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ON THE ISSUES

FEATURES

COVER STORY
Should the Trinity Be a Quartet? Should Mary Be Elevated? - 13
Manifesting the Goddess - A Conversation with Mary Daly - 14
Mary Co-opted as Co-Redeemer - Frances Kissling - 15
Mary: A Muslim Feminist? - Laila al-Marayati - 17
The Priesthood of Women - Carter Heyward - 19

RISK-TAKING
When Death is a Constant Companion - Marilyn Stasio - 20
Why women reporters go to war

EXPOSE
Algeria Unexamined - Laura Flanders - 24
Tens of thousands dead and it's barely news

PORTFOLIO
Infant Mortality in America - by Michele McDonald - 29

SPORTS
How We Got Rid of the Bloody Corsets - Anngel Delaney - 34
and Other Tales of Women's Sports

MEDICAL POLITICS
Research for Your Life - Katherine Eban Finkelstein - 38
Investigating your own health care

MENTORING
Letter to a Young Feminist - Phyllis Chesler - 42
Letter to an Older Feminist - Sanda Balaban - 45

PROFILE
"There Once Was a Union Maid" - Lawrence Lader - 46
Hattie Canty plays to win in Las Vegas

SPECIAL SECTION: READERS POLL
Let us know what you feel passionate about - 53

COLUMN
Iran: Notes from the Interior - Merle Hoffman - 5

DEPARTMENTS
Feedback - 4
Talking Feminist
   Born Again? Once is Enough, Thank You. - Richard Newman - 9
   It's a Boy! - Cheryl A. Passalaqua - 10
   What Does A Pretty Girl Like You Do for Extra Money? - Rita Henley Jensen - 12
Books and Film
   The Cultural Politics of Fur, reviewed by Carol Adams - 50
   The Wrath of Angels: The American Abortion War, reviewed by Patricia Baird-Windle - 52
   Film: Hollywood Downsizes Women - Molly Haskell - 48
Back Page - Heartbroke - Joan Hilty - 62

COVER ILLUSTRATION: MARY ELLEN CROTEAU
Multiple Relationships — Yea and Nay

Your review of Celeste West's Lesbian Polyfidelity: A Pleasure Guide for All Women Whose Hearts Are Open to Multiple Sexuals states that the author is a Buddhist and that she makes many references to her Buddhism in her book. (See Carolyn Gage's review, Winter 1998.) As Buddhists ourselves, we are concerned that readers not familiar with Buddhism may be led to believe that she advocates or approves of polyfidelity. This is not the case. The different schools of Buddhism all commonly take certain basic vows, among which is the vow to refrain from sexual misconduct. These basic vows have been elaborated and explained very beautifully by the well-respected Vietnamese teacher Thich Nhat Hanh. His statement of this vow in For a Future to be Possible (Berkeley, Parallax Press, 1998), reads as follows:

"Aware of the suffering caused by sexual misconduct, I commit myself to cultivating responsibility and learning ways to protect the safety and integrity of individuals, couples, families, and society. I am determined not to engage in sexual relations without love and a long-term commitment."

Joan Sophie & Deborah Scott
— Chicago

I am amazed by On The Issues', or should that be On The Moveaways'? frightening/frightened editorial stance on Lesbian Polyfidelity: A Pleasure Guide for All Women Whose Hearts Are Open to Multiple Sexuals.

Why does OTT devote two fulminating pages to a unilateral, contestless condemnation of the first published research and interviews of lesbians in honest multi-relationships? Might not my book have been more fairly, at least more expertly, evaluated by a lesbian polyfidelity? This is not the case. The different schools of Buddhism all commonly take certain basic vows, among which is the vow to refrain from sexual misconduct. These basic vows have been elaborated and explained very beautifully by the well-respected Vietnamese teacher Thich Nhat Hanh. His statement of this vow in For a Future to be Possible (Berkeley, Parallax Press, 1998), reads as follows:

"Aware of the suffering caused by sexual misconduct, I committed myself to cultivating responsibility and learning ways to protect the safety and integrity of individuals, couples, families, and society. I am determined not to engage in sexual relations without love and a long-term commitment."

— Chicago

Light Shed on Rape Crimes

I was deeply affected by Jan Goodwin's article on Rwanda in On The Issues ("Rwanda: Justice Denied," Fall 1997). I can't tell you how enraged, saddened, and ashamed I felt when I finished it. OTT brought the experiences of these women right up in my face, and I hope I never forget. Goodwin is one hell of a writer who continually brings the systematic and often appalling abuse of women around the world to greater attention.

OTT readers will be interested to know that this past summer, the indictment against Jean-Paul Akayesu was amended to include rape and other forms of sexual violence. In the motion to amend the indictment, the prosecutor mentioned "a significant amount of attention on this issue from outside organizations..." and acknowledged that the prosecution was "not as sensitive as we should have been on the issue." Amen to that.

Mandy Sullivan, Campaign Director, Equality Now — New York (Equality Now works for the civil, political and economic rights of women around the world.)

An Experience to Learn From

Thank you for Merle Hoffman's essay on abortion activism ("27 Years, but Who's Counting? Thoughts on yet another Roe v. Wade," Winter 1998). I was astounded by her insights. I had an abortion when I was 15 years old, and now, at the age of 23, I'm thinking it's an experience I can learn more and more from than rather than putting it behind me. Every woman has her right to choose—always.

Oriana Noel Lewis — Jamaica Plain, MA

Purging Helplessness

I would like to thank you for your wonderful article on abuse in institutions ("No Safe Place" by Phyllis Chesler, Winter 1998). Four years ago, when I was 12, I was molested by a 70-year-old doctor while in an institution. I knew I couldn't tell anyone. Who would believe a 12-year-old mental patient over a respected doctor? Your article was the first I had ever seen on the issue. After I read it, I spent hours on the phone with my girlfriend, crying. My tears purged that feeling of helplessness and filth that have been haunting me for so long. Please let me remain anonymous.

OTT welcomes letters and considers them for publication in the magazine and on its web site, unless otherwise specified. Letters may be edited for clarity and space. Send to OTT, 97-77 Queens Blvd., Ste. 1120, Flushing, NY 11374, or e-mail to onissues@echonyc.com.

4 - spring 1998
on the issues

IRAN

Notes from the Interior
by Merle Hoffman

You're going where? The insistent questioning by family and friends reverberated in my head as I flew over the blackness of the Bosphorus, the sky brilliant with stars.

Traveling to Iran in the fall of last year, I journeyed much farther than anticipated. Media sound bites and commentary defined my expectations: The fatwa against Salman Rushdie; American hostages; burned U.S. flags; oppression of women; political repression; religious fanaticism. My visual perceptions included the images of bearded young men with fists punching the air in passionate rage, and veiled women forming a moving sea of black shrouds. Massive crowds engaged in collective acts of transcendence that stretched my cross-cultural empathy and taxed my understanding.

What was this place really? This "rogue state"—this revolutionary, yet ancient society to which I was traveling?

I was entering Iran curiously, and somewhat apprehensively. Ultimately, I was to find that Iran entered me. It pushed my boundaries and transformed me in ways I never expected.

The strangeness started on the plane. I learned that none of the Swiss Air crew ever disembarked. The plane landed just long enough to unload its passengers, refuel, and start back again.

The stewardess apologetically handed me the pre-landing forms. Was I carrying any liquor or unacceptable reading material into the Islamic Republic? I stared at my book on women pirates—a blood-red cover showing a swashbuckling heroine with a half-exposed breast. "Serious history," I thought to myself with a grin. I would keep it. Two books on the psychology of serial killers could also pass muster as quintessential American culture, but the British Times Literary Supplement with a long piece on homosexuality would have to stay on the plane. (Last April, a 32-year-old Iranian lesbian was granted asylum in the U.S., after her home was raided twice by Revolutionary Guards, and her lover and a former girlfriend were both jailed because of their suspected sexual preferences.)

Shortly before landing I slipped into the restroom and prepared to go native. From the very beginning, Iran challenged my vanity. In order to conform to Islamic hijab, I was expected to cover my hair and neck, wear a long, loose dress, dark stockings or trousers, and forego cosmetics in public.

From my adolescent-bohemian days at New York's High School of Music and Art, to the adult rituals of Manhattan fashion, black had always been my color, so the floor-length dark coat was not a problem. The head scarf was the issue. I'd purchased a large opaque one, and had practiced with it at home, throwing it over my shoulder in a dramatic gesture. But because I was always in motion, the damn thing kept falling off, resulting in a dangerous display of blond hair. The scarf made my long hair, which is so much a part of my female self and self-definition, situationally unavailable to me. I felt neutered, de-sexualized.

But that was the point.

The associations I began making were brutal: Auschwitz, where the first thing done to the woman—before the dogs and the gas—was to shave their heads in an attempt to dehumanize them; female collaborators during World War II being shamed by having their heads shaved.

