publishing Company, 1995. Paper, ISBN 1-882587-07-3, \$10.95

If strong women, with equally strong desires, are your cup of tea, this new episode in the life of Delta

Stevens, police officer and lesbian, will please you. The other women in this novel are all well drawn. Megan, on her personal fulfillment quest in the rain forests of Costa Rica, is Delta's lover. She challenges Delta in many ways, including her perceptions that "lesbians often get so immersed in their relationships, they forget who they are." As one of her self-awareness measures, Megan has preferred to keep her own apartment, leaving Delta none too pleased.

In this new mystery, Delta engages with a jewel thief and a threat to the District Attorney's life and career, all with these relationship issues as a backdrop. Consuela (Connie) Rivera, Delta's best friend and the police station's Research and Data Specialist par excellence, offers relationship advice and participates fully in Delta's covert operations. "After seven years on the force together, and countless hours of off time, Connie and Delta worked together like a well-oiled machine." The dual mystery plots run side by side as Delta's primary cases. Her skill is matched by the international jewel thief, Taylor, who has a special interest in Delta. In their struggle, the reader gets some interesting slants on the grey area between good and evil. And in Delta's pursuit of a would-be assassin, she is confronted with temptation again in the form of the beautiful District Attorney, Alexandria Pendelton. The book ends full of promise for Delta's career, love life and another lesbian mystery in the Storm series.

—R. McAndrews

Adventure and recovery: Two first novels

Luders, Lesa. *Lady God*. Norwich, Vermont: New Victoria Publishers, 1995. Paper, ISBN 0-934678-59-6, \$9.95. Zschokke, Magdalena. *Windswept*. Norwich, Vermont: New Victoria Publishers, 1996. Paper, ISBN 0-934678-73-1, \$10.95.

Two new books, both first novels, *Lady God* and *Windswept*, with a focus on child abuse, memories and healing are new from New Victoria Press.

In *Lady God*, Lesa Luders tells a moving and achingly real story of a young woman's recovery from an isolated rural childhood and an intense and difficult relationship with a disturbed mother whom she dearly loves. As a little girl of preschool age, she goes daily with her mother up the mother's magical mountain. Her mother commits suicide when Landy is only 5, and she and her younger brother grow up with their father who, because of his wife's death, turns away from them and to alcohol; they barely survive.

At age 22, Alexandra, whose mother calls her Landy and her father, Alex, leaves her rural mountain town in Washington state where she has always kept herself in isolation for the sake of her own survival. In her new college town, her childhood memories and nightmares become stronger as does her confusion over her sexuality. Finally with help from her lesbian neighbor, Claire, she begins to travel the road to healing, reclaiming herself, her lesbian sexuality, and her name, Landy.

Sailing the high seas

Magdalena Zschokke, in *Windswept*, weaves the story of Olivia, sexually abused as a child, through the stories of two other women, Mara and Zoe; all are sailing the high seas on yachts they either captain or crew. The world of these independent, strong women is full of excitement, whether from the vagaries of the weather or the foibles of the people who inhabit it. Many different people inhabit this watery world; from couples with children, surfers moving to the next wave, macho ship owners, battering husbands, and most of all other women, whether lesbian or straight, who love to sail.

Mara is one of very few females who have been trained as captains; she lives and breathes boats and sailing until she falls in love with a woman. Zoe, her good friend, once sailed with her but now is crewing half-way across the world and running into her own difficulties with aggressive men, hostile and dangerous drug-runners and casual affairs with often straight women. Olivia, part New Zealand Maori, loves sailing but is running from her memories of childhood abuse. These three and other women they encounter on land or sea support each other with letters and comfort. The letters are deftly interwoven with the fascinating stories of their

travels in the Caribbean and the South Seas. Schokke makes this colorful life real with her apt descriptions of the yachts they sail as well as the all-night watches under clear starry and dark stormy nights. The women all watch those stars and dream of sailing together as an all-female crew and captain.

Luders and Zschokke are promising new writers; watch for their new stories.

—Jacquelyn Marie

Non-Fiction

Essays from Sojourner

Kahn, Karen, editor. *Frontline Feminism, 1975-1995: Essays from Sojourner's First 20 Years*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1995. Cloth, ISBN 1-879960-43-5, \$27.95; paper, ISBN 1-879960-42-7, \$17.95.