Cross-dressing as a Muslim woman in a chador, I moved awkwardly into a socially constructed invisibility. But remarkably, by the time I left Iran I would find the restrictive coverings an unexpected revelation.

Interacting with other women in hijab was a distinctive experience. I felt totally concealed, yet strangely naked at the same time. Free from an individuality defined by attire, and with only one's face exposed, the presented "self" can become more focused and authentic. All the usual and customary signifiers were unavailable. Without designer labels or rich textures to define, to specify one's "caste," for example, I could not process or calculate class and rank. For the first time, I inhabited a space without familiar roles or stereotypic assumptions. I could be in a nunnery, or an Orthodox shul—other worlds where an egalitarian uniformity of dress creates a more intense meritocracy of personality. It was a welcome relief.

The chador: woven prison, romantic shroud, encompassing, suffocating, oppressive. It was so difficult to hold correctly. Many women...
held theirs in their teeth, allowing them the use of both hands. I was always nervously clutching at the ends of mine to keep it acceptably in place.

Iranian men on the other hand were free to dress as they chose. Most wore casual jackets and open shirts. When the mullahs declared ties to be a symbol of Western influence, Iran became the only country where wearing one is a political act.

So is dancing.

Since the revolution, the Islamic Republic allows no dancing. In one of the few restaurants now permitted to have live music, I forced myself to sit still while my body strained against the limitation. My shoulders, neck and head moved to the rhythm, while my feet tapped the floor. I turned and met the eyes of another woman. We danced together with our eyebrows, laughing knowingly through the boundaries.

Expressions of politics and religion were everywhere. At the airport and in the public spaces of Tehran, I was visually assaulted by enormous posters of the fiery, revolutionary leader Ayatollah Khomeini, and the current supreme religious leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who stared down at me with haughty patriarchal preeminence.

The sides of apartment buildings were covered with wall paintings of the martyrs of the Iran/Iraq war: state-created religious iconography—young men with saintly, serious eyes, and a touch of knowing in their faces—doubling as revolutionary graffiti. Later I would see their mothers on television detailing the brief life stories of their sons—poignant vignettes of suffering and loss, produced to reinforce the collective national experience of sacrifice and bonding. That was one channel. The other two aired either continual readings of the Koran, or serious discussions on art or nature. No Sally Jesse or Oprah here.

Then there was Qom, the center of Shiite Muslim teaching, the palpable heart of the religion and the revolution. I'd wanted to go there ever since I'd known I would visit Iran, drawn by what must be the intensity, the heaviness, the pure seriousness of the city. Khomeini studied here and the place has his mark.

In Qom, the mullahs were everywhere: long dark beards, pointed slippers, russet capes, books under their arms. The atmosphere was weighted with significance, expectation, and for women, danger of unintentional blasphemy. Not a hair must show; keep eyes cast down; don't smile; don't laugh; walk modestly. I was told that one can always tell a foreign woman, even in chador and from the back, because of the way we walk, stride really-purposeful movements the chador is intended to hinder.

I arrived at Qom's main shrine just in time for midday prayer. Interestingly, in this ancient monastic city, the shrine where people worship is the burial site of a woman, Massumeh, a descendant of the Prophet.

I found myself surrounded by ranks of women, bowing, praying, placing their foreheads on small tablets of clay (one does not speak to God touching man-made substances). As I maneuvered my way through the undulating crowds, I was reminded of Orthodox Jewish synagogues. There, too, I have always been both fascinated and a little repelled by the solemn dark figures mouthing unintelligible prayers as they move their bodies ecstatically in ritual dialogue with the Divine. Here, in this most alien of places, where as a non-Muslim, yet alone a Jew, I had no right to be present, I felt an ambivalent familiarity.

Then a vision in black stood before me. I think it was a mother and child. I am sure about the child. I could gauge her age in her face and size. But the figure standing next to her was a mystery. Totally encased in black cloth, the face completely obscured by an embroidered covering, she stood absolutely still facing the shrine. I was transfixed by the pair's solemnity, the strange beauty of this tableau, and wondered how the wrapped figure could possibly breathe.

My attention was drawn away from this exotic scene by anoth-
er, a group of six men walking around the courtyard of the mosque, holding a corpse wrapped in a blanket above their heads. This ritual allows the family of the deceased to help the corpse pay his last respects. I later learned that the traditional souvenir visitors bring home from Qom is a shroud to be used at one's death. I declined.

Even here in Qom, especially here, the politics can be explosive. The day before I visited there had been a demonstration by militant students against a leading cleric. He had issued a statement questioning the role of the Supreme Religious Leader, a constitutional position that is neither elected, nor responsible to the people. Tear gas was needed to dispel the demonstrators.

In Isfahan, the enchanting city of turquoise mosques, soaring minarets, and tea houses on the river, the romance of the moment was broken when I noticed a mass of black chadors marching toward my taxi. Holding large political banners and chanting, they were the stereotype come to life. It was November 4th, the eighteenth anniversary of the occupation of the U.S. embassy and the taking of American hostages.

At my insistent questioning, my driver apologetically explained that the slogans were anti-American. But, he hastened to assure me, it is the government, not the people, of the U.S. with whom some Iranians have a problem. But it felt more personal than political when, sitting in the lobby of my hotel in Shiraz, I was struck by the large gold lettering above the entranceway reading “Down with USA.” This is a remnant of the early days of the revolution, and even though it is at odds with Iran's newly emerging tourism, the slogan stays. Lest they forget?

Since the astonishing election of President Mohammad Khatami, the preferred candidate of the intelligentsia, social and political tensions have heightened. In his “message to the American people,” broadcast on CNN in January, Khatami praised the founders of America, suggested cultural and intellectual exchanges, and acknowledged that the feelings of the American people had been “hurt” over the hostage crisis.

The Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khamenei’s reaction was to support Khatami’s remarks and dismiss any ostensible disagreement as a “difference of taste.” However, he defended the seizure of the American hostages, calling it a “way to punish America,” and praised the student militants for their decency in not killing them.

Whatever the nuanced political maneuverings between Iran and the U.S., I felt that President Khatami echoed the sentiments of my taxi driver with his praise of the “great American people,” and his desire to “crack the wall of mistrust” between Iran and America.

And it was the people of Iran who defined the landscape of the place for me. The families and friends whose homes I visited every night. It was only there, on the inside, that the “personal,” as we define it in the West, was possible.

Inside, the scarfs, long coats and chadors of the day were put aside for designer suits or comfortable jeans. Fashionable accessories appeared, and hair in myriad styles escaped. Because the selling and consumption of liquor is prohibited, there was homemade vodka and wine. I ate rice flavored with rose petals, and danced energetically to tapes of traditional Iranian music.

Connections were fast and intense. Things that were forbidden on the outside were allowed inside: looking, touching, embracing. Without the assaulting media saturation of consumerism, sex and violence that so often defines Western society, the smallest things became meaningful: the subtle eroticsisms; the briefest hints of sensuality—as if the reality of the revolution outside enforced an interior hypersensitivity. I recalled my adolescence, where so much of the excitement came from the danger of having lines to cross, boundaries to break. A time when anything was possible and fantasies of romance, adventure and enchanting places filled my mind.

It all came back to me in Shiraz, walking in one of the gardens for which Iran is famous. Particularly there, where the delicate, disciplined parks create small green oases in an otherwise gray city.
One expects to find Persian miniatures come to life—lovers in silk robes strolling among the pomegranate trees. Instead on a crisp fall day, with the graceful trees of Shiraz surrounding me, and the Zagros Mountains as a backdrop, I spotted three uniformed soldiers taking a stroll. In lieu of their customary guns, they each held prayer beads in their hands.

On that same day, I took a taxi to the tomb of Saadi, the Shakespeare of Persian literature, and when I asked the price of the ride, was told by the driver, “Pay me whatever you choose. It is an honor to take you to Saadi’s grave.” Unforgettable was the day I stood at the tomb of Hafiz, the revered thirteenth-century poet, while couples read his haunting words of love to each other, and kissed the Koran in gratitude for his life. Or the powerful silence in the thousand-year-old Jummah (Friday) Mosque in Isfahan just before midday prayer begins recalling and replicating centuries of the same moment.

And the day I was approached in Ali-Ghapu, a seventeenth century palace of Shah Abbas, by a young male student who, on hearing me speak English and learning I was an American, shouted joyfully, “Michael Jackson, Pink Floyd, Danielle Steele.” Laughing, I replied, “not my taste,” and posed for pictures with him.

Learning that there were still 5,000 Jews left in Isfahan, I was determined to visit the ancient synagogue. I found it tucked away behind a street facade, its small door easily missed. A doe-eyed teenaged girl, who lived there with her mother, let me in. The synagogue was faded and worn, a sad remnant of what was once the center of a vibrant community. Chickens scratched in the courtyard; the once richly colored Persian nigs were now dimmed and stained; the only seating for a diminishing congregation: folding chairs.

The poignancy of the decaying synagogue was augmented by the mother, who with tears in her eyes told me of the death last year from leukemia of her only son, at 27. With tears in my own eyes, I embraced her, and gave her what was for me a small donation, a gift for the synagogue. It was received as if I had given thousands of dollars. Perhaps I should have.

But it was the young girls of Iran who moved me most deeply. Resembling little novices, their black eyes stared out boldly from under their headcoverings. At a museum, which was previously one of the Shah’s palaces, I was surrounded by a group of them, ranging in age from 9 to 12. On a class outing, they were greatly interested in a foreigner, especially an American. “Is it better in the West?” “Should we leave and try to live there?” “Will I have a better life?” they asked me. I answered diplomatically that “one can build a good life anywhere.” But I wondered. Because I know that geography is destiny, and that there are many in her country who would deny them any opportunity to participate fully in society.

Just this past year, two Iranian leaders made that quite clear. On Tehran radio in July, Ayatollah Khamenei said, “The idea that women should play a role in society just as men do is a negative, primitive, simple and childish notion.”

Or Justice Minister Ismail Shoushtari, who told the Jomhouri Islami newspaper: “When it comes to the defense of women’s rights, the notion of equality between men and women does not mean that women will no longer suffer discrimination. Moreover, the notion of equality between men and women does injustice to women.”

In a country where men are still automatically awarded custody of children, and women are routinely and institutionally discriminated against in terms of financial, judicial and social systems, just what is justice for Iranian women? Is it to be found in the details of Islamic law, under which, this past summer, the Iranian parliament approved a special bill to allow women being divorced to receive their prescribed alimony adjusted for inflation? The measure makes it mandatory for marriage license bureaus to register the price indicators at the time of the marriage in the marriage certificate.

Or is it found in the reality that, despite the severe restrictions of the fundamentalist regime, women are more engaged in the life of their country than they were under the Shah? That they continue to slowly push at barriers and move toward freedom. That their strength and energy are the hope and future of Iran, just as their mothers were the foundation and support of their families during the revolution.

I only know that when I climbed aboard the Swiss Air plane to return home, the first thing I did was to pull the scarf off my head, because I was free to do so. But removing symbols and metaphors is so much easier than dismantling the radical ideologies that placed them there.
In medieval Europe, when the Roman Catholic church was at its most powerful, to be a man of Christ was to be a man of integrity—honest, caring, responsible, accountable for one’s actions. At the Promise Keepers’ October rally in Washington, D.C., hundreds of thousands of men gathered to pledge that their manhood “collectively and individually” would embody those very qualities. On the surface, it’s difficult to find fault with this agenda. Who could argue that men, as a group, don’t need to be less violent and abusive, more committed to our families, and more concerned about the moral and ethical content of our culture than we have been? Or that redefining manhood around a core of such values isn’t a worthwhile goal? The hitch is that this manhood, as defined by the Promise Keepers, requires both that men accept Jesus Christ as the messiah, and that we assume once more the position of power and privilege reserved for us in the biblical model of male dominance. Only then, the Promise Keepers argue, will the possibility of a just and humane society become truly achievable.

The belief that justice and humanity depend on women’s subordination to men clearly requires rebuttal. But it is important that we not become distracted from the larger ideology by which the Promise Keepers are driven: the belief that the world should be remade in the image of their Christianity. More than a world in which men lead and women follow, in other words, the Promise Keepers want one in which Christian manhood defines the standard by which all other ways of being are judged. In the Middle Ages, the “Soldiers of Christ” crusaded for a similar world.

It was in just such a world that Jewish men could neither own land nor hold public office. They were excluded from many professions and were denied the right to obtain academic degrees. Just about every avenue of Christian male privilege was closed to Jewish men on the grounds that they could not be trusted because of their refusal to accept the truth of Christ. These qualities, dishonesty and deceitfulness, were additionally significant because they were the very same qualities commonly attributed to women as descendants of Eve. And just like women, Jewish men were believed to have been punished with the “curse” of menstruation. So not only were Jewish men seen as afflicted with a fundamental psychological flaw that made it spiritually impossible for them to be men of Christ, they were also seen as physiologically female—as the antitheses of true men.

It’s tempting to dismiss this bit of biological absurdity as the ignorance of a bygone age. But, as Sander Gilman points out in Jewish Self-Hatred, this identification of the Jewish male as female was used to give credence to perhaps the most pernicious and deadly canard of Jew-hatred ever invented: the blood libel. This was the myth that Jews ritually murdered and drank the blood of Christian children. Dating back to twelfth-century England, when the Jews of Norwich were accused of showing their contempt for Jesus by allegedly crucifying a Christian boy, blood libel accusations have led to the torture and murder of countless Jews. As recently as 1882, La Cruila Cattolica, the semi-official journal of the Vatican, described ritual murder of Christian children as a normal part of Jewish life.

In the thirteenth century, Jews were understood to need Christian blood not as a sacrament but as a cure for Jewish male menstruation. As Gilman reports, Thomas de Cantimpré—an anatomist who cited as his authority no less a personage than St. Augustine—explained that the Jews had begun the practice of ritual murder when one of their prophets mistakenly declared that they could remove “the curse” from Jewish men only by Christiano sanguine, the blood of a Christian, rather than by Christi sanguine, the blood of Christ. The only way Jewish men could remove the curse of physiological feminity and attain manhood, in other words, was by recognizing Jesus as the messiah, thereby becoming (real) men of Christ.

The Promise Keepers have neither revived the blood libel nor suggested that men who choose not to follow Christ are anything less than manly. In fact, they’ve taken pains to oppose the denigration of other faiths. Nonetheless, the Promise Keepers’ vision of manhood is essentially the same as the one held by the thirteenth-century Church. To put it in personal terms: As a man who is not interested in taking back my traditional role as the head of the family and who is also unmoved by the notion that Jesus is my personal savior, I represent the antithesis of the kind of manhood the Promise Keepers stand for. How can they see me as anything but emasculated? How can they not see me and other men like me in the same way that my forefathers were seen by the medieval Church, as a feminizing stain on the body of the world? How can the Promise Keepers not believe at some level of their being that it’s their Christian duty to wipe that stain away?
"God," the Reverend Billy Graham told the Promise Keepers in Washington, "is calling us to a battleground, and we are in the center of the battle." Make no mistake about it, even if Graham is not calling for literal bloodshed, he is talking about a war against non-Christian ways of being. As a Jewish man, therefore, it's difficult for me not to become a little paranoid, hearing in Graham's message the rhetoric that justified the Inquisition, the Crusades, the pogroms—all means by which some Christians have historically "defended" their faith. It's difficult not to characterize the Promise Keepers as crusaders-in-training, needing only the right leader to send them off, swords in hand, to conquer the world for Christ. I recognize, however, that this characterization—much like the feminist characterization of the Promise Keepers as male backlash—is a dismissal of the group, defining the Promise Keepers as an all-too-familiar enemy that needs, simply, without much comment, to be defeated. This approach seems to me a mistake, not because it's wrong, but because it's too narrow. We need to see the Promise Keepers' call to Christ as an opportunity. In its public endorsement of the connection between religious and gender elitism, the group demonstrates more concretely than just about any other element of conservatism in this country how deeply rooted male dominance in our social, cultural, political, and spiritual institutions. It also illustrates how much those institutions have depended on male dominance for their survival. More to the point, the Promise Keepers are a prime example of how the question of male dominance is not only one of men's power, women's powerlessness, and the gender inequities resulting from the imbalance. In their explicit definition of manhood as inherently Christian, they also show how male dominance depends on a division of the world into those who are and those who are not "real men." The Promise Keepers' call, in other words, should be seen as a challenge to us all, but to men in particular, to find nondivisive ways of addressing the question of manhood. Only when that question is resolved will we be able to fulfill the promise of a society in which men and women share equally in the rights and opportunities of human existence.


It's a Boy!
by Cheryl A. Passalaqua

I'm lying on my back, my distended abdomen eclipsing my feet. Sitting next to me, the father is holding my hand in the darkened room while the technician plays with the knobs on her machine. The only noise comes from this machine, which purrs with an indifferent arrogance, completely unaware of its importance.

Women exit this room in ecstasy with the news of a healthy fetus; in gut-wrenching agony with the discovery of defects. I behold this interpreter of uterine secrets with both fear and admiration.

The technician picks up the paddle, smears cold gel on it, and warns me of its temperature with an apologetic tone. While she adjust knobs and probes with the paddle, we exchange small talk.