Sojourner originated as a Boston-area newspaper in 1975 and branched out from there into national and international coverage of feminist news. In addition, it publishes fiction, poetry, and *The Issues*; that is, "women's issues" which means, as Robin Morgan writes in her foreword, "simply everything (since woman are the majority of the human species, how can all issues not be women's issues?)"

This collection of newspaper articles cover the most significant issues of the feminist movement in the last twenty years. It is an ideal addition to the patriarchal textbooks endorsed by school systems which often lose "herstory" in favor of "history." This book demonstrates the strides that have been made in the feminist movement, the ground lost, and the footsteps that are traced over and over again.

Each segment of the book is food for thought, particularly in this presidential election year. In the section on economic injustice, we find women fighting many of the same battles for equal pay, despite perceived gains. Homelessness and welfare reform are also probed. The politics of the family, particularly the role of motherhood, is seen through the glass of lesbian parenthood, and the politics of adoption, especially adopting children from third world countries. Another important issue, that of choosing to be childless, is addressed in the context of the current push toward "family values."

The never-ending abortion debate is highlighted in the section dealing with reproductive freedom. In vitro fertilization, surrogate motherhood, and economics are examined in Rita Arditti's article, "Wombs for Rent, Babies for Sale." She points out "commercial surrogacy can thrive because of class differences and exploitation of poor women. . . Surrogate companies see women in poor economic conditions as more likely to 'behave.'" She makes the point that rich women are unlikely to become surrogate mothers.

Health care issues are addressed not only in terms of the availability and affordability, but also in terms of race. Why is it, Linda Wong, of the Women of Color Coalition for Health, asks, "nearly 42% of

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AIDS cases among women and children in Massachusetts afflict black residents, even though African-Americans account for only 5% of the state's population?" HIV risk factors for lesbians are also addressed. Susan Shapiro in "Cancer as a Feminist Issue" reminds us that, while it is estimated that 1/3 of all Americans will get cancer, "as women, we are all affected by cancer. For it is females, in our many roles, that most often assume caretaking responsibilities when someone is ill."

Violence against women is chronicled, including new realizations of "Sexual Harassment in the School Yard" in which Lynn Goods writes, "Girls are more profoundly affected by harassment than boys, precisely because men have more power in this society than women." Power is always the underlying issue of violence, from incest to rape to pornography to death.

The book finishes on an emphasis of a global feminist movement, demonstrating that it is truly a small world and through new technologies of media, shrinking further every day.

—P. Crossland

Latin American feminists' experience

Lavrin, Asunción. *Women, Feminism, and Social Change in Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay, 1890-1940*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995. Cloth, ISBN 0-803228-97-X, \$60.00.

Asunción argues that from 1890 to 1940, the environment created for social and economic reform, coupled with the passing of the old oligarchy and rise of urban labor and the middle class, validated feminists and feminism. Feminism in Latin America was distinctive then, and probably remains so. Unlike their North American and European counterparts, Latin American feminists sought to be "as good as men" while still insisting that they were not the same: motherhood set them apart and they wanted to maintain the traditional, Latin reverence for it. This sense of protecting and revering motherhood found expression in protectionist labor legislation in the early twentieth century. It also made them reformers, not revolutionaries. Even when feminists sought female equality before the law, they and their male supporters did so to gain economic rights that would help support their role as caregiver, "not to disengage themselves from the duties of motherhood."

As social crusaders, women alerted society about the problems that accompanied urbanization and industrialization—infant mortality, disease, poor working conditions. Male support for such female activism came easily because it did not diverge from acceptable female concerns expressed in their traditional role as mothers, nurturers, and caregivers. There were insurmountable obstacles, however. By 1940 women involved in labor politics became disillusioned because the legislation often went unenforced and they continued to be underpaid. More serious attempts to realign gender roles,
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such as divorce or the suffrage usually met stiff opposition and were seen as being harbingers of social disaster.

Lavrin's study is solid history. Yet it was limited by the focus on the urban middle class from which most of the female feminists were drawn and which accounts for their bourgeois complacency. Understandably, that can be attributed to the paucity of documents. That does not take away from the fact that we know little about real working class women who were perhaps not so complacent, nor so uninvolved as they appeared to be in this study.