"The brain looks good," she says unemotionally, as if thinking aloud. "See the spinal cord? It looks good." She proceeds to inform us that everything is where it should be.

"Can you see the sex organs?" I ask, afraid of the answer.

She swings the slimy paddle into position and probes again. "Are you sure you want to know?" she says.

We both nod eagerly.

"See this here? That's the penis and scrotum. It's a boy."

A boy. My eyes well with tears. The father squeezes my hand and mumbles, "I'm sorry."

The tech looks puzzled. After all, she has informed us that the baby is perfectly healthy, and news of a son is usually met with enthusiasm.

"We have two boys already," the father explains. I am devastated. I want a daughter. I lie on the table and weep. The father does not know what to do, what to say, so he continues to hold my hand. I want to punch him for his abundance of Y-chromosome sperm.

In the car we are sullen, our moods fusing with the Boston February sky. We are each wrapped in our thoughts about this baby. I know he is concerned about my mental state at this point, so I reach over, squeeze his hand, and offer a conciliatory grin. There is nothing we can do about it now. "Want some lunch?" he asks.

"I have to get back to work," I inform him. For once, I have no appetite. The news travels quickly throughout our network. Friends from around the country call and offer their condolences. "Just think, you'll never have to pay for a wedding!" (An ancient tradition I disagree with.)

"You'll have three little boys who'll adore you. You will be their ideal of a
woman." (I don't want to be an ideal for anyone.)

"Boys aren't as expensive as girls." (That's because we, as a society, offer girls material objects in lieu of opportunities.)

"You know where you stand with boys; girls are sneaky." (Where the hell did that one come from?)

"In many cultures you would be held in great honor because you've given your husband nothing but sons." (I'll remember that the next time I'm in Oman.)

"Boys are easier to raise. There's no mother-daughter jealousy bullshit to deal with." This from my friend with daughters.

"But that's just it," I try to explain. "Along with the jealousy there's a wonderful bond."

She unconsciously smiles in recognition. "I want to do facials and share clothes. I want to have heart-to-heart talks the way me and my mom did. I want to teach her to be independent and strong, and to value her intelligence. You know, all the things you have with your girls. I want that." "You can have that with your boys," she insists.

I glare at her and shake my head. "It's not the same."

"But it's the reality. You're going to give birth to a son, not a daughter. Get on with it."

I smirk and tell her I can't stand the thought of a penis growing inside of me.

"Don't you see what a challenge this is? It's so important to raise feminist sons along with daughters. Do facials with your boys; share clothes with them. Do all the things your mother did with you. Isn't that what feminism is all about?"

She's got a good point, but I don't want to admit it. I want to wallow in this self-pity—a luxury I rarely indulge in.

My back hurts, my feet hurt, my crotch aches. The baby is moving constantly and I can't get comfortable. I resent this. I don't want to have this baby. I feel like an incubator carrying precious cargo for society: a boy who will be entitled to all the benefits society accords his gender. I am jealous of him already.

The contractions are close together. I ride each surge of pain. It comes in slowly, reaches a crescendo, then ebbs away. I embrace each wave, fondle it, feel every aspect of it, caress it and envision it doing the same with me. I let it go and gather strength for the next one. Don't give me drugs. I want to experience this.

I hold him for the first time and fall in love, as he roots for my breast, finds it, and brings great pleasure to both of us. As our bonding begins, I see the father and the other two boys on the periphery. They are witnessing something they will never experience and they are awed by my ability to do it. The baby and I retreat into a private place and touch each other, becoming acquainted.

Years later I am shocked when I change my niece's diaper. There is no penis, but a fresh, tiny vagina. I have never seen one before. I stare in reverence with a towel in hand, ready for the golden shower that used to shoot up at me. After 10 years of wiping asses, I realize I don't know how to clean her.

My three sons and I sit around a bowl of popcorn with green goo on our faces, laughing at how hideous we look. It took some persuasion, but they finally relented. They enjoy pampering themselves. My mind wanders back 30 years to a similar scene with my mother and sister, and tears of gratitude smudge the green goo before it can dry.

I am perusing the shelves of a bookstore. I turn the corner and am confronted by a little girl. She's beautiful; she reminds me of the storybook character Madeline. Our eyes lock. If I had a daughter, this is what she'd look like. She would have the spunk and eccentricity of Madeline too. This hurts. I put my books down and quickly exit to gulp the rank indifference of Harvard Square.

At three, my youngest informs me that girls are not bosses, they are princesses. I almost drive off the road. Before I can explain to him why he is so very wrong, his two brothers rush to my aid and list every female boss they can think of, furtively looking at me in the mirror. I smile and let them do the explaining.

"My youngest is really into dance," my friend with the daughters is telling me. "The lessons are expensive! Each class ends with a recital which requires new, specially made dresses that cost at least a hundred bucks each. Then I have to sit through hours of little girls trying to look like Miss America. It just kills me. It's the nineties, you know. I mean, what have we worked so hard for?"

I smile and encourage her to continue.

"The oldest is a cheerleader! Can you believe it?"

I beam as I listen to her and eat one of the cookies my middle child has just pulled from the oven. They are hot, gooey, sinfully sweet and oh so fulfilling.

Cheryl Passalaqua is a freelance writer based in Socorro, New Mexico. She is currently working on two novels exploring women's relationships amidst their struggles for equality and liberty.
What Does a Pretty Girl Like You Do For Extra Money?
by Rita Henley Jensen

Hitchhiking back to campus from the food stamp distribution center, I was in a particularly belligerent mood. My car wasn't running again, and I'd spent my lunch-hour standing in line and was now late getting back to work. The temperature was in the 30s, damp and overcast. This was in Columbus, Ohio, in December, in the 1970s.

A man driving a late-model sedan stopped. I got in. He was dressed in a dark business suit, a gray topcoat. He shifted his four-on-the-floor gears with panache, his hands kept warm by supple, gray leather gloves.

"Where are you coming from?" he asked.

An ordinary question and, in ordinary circumstances, I would have answered with the vaguest of replies. But I was feeling ornery. "Picking up my food stamps," I said curtly.

Without missing a beat, even as he was watching the traffic light change to red and downshifting to make the stop, he asked, "So, what does a pretty girl like you do for extra money?"

Now, you could argue with me these many years later that it was an innocent enough question. That maybe he was just curious or maybe he was interested in my resume because he had some career advice for me. I have the strong belief, however, that Mr. Graygloves' question indicated he intended to benefit from my poverty by encouraging me to join the ranks of entrepreneurs and perform a sexual act for a fee.

I also believe that the incident illustrates a basic truth about the economics of female poverty: Those in the driver's seat of public policy—Democratic presidents, Republican members of Congress, corporate chieftains, Harvard professors, and well-paid journalists writing for mainstream publications to name a few—see women's poverty as an opportunity to be elected, cut labor costs, or otherwise reach whatever goal their personal ambitions dictate at the time.

Take cutting labor costs, for example. I'm sure you've read the news by now that the wage gap between women and men is increasing for the first time in two decades. Women are actually falling behind, not gaining. Today, their median wages are slightly less than 75 cents for every dollar a man earns if both are working full-time all year, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. That's down from 77 cents four years ago.

When the statistics came to light, many economists hurriedly did more studies. This is a little like saying we can't be sure cigarette smoking causes lung cancer. It does, and the welfare legislation put downward pressure on all non-professional women's wages.

Promised as part of the Republican Contract for America and signed by President Clinton with his eye on the upcoming 1996 election, the new law should have been titled: The Maximize Unmarried Mothers Economic Vulnerability Act of 1996. Its regulations apply only to impoverished single heads of household—90 percent of whom are mothers or grandmothers caring for children. (No direct federal income aid exists for childless adults unless they are disabled or elderly.)

Its central provisions are:

- All single parents who receive federally supported government assistance for families must work at least 20 hours per week during 1997 and as many as 30 hours by the year 2000. No minimum wage requirement or health and safety standards are included.

Recent affidavits in a class action against the City of New York show that women employed by the Departments of Sanitation and Transportation are being asked to work under such unreasonable conditions that, throughout their entire working day, they are often unable to use the restroom. Menstruating women frequently end up with bloodstained clothes because in their eight hours on the job they are not given the opportunity to change a tampon or napkin.

- All states must set time limits of five years or less on receiving assistance. (Connecticut set its limit at 21 months and began cutting families off assistance in November, 1997.)

- Recipients may be enrolled in vocational training for no more than 12 months, a restriction that precludes mothers from obtaining even an associate's degree while on welfare. (Right now, 17,000 welfare recipients are enrolled in New York's City University and over 140,000 are enrolled in California's state community system. Most will be forced to drop out.)

The ostensible rationale for this approach to poverty is stated in the opening paragraphs of the law. It says, and I am quoting verbatim: "Marriage is an essential institution of a successful society which promotes the interest of children."

This is followed by a laundry list which blames single-parent families for everything from low-birth-weight babies to high crime rates. Here is one of my favorites: "The absence of a father in the life of a child has a negative effect on school performance and peer adjustment."

Somehow, Congress appears to have made the intuitive leap that all this evil caused by single-parenting could be eradicated if the federal government eliminated the financial incentives—those whopping $375-a-month welfare checks—women have been receiving for raising children out of wedlock (the term used frequently and aptly by the law's drafters). If mothers choose to be unmarried, the law appears to be saying, it is only fair that they face grievous financial consequences—including having to work for below-minimum wages while leaving their children in the care of whomever. The carrot or stick approach.

As the lawmakers must surely have anticipated, the legislation has compelled welfare mothers to enter the paid workforce—ready or not. And as inevitably as access to a high-level...
For almost 2,000 years, the Madonna has been one of the most sustaining images in Christian art and music. More babies have been named for her than for any other historical figure. In this century alone, there have been 400 apparitions of the Virgin Mary, and even bombs and bullets have not deflected her followers. Throughout the war in the former Yugoslavia, tour buses continued to pour into Medjugorje, where, in 1981, six children saw visions of Mary. Despite the brutal conflict, some 20 million people visited the small town in the past decade—a miracle indeed. Yet little is written about Mary in the New Testament, and religious patriarchy intended her to know her place. The Trinitarian concept of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit excludes a female principle. “The Madonna is not pleased when she is placed above her son,” insisted Pope John XXIII during the Second Vatican Council (1962-65). About the same time, feminists began criticizing Mary’s subservient role. It was the first time in human history, they maintained, that a mother had knelt before her son and openly acknowledged her inferiority.

In recent years, Protestants have joined Catholic and Orthodox scholars in a new debate on Mary’s role: Should the Trinity become a Quartet? And while the special commission of 23 marianologists appointed by the Vatican to consider the issue all voted against it, and the head of the Greek Orthodox church in the U.S. calls the very concept heresy, the public groundswell in favor of Mary’s elevation only grows. So far, in the largest letter-writing campaign the Vatican has ever seen, the pope has received some 4.5 million signatures from 157 countries—an average of 100,000 a month—supporting the proposed dogma.

On The Issues asked four female theologians and religious thinkers, three Christian and one Muslim, whether they were in favor of such a move or not, and what the significance would be for women.
A Manifestation of Goddess
A Conversation with Mary Daly

Mary is a Radical Element Feminist and longtime Postchristian, who holds doctorates in theology and philosophy. She is author of such classics as The Church and the Second Sex; Beyond God the Father; and Outercourse. Her new book, Quintessence: Realizing the Outrageous, Contagious Courage of Women--A Radical Elemental Feminist Manifesto, will be published in November this year.

Q) Theologians, including the Vatican, are debating whether Mary should be elevated to equal status with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, in effect, making the Trinity a Quartet. What do you make of this?

A) Mary doesn't need to be promoted to membership in a divine quartet. If some theologians want to raise Mary up, they are responding to the vast sea of unconscious longing on the part of women, and some men, for the return of Goddess. The world is crying out for her. But neither the Pope nor his theologians understand how "up" she is. Mary is a manifestation of Goddess.

Mary doesn't need elevation. She is too good, too powerful for tokenism, for assimilation into the Boys Club, to be a Madeleine Albright. She is far more ancient, far richer than that. Look at the great cathedrals of Europe--Chartres, Notre Dame, Cologne, Canterbury... Most were erected to Mary, dedicated to her explicitly. Look at their names: Notre Dame, "Our Lady." They were built by the people, who carried rock after rock until they had created a cathedral. And when you are in those cathedrals, you can feel such spiritual power.

Examine the litany: The names given to Mary are beautiful, inspiring: "Queen of Heaven," "Morning Star," "Gate of Heaven," "Star of the Sea." They suggest how people have felt about her. You don't have names like that for a male god.

Mary is a remnant of the ancient Goddess, who was celebrated, not worshiped; whose images predominated all over this earth in pre-patriarchal, Gynocentric times, before gods came into prominence. Since it is a patriarchal religion, Christianity is characterized by the erasure and reversal of everything female. There is no acknowledged Goddess in Christianity. The attributes of the Great Goddess are plastered onto a contrived god. God is a male image, contrived, not natural. Both erasure and reversal mark the history of Goddess taken over by Christianity. It's been demonstrated over and over by anthropologists and archeologists that there was a celebration of goddesses everywhere on this earth before patriarchy took over.

Both God and Goddess are, however, anthropomorphic images for what I call the "Ultimate-Intimate Reality," and what other philosophers describe as "The Encompassing," or "Power of Being."

All these names are more intellectually satisfying than symbols. But people need symbols. They need to be able to address someone, a personality that shimmers through the abstraction. And because there is a need for that kind of personification, we use the anthropomorphic image. But the male image is terrible, a ruthless, mean, vengeful, jealous god. And if god is male, the male thinks he is god. Women have had enough. The image of Goddess is surging up from their unconscious. We've seen this before.

When the Christians were bloodily conquering Europe and forcing people to turn from Paganism to Christianity, they had not paid much attention to Mary; Christianity is a very woman-effacing religion. But the Pagans wouldn't buy it. It was Ireland's St. Patrick who recognized that it was Goddess the common people all over Europe missed. The Pagans would accept Christ only if they could have Mary. The church offered a package deal. And thus, in the fifth century, the official policy of the church toward Mary was changed. Later, the so-called Protestant Reformation had a disastrous effect. Protestantism is devoid of Mary, the Female Principle, with which women can identify.

Today, some theologians give the appearance of responding to public pressure.

The most powerful reality in Christianity is Mary, the ancient Goddess reborn. Henry Adams described this reality: "Symbol or energy, the Virgin has acted as the greatest force the Western world has ever felt, and has drawn men's activities to herself more strongly than any other power, natural or supernatural, has ever done."

Longing for Goddess
I was interested in the world's reaction to Princess Diana's death. Women, and some men, too, who were not even particularly impressed by her, were sobbing their hearts out. You can call it media manipulation, but there was something beyond that. A friend of mine spent hours crying, and she is not the type to weep. There was such grief, and it was because Diana represented something far more than a modern princess.

Q) It has been said that women everywhere saw themselves in Diana, their life in hers. How is this psychological affinity related to the longing for Goddess?

A) The original Diana was the Sky Queen. When the brother of Princess Diana gave his eulogy at her funeral, he identified her with Diana, the Goddess of the Hunt. The original Diana did indeed later become identified with Artemis, the Greek Goddess of the Hunt; but before that Diana, whose name is associated with the word for light, was the Queen of the Open Sky. The descriptions of Diana, like those of Mary, are taken from the ancient descriptions of...
the Sky Goddesses. Among them are Ishtar and the great astral divinity, the Triple Moon Goddess Isis. It's a very interesting "coincidence" that women are grieving for today's Diana, whose name resonates on some level of consciousness, unconsciousness, or unconscious memory, call it what you will, with those ancient images of divinity, the Sky Goddesses.

In grieving for Diana, women are also grieving for themselves, because so many things that happened to Princess Diana have happened to every woman. They are grieving over the patriarchal takeover, without even knowing it. They are grieving over the loss of a Gynocentric society. They are grieving over the loss of Goddess. Princess Diana triggered all those unconscious memories. Diana was stripped of her titles, betrayed, mistreated, abused, chased by the paparazzi, killed. Everything that happened to her happened to Goddess. In a famous battle in the Babylonian creation myth Enuma elish, the Goddess Tiamat is clubbed, raped, dismembered by Marduk, "the wisest of the gods."

Hope in the Midst of Horror

In Anglo-Saxon, "god" means simply good. But in everyone’s imagination, god is always a male image. Just ask anyone on the street. I don’t think that what happened to Princess Diana was a coincidence. Rather, I believe it was synchronicity, when something seems to be accidental or coincidental, but isn’t. And there are so many "miracles" happening, more Apparitions of the Blessed Lady in this century, it is said, than in the preceding 300 years.

Perhaps the millennium is a factor; but it is not the only one; it is after all, a thin concept. There is also an urgency stemming from the conditions in the world today. The earth is being destroyed by men —global warming, climate changes, hideous weapons, more frequent wars, horrifying biotechnology. Scientists today believe they are creators, and mutate species at will. When they think they are creators of life, they are really death-dealers. And there is so much more stalking, rape, murder of women worldwide. In the midst of all this horror, there has to be hope. It is a case of biophilia versus necrophilia, life-loving versus death-loving. There is a battle of principalities and powers that becomes ever more intense. It is necessary to uncover the Principle of Light, and that is the Female Principle.