—P. Charney

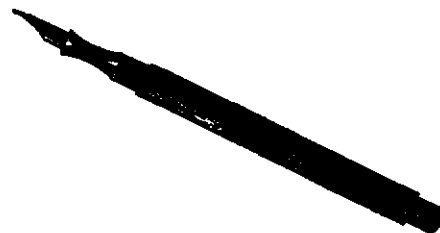
But is it worth it? Artists talk: motherhood and career

Rosenberg, Judith Pierce. *A Question of Balance: Artists and Writers on Motherhood*. Watsonville, CA: Papier-Mache Press, 1995. Cloth, ISBN 0-918949-54-8, \$25.00; paper, ISBN 0-918949-53-X, \$14.00.

As recorded by interviewer Judith Rosenberg, award winning author Ursula K. Le Guin says, "It's like we have nine million books about fathers and sons, and we're just beginning to get the novels about mothers and daughters, about motherhood and daughterhood, which is endlessly fascinating and a very difficult subject."

Rosenberg has taken this "endlessly fascinating" subject and viewed it through the lens of twenty-five practicing artists and writers. Each of the featured women answer the question about balancing their art with motherhood. Some share children's-book author Jane Yolen's claim: "I tended . . . to be more creative when I was pregnant" and that "any time your life is full, you have more to write about." Others agree with water colorist Karen Horn, who quotes a friend, "Have a kid, lose ten years." What makes this book such interesting reading is that each of these twenty-five women have sought balance in different ways. Some have had the assistance of husbands and other family members. Others have coped as single mothers on welfare. But the theme that runs through each of the interviews is that motherhood is worth it. As Rosenberg says in the introduction, "becoming a mother is a process that permanently changes the self. It is a kind of metamorphosis." The struggles and triumphs of these women, as chronicled by Rosenberg, make fascinating reading.

—T. L. Hanson



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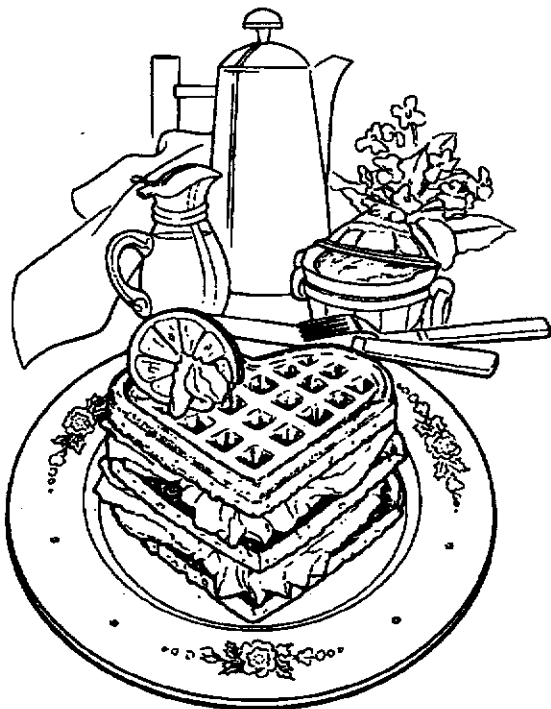


Ticket Order Form

To buy tickets to the breakfast, send \$18 a ticket,
\$12 for library school students, to:

Dorothy Granger
 Pacific Oaks College
 5 Westmoreland Place
 Pasadena, CA 91103.

Make checks payable to Dorothy Granger/FTF.
 Tickets will also be available at the conference meal
 ticket counter for \$22.



*This looks like waffles, but you'll have your choice of challah french
 toast and fruit-stuffed pancakes at Loews New York Hotel, while
 you listen to spirited poetry and stimulating speakers at the
 Feminist Authors Breakfast. Ticket order form this page. See page 1
 for more details; complete coverage next issue.*

Fill in the number of tickets you would like, and the total.

() Regular tickets, at \$18 each, total \$ _____

() Student tickets, at \$12, total \$ _____

Total enclosed: \$ _____.

Name _____

Address _____

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