The idea of promoting Mary to a quartet shouldn’t even be addressed. The Vatican is discussing whether to name her Co-Redemptrix, Mediatrix and Advocate of the People of God. They can’t change the Trinity officially, make three into four, although they have always struggled with that theologically. (Thomas Aquinas, in the thirteenth century, devoted an article to this problem in his Summa theologiae.) They can’t do it because it is dogma, it’s in the creed, and they won’t change that. But they could do something that brings her into a greater prominence.

Conferring the title Co-Redemptrix would be a step that some theologians hope will keep women in the church, because so many have left. Like all tokenism, it could distract from the deep reality of Mary, but the Pope can’t really co-opt Goddess. He can, however, make her more visible, by making the image of Mary more prominent. The Vatican could follow the mood of the people. They could respond, as Rome sometimes does, by trying to draw people into the church and keep them there. I think the Pope means well, that he has some integrity, some devotion to Mary.

But, in fact, Mary should not be named Co-Redemptrix. She is Redemptrix, in the sense that only Goddess can save us from a male god. Nor is she Mediatrix, which would mean she mediates between us and the male god. She doesn’t. She is beyond all that. It is interesting to watch, however, as patriarchal religion struggles with the surging power of longing that is out there, trying to harness it. But the power is so much greater than they are.

Perhaps some theologians want to "uplift" Mary a little, after demeaning her. Christianity lobotomized the image of Goddess, stomped on her, smashed her, made her into a dimwitted jerk who kneeled before her own son. Some are now trying to pick up this beaten, crushed entity and give her a bandaid to cover up what they’ve done. If this enables some people to see through the faded replica into the depth of the meaning of Goddess, fine. It is better than millennia of negating her.

Mary Co-opted as Co-Redeemer

by Frances Kissling

As we got closer to high school graduation, got to know a few boys and experienced sexual desire if not activity, the essential paradox of Mary became more real. The Virgin Mother. It was a classic patriarchal trap. I’ve sometimes suspected, to establish an unachievable ideal as a way of keeping women in our place. Mary, a fully human woman, but without sexual desire or passion. Mary,

Catholic girlhood lived out in Catholic schools included substantial devotion to Mary. May was Mary’s month. From first grade through high school graduation for the entire month, we would dress in virginal white and process through the school grounds singing Marian hymns. Come Christmas, some lucky girl among us would be chosen to play Mary in the Nativity pageant (never me; I was usually relegated to the barnyard, playing either shepherd or sheep).
the teenage mother, married to a sweet, gentle, older, also asexual man. Mary, always depicted with sad, circumspect eyes, her hair partially covered with a blue veil, lips barely parted, never open-mouthed with laughter. A quiet woman, a woman who knew her place. Mary, dogmatically situated in the chasm between "I'm a man"; between Catholicism and Protestantism, between religious fundamentalism and secular humanism, between patriarchy and feminism. Mary, patron saint of the 50s and 60s Catholic anti-communism. Mary, social and political conservative, darling of the Catholic religious right.

Is it any wonder that Mary has emerged as a conservative cause and icon in our time, a response to Catholic feminism? Over the last 30 years, Catholic attitudes toward birth control, abortion, women's ordination, divorce and remarriage, homosexuality, and church authority have shifted dramatically, and Catholic women have provided the insights that generated these shifts. Significant majorities of Catholics disagree openly with traditional church positions on these issues, and consider church policies discriminatory toward women. For conservatives, a resurgence in Marian devotion and dogma is the antidote.

**Sometimes Crude, Sometimes Subtle**

Some applications of the antidote are crude and obvious. Anti-abortion Catholics like Joe Scheidler have paraded the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe through the streets as part of the effort to close down abortion clinics. Never mind that Mexican women who revere this apparition of Mary are quite likely to use birth control forbidden by the church—and to have unsafe illegal abortions when it fails.

Some manifestations are more subtle. A case in point is an effort by conservative Catholics who have been petitioning the Pope to add one more infallible declaration to the current set of dogmas "honoring" Mary. They would like Mary declared, with Jesus, the co-redeemer of humanity. And they claim that the way Mary is honored by the church reflects a long history of church commitment to women's equality. The Vatican, for example, now asserts it was an early champion of women's education, co-opting the work of nuns who often started women's schools against the advice and even the orders of local bishops. The Vatican also doesn't mention that women's education in Catholic schools was accomplished by financially exploiting the sisters, who received less than the minimum wage and no meaningful retirement programs. A number of these sisters are now aged and on welfare (assuming that the programs aiding them survived the Clinton welfare reform).

The move to see Mary infallibly declared co-redeemer is almost exclusively conservative. Among the few cardinals who have signed on to the campaign are John O'Connor of New York, the man who declared on Earth Day a few years ago that "women's wombs" are the most dangerous environment in the world, and Jaime Sin of the Philippines, who forced that country's family planning clinics to offer exclusively the only method of family planning approved by the Vatican: "natural family planning." The "co-redeemer" campaign is run by a priest affiliated with conservative Franciscan University in Steubenville, Ohio. Franciscan University has had frequent speakers from the Promise Keepers, who have their own unique take on women's role. It is also the site of a permanent monument to the "unborn" and recipient of substantial contributions from conservative Thomas Monaghan, owner of Domino's Pizza. Another noted supporter of the petition is Catholic TV evangelist Mother Angelica, who proclaimed on-air that feminists hate the church, are destroying it, and should leave it.

In spite of the support of these well-known and Vatican-favored right-wingers, the effort has encountered a cold shoulder in Rome. A papal commission on the issue has advised against declaring the dogma, and highly placed Vatican conservatives like Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger have strongly indicated that more dogmas on Mary are not to be. The Pope himself has given no indication that he intends to act favorably on this petition. But ultra-conservative Catholics continue their campaign, regularly mailing large numbers of signed petitions to the Vatican (over four million to date); writing long, tedious pseudo-scholarly articles in the right-wing Catholic press; and conducting predictably low quality exchanges on the Internet.

All this would probably have remained internal politics without the August 25, 1997 publication of a long article in Newsweek by the magazine's religion writer, Kenneth Woodward. Woodward is well known in Catholic feminist circles as, to put it politely, a conservative regarding feminist thought and efforts in religion.

But what about this idea of recognizing Mary as "co-redeemer"? From a Catholic feminist perspective, adding to the current Marian dogmas is not likely to help women achieve equality in the church and could actually hurt such efforts. Some Catholic feminists have tried to recast Mary in a more empowered mode, but it's an uphill struggle. The trajectory of Marian dogmas from 431 to 1950 has been to get Mary out of her body and to separate her from women's lives and experience. In a church obsessed with sexuality and historically hostile to both women and sexual expression—seeing the latter as largely evil and the former as responsible for almost all sexual transgression with the exception of male homosexuality—Mary's body, sexuality and childbirth have been matters not to be embraced, but explained away.

The first dogma declaration in the year 431, which declared that Mary was the mother of God, opened a Pandora's box. Her pregnancy and childbirth needed to be separated from all that normally precedes these events—especially sexuality. Subsequent
My 1st gift to:
Name: 
Address: 
City: State: Zip: 

My 2nd gift to:
Name: 
Address: 
City: State: Zip: 

My name is:
Name: 
Address: 
City: State: Zip: 

Include my subscription: 
Total Order at $14.95 each $: 
□ New □ Renew □ Payment enclosed □ Bill me 

Gift will be mailed in your name. New subscriptions begin with the current issue. Canadian subscriptions add $4; other foreign add $7 (surface mail) or $20 per year (air mail) payable in US funds. ON THE ISSUES is published quarterly.
Then in 1950, still not content with having protected Mary's purity on earth, the church proclaimed the most recent Marian dogma, the Assumption. This one held that after her death, Mary was taken bodily into heaven, thus preserving her from human decay. So much for an "earthy" Mary.

New dogmas promoted by Catholic conservatives will do little to change the fear and loathing of women and sex that are a part and parcel of the history of Catholicism. Events in early Christianity that point to a priesthood of courageous women, including Mary, will remain invisible. Although a woman's body gave Jesus his humanity, women cannot turn bread and wine into His Body and Blood; although Jesus was anointed to his priesthood by a woman, women cannot anoint others to the priesthood or be priests themselves. Although it was women who remained at the cross throughout Jesus' crucifixion, and women to whom Jesus first appeared after his resurrection, these events, for conservatives, symbolize nothing. For them, Mary is a symbol of submission, not mission.

Save us from new Marian dogmas—and the old ones as well.

Frances Kissling is president of Catholics for a Free Choice and a frequent commentator on religion and politics.

Mary: A Muslim Feminist?
by Laila al-Marayati

And Lo, the angels said, "O Mary, Behold, God has elected thee and made thee pure and raised thee above all the women of the world." (Koran 3:42) Thus the Koran refers to Mary, the only woman mentioned by name in its pages. Muslims believe their holy book is the word of God, which was revealed by the Angel Gabriel to the Prophet Mohammad nearly 1,400 years ago in what is now Saudi Arabia. The Islamic sacred scripture is considered a guide for all people at all times to achieve success in this life and the hereafter by following a moral code in submission to God. It uses examples and lessons that the believer applies to her daily life as she struggles to "enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong," and to achieve closeness to God.

For Muslims, Islam is the continuation of the Abrahamic faiths of Judaism and Christianity, with a few, but critical, differences. One major divergence from the latter is that Islam does not recognize the Trinity, nor that Jesus was God incarnate; rather, he is viewed as a prophet and a messenger, sent to bring the Children of Israel to the straight path.

Christ Jesus, son of Mary, was but the God's Apostle....Believe then in God and his apostles but do not say: "God is a trinity." (4:17) The Koran does not go into great detail, but focuses on the key concepts to be found in the stories of earlier prophets, including Abraham, Isaac, Ishmael, Lot, Job, Moses, and Jesus.

The story of Mary and Jesus is repeated throughout the Koran, mainly to emphasize the unity of God. Islam is a strictly monotheistic religion, in which tawhid, or the oneness of God, is the most basic principle of faith.

Despite the differences among Islam, Judaism, and Christianity, the Koran serves to connect Muslims to the thread of faith and worship that links the earlier communities of believers. And Mary as a woman from the family of Imran, of Moses and his descendants, is part of that thread. For Muslims, the prophets and others mentioned in the Koran serve, not as intercessors, but as warners, guides and examples for those seeking to worship God, striving for good in this life and the hereafter. Mary is no exception.

Throughout the sacred scripture it is clear that Mary occupies a position of great esteem. This is reflected partly by the fact that an entire chapter of the Koran, the nineteenth, is named after her. Her stature is often attributed to her being the mother of Jesus, but other Koranic texts reveal that her importance transcends her biological role as the vehicle by which Jesus entered the world. Via the story of Mary, God provides guidance and wisdom regarding gender...
and she finds comfort in His companionship during her gladdened,
in a subtle yet profound manner. When Mary's mother, for example,
becomes aware that she pregnant, she dedicates her offspring to the service of God. She is apparently surprised when that child is a girl.

Neither the Same Nor Superior
Yet God responds the male is not like the female. (3:36) Patriarchal exegesis interprets this as a consolation to the mother, who had hoped to bear a son so that he could become a priest; only men were allowed to serve in the temple. Instead, she was given a daughter who, by virtue of her gender, was superior because she would bear a future prophet.

The Koran, in fact, makes no judgment on the superiority of males over females or vice versa. It only declares that they are not the same, and affirms that maleness is not a prerequisite for spiritual or other forms of superiority. This challenges practices and trends that perpetuate son-preference in modern Muslim communities; in fact, son-preference is contrary to the spirit of the Koran.

This is demonstrated when Mary, a daughter, is revered and honored by her family, as shown by her uncle Zachariah, into whose care she is entrusted. He remarks on the God-given sustenance (food) that appears miraculously as she worships in the temple, and inspired to ask God for his own child to be similarly dedicated and devoted. (This he is granted in the form of John the Baptist.)

Additionally, Mary's role as one who is pure, faithful and full of God-consciousness elevates her and sets her apart. She is a recipient of wahy, or inspiration, a term also used to refer to the revelations bestowed on male prophets.

After the conception of Jesus, Mary retires alone to a far-off place in the desert (as opposed to a stable, complete with manger, as mentioned in the Bible.) When the pains of childbirth overwhelm her, she cries out, “Would that I had died before this and been a thing forgotten, utterly forgotten!” Some interpreters assumed her despair emanated from profound shame associated with bearing a child out of wedlock. The more likely explanation is that God, through Mary, is giving voice to the physical and emotional response to labor, understood by so many women who have similarly suffered. She is told to take drink from the stream at her feet and nourishment from the date-palm above her; thus, God sustains Mary so that her eye be gladdened, and she finds comfort in His companionship during her moments of desperation.

With forbearance and commitment, Mary fulfills her role, first as a righteous servant and then as the mother of Jesus. She does this alone, without benefit of male companionship or protector, for there is no reference to Joseph, her Biblical husband, in the Koran. She is not portrayed as weak or passive. She is strong, active, and submits only to God. After the birth of her child, God tells her to abstain from speech and rely on her infant child to defend her honor when she is interrogated by relatives about her out-of-wedlock pregnancy, and accused of shaming her family's name.

From the cradle, the infant Jesus speaks of himself: "Behold, I am a servant of God. He has vouchsafed unto me revelation and made me a Prophet and He has enjoined on me prayer and charity as long as I live; and endowed me with piety toward my mother and He has not made me haughty or bereft of grace. Hence, peace on me the day I was born, the day I die and the day when I shall be raised to life again."

From this point on, the Koran focuses on the nature of Jesus and the conflicts therein. But Mary is not forgotten, and is referred to again as an example for all believers to follow. Traditional male interpretation of the Koran has considered the female figures in the holy text to be exemplary only for women. But Muslim women have always accepted without question that the male Islamic prophets are guides for women, too. And as previously mentioned, gender specificity does not appear to be consistent with God's message that faith and righteousness are not related to sex. By realizing this, men, too, may reap much benefit by appreciating Mary not only as the mother of a male prophet, but also as an exalted believer whose devotion deserves emulation. Clearly, the following text exhorts all believers, not only women, to pay heed to Mary's example:

“For those who believe...in the story of Mary, the daughter of Imran, who guarded her chastity, wherewith We breathed into her of Our spirit and who accepted the truth of Her Sustainer's words and of His revelation and was one of the truly devout.” (66:11-12)

While Muslims and Christians may not agree about the Trinity, according to the Holy Koran, Mary unequivocally occupies, an exceptional and elevated position.

Modern Muslims have much to gain by revisiting the story of Mary. As conflicts confront much of the Islamic world today, Muslim women in particular are often caught in the crossfire, struggling to survive, bearing the burden of honor and hence shame for their families, sometimes forced to defend themselves alone. The words of the infant Jesus, speaking in defense of Mary, could enable today's Muslim women to withstand the pressures exerted by family and society in a constantly changing world.

The Koranic verses on Mary help us to understand her stature in the eyes of God, and they enable us to reinforce our faith in Islam as a truly liberating and empowering force for women. Equipped with this knowledge, and inspired by Mary, Muslim women can reclaim their status and God-given rights, which are currently being denied them in some Muslim societies.

Laile al-Marayati, M.D. is past president of the Muslim Women's League, based in Los Angeles, which disseminates accurate information about Islam and Muslims, particularly regarding women.
The Priesthood of Women
by Carter Heyward

Shortly after my ordination as an Episcopal priest in 1974, I received a note from a woman congregant who had attended a service at which I officiated: "For the first time," she wrote, "I feel as if I can have my daughter baptized in the church. Thanks for opening up my experience of God and also of myself, my girlchild, and other women." This sister’s fresh appreciation of herself and God is fairly common among women who experience the priesthood of women. Simply to see a female priest is, for many women, to tap into an awareness of their own spiritual power.

And yet, while the ordination of women may expand the image of God for many churchwomen (and some men as well), this stretch has been largely symbolic and personal. The actual social foundations of the church—the shape of liturgy, leadership, and doctrine; matters of pastoral, political, and economic control of the church—are not much changed by the advent of women priests. This is partly because those women whom the church ordains are, on the whole, sisters without a sustainable, radical critique of the patriarchal moorings of Christianity. And, given the image of the Virgin created by the Christian church, women priests are easily lured into themselves assuming those “feminine” qualities deemed virtuous precisely because they do not threaten the patriarchal order of God. In addition, many women priests (as well as our male counterparts) can be seduced into imagining that even if we ourselves are troubled by patriarchal religion, our primary priestly vocation is not to change the church but to pacify churchpeople, including those who may be troubled by sexism, heterosexism, racism, classism, ableism, and other systems that violate the body and dampen the spirit.

Some suggest that change will come about only by transfiguring Christian doctrine itself. Along those lines, there has been much discussion lately about fashioning the Trinity into a Quartet, opening the all-male God-head to women. Would the patriarchal logic that undergirds the faith of our fathers be subverted by the inclusion of the mother of the fathers, Blessed Mary, mother of God? Or would her inclusion in the divine hierarchy—like the inclusion of women priests—cloak the violence being done to women in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, thereby dulling the edges of feminist resistance to patriarchal religion?

Whether the inclusion of Mary—or any other “female” principal—in the sacred panoply would benefit real flesh-and-blood women, without radical transformation of patriarchal religion itself, is to me the most important question. And in my view, inserting the mother of Jesus into the official image of the Christian God would not much change the historical, social, psychological, or political conundrum in which women find ourselves in a male-defined and dominated world and church. After all, the reverencing of Mary has not meant the elimination of sexism in those parts of Catholic Christianity in which she is already held in such esteem that her status, for all practical purposes, is divine. Indeed, the deification of the Virgin Mary in a sexist church would simply confirm her status as a model of female subordination and obedience to the Father. Some of my Latina sisters may protest: "The Virgin of Guadalupe is no submissive woman, and she is God for many poor Mexican women. Her presence is much stronger and her stature much greater than those of her son!" Similarly, Kwan Yin, the Bodhisattva of Compassion, is Mary for some Buddhist Christians, and she is hardly a figure of subordination to Jesus or his father. If anything, Kwan Yin towers spiritually above Jesus, bestowing power and grace upon the Christian Savior.

Propping up Patriarchy

How then could the deification of a Mary who crosses cultures as a bearer of compassion and hope not make a powerful, positive difference to Christian women and girls? How is it that the inclusion of this woman in the Christian God-head would not empower many, mostly poor, Catholic women who already look to her for support? Sacred female characters such as Guadalupe and Kwan Yin are resources of staying power for women in a variety of contexts, including the struggle for justice. Like Jesus, they can function either to ease social discontent or to radicalize it. So Mary’s value as an agent for revolutionary social change should not be minimized. Yet as valuable as these goddesses can be, they seldom function as serious advocates for women in the church or elsewhere in the world. Just as the most popular image of Mary in the West is of a woman obedient and submissive to the Father and his Son, so too the different figures who function as Mary in non-dominant Christian cultures—however helpful they may be to women in their daily lives—serve to hold patriarchal power in place. And they do this in a religion that itself has served traditionally as handmaid to the One who is rightful head of the family of both God and "man."

Merely to include Mary as another image of the Christian God would not change this situation, nor would it create a new understanding of sacred power. Indeed, to make the Trinity a Quartet would theologically strengthen the hand of God the Father by giving him a "wife," a female consort, to serve as a foil against feminism. Indeed, the same phenomenon can be seen in "good Christian families."

—continued on page 61
When death is a calculation

Why Women Reporters Go to War

by Marilyn Stasio

Dickey Chapelle died with a flower in her hat and pearls in her ears. The 47-year-old war correspondent, who was on the front lines at Iwo Jima and Okinawa, and who won the George Polk Award from the Overseas Press Club for her Vietnam war coverage, was killed by a land mine on November 4, 1965, while on patrol with a unit of the U.S. Marine Corps in the jungles of Chu Lai. One of her grim combat photos survives in the pages of Requiem (Random House, 1997)—a fierce and poignant tribute, compiled by Horst Faas and Tim Page, to the 135 photographers who died covering the wars in Vietnam and Indochina—juxtaposed with a colleague’s stark image of Chapelle’s bloodied body and a report of her final words: “I guess it was bound to happen.” Chappelle, a pioneer among female war correspondents, photographed and wrote about war for Life, National Geographic, Reader’s Digest and The National Observer.

In the 30 plus years that have passed since the death of Dickey Chapelle, more and more women have stepped forward to take her place on the front lines of journalism. In a world technically at peace but blistered by brushfire wars on every continent, they have scattered themselves across the globe: Algeria, Rwanda, Chechnya, Turkey, Albania, Bosnia, Iraq, Afghanistan, El Salvador, Cambodia, Mexico, the Middle East, and in some cases, in their own burning backyards. Most of these journalists work in the near-anonymity of the profession—except for those caught in the crossfire of the wars they cover. Even then, the individual stories of these reporters, photographers, and TV and radio commentators are often lost to memory, absorbed in the greater civilian casualty pool or obliterated by totalitarian political regimes. The sheer numbers are staggering:

- The Committee to Protect Journalists in New York reports that 86 journalists were killed in the line of duty in 1995-96 alone.
- Forty-four journalists perished in the civil wars that dissolved the former Yugoslavia.
- Reuters wire service has lost four of its combat photographers in the past eight years.
- The Publishers’ Association of Turkey estimates that some 100 Turkish journalists are currently in prison.
- More than two dozen Russian journalists, along with four foreign correspondents, lost their lives in the failed Russian coup d’état of October 1993. And at least 10 journalists, including recent female casualties Nina Yefimova and Nadezhda Chaikova, died after Russian troops invaded Grozny in 1994.
- Death threats were made to 92 writers and journalists in 1996, according to PEN, the international association of writers and journalists.
- PEN also reports on 20 kidnapings and 51 instances of writers and journalists who disappeared in 1996.
- And, as we are reminded by Requiem, 135 combat photographers lost their lives covering the wars in Vietnam and Indochina.

“She was always where the action was.” That was Dickey Chapelle’s memorial tribute from the Women’s National Press Club, which described her as “the kind of reporter all women in journalism openly or secretly aspire to be.” Is this what drives women journalists to the front lines, where they can easily become one of the statistics PEN collects—the desire to be where the action is?

Women in the field can be prickly on the subject. Without denying the dangerous nature of their work, they hate being characterized as thrill-seeking adventurers as much as they resent the implicit gender stereotyping in being singled out for bravery. They will offer eloquent testimony to the horrors they’ve seen, but will often resist analysis of their own motives and reactions. “Thinking about it is depressing, and I don’t want to dwell on it,” says Judith Miller, a senior writer who covered the Middle East for The New York Times. “You don’t talk about it, you don’t whine about it, you just do it and you get over it.”

Most conflict correspondents find safe ground, not in the recounting of their war stories, but in the discussion of their sense of mission. “I am absolutely sure that people do this because of professional commitment,” says Seda Pompianskaia, a former Moscow newspaper reporter and documentary filmmaker who covered the war in Chechnya and was in the thick of the action during the 1993 coup attempt. “You have to fulfill your obligation and nothing else matters,” she says of the two tumultuous days in Moscow when, dodging the sniper bullets that felled dozens of her colleagues, she ran with the mob that rampaged through the streets to storm the Parliament. “It’s like seeing a child fall from a bridge,” she says. “You don’t think about the personal danger—you just jump into the water.” Other journalists make the same point in ways spe-
specific to their own work in the field.

"I felt it was really important to be there, because I was bearing witness," photojournalist Michele McDonald says of her experiences in a Muslim village outside Banja Luka where she and a colleague from The Boston Globe slipped past a military roadblock to become the first witnesses to an ethnic massacre by Bosnian Serbs. "What I saw resonated with everything I'd heard about the massacre of the Jews in World War II," McDonald recalls. "If I did not document the evidence of the torture and the killing, it would be just another forgotten night of ethnic cleansing. It's really important not to let these things fade away, not to let people pretend they never happened."

Journalists, who see their function as witnesses, strive to be fair and dispassionate recorders of history. But when stating their own higher mission, they invariably project themselves into a more participatory role. "This may sound trite, but as a journalist and a human rights activist, I do feel that I am giving voice to the voiceless," says Jan Goodwin. On The Issues' new editor, Goodwin is a veteran combat reporter and author of two books, one on human rights' atrocities by the Soviets in Afghanistan, and one on the repression of women under fundamentalist Islam. The first female journalist to report from wartorn Afghanistan, Goodwin says, "The Soviets closed the borders and then announced they would kill any foreign journalist caught 'illegally' in the country. Consequently, the conflict in which two million Afghans died wasn't being covered, which was Moscow's intention, of course. I kept going back because I felt the story needed telling."

The stronger that sense of participation, the higher the personal risk involved—as Reuters photographer Corinne Duika discovered in East Africa when she was kidnapped by five soldiers who taunted her by pulling the pins in and out of the live hand grenades they waved in her face. In Duika's view, traditional journalistic objectivity has been nullified by "a different kind of war, driven not by struggle against injustice and political oppression but instead by nationalism, tribalism, and fundamentalism." Moral aloofness is not an option, she feels, for the war correspondent who has seen the corpses stacked in Rwandan churches, or watched 68 civilians get blown to bits by a mortar shell in a village marketplace.

Why, then, she asks herself, do journalists go on doing what they do? "Is it the desire to observe history? Or curiosity about what drives humanity to extremes? Or, is it because in the midst of violence and evil, one sees clearly what is right, decent, and just?"

More and more, the committed journalists who cover this savage kind of war find themselves being drawn into it on an intensely personal level. Susan Meiselas, a photographer who has covered wars in Nicaragua (where she was almost killed by a grenade), El Salvador (where she was knocked out by a land mine), and Iraq (where she crossed the border with Kurdish rebels), took a professional combat leave to compose a pictorial history of the Kurdish
people. Compiled from historical documents and the images of others, *Kurdistan: In the Shadow of History* (Random House, 1997) is more than Meiselas' personal tribute to a country—it is also an expression of what she calls “a desire to be connected” to its people.

Goodwin gave up a six-figure salary to spend four years in Pakistan starting and running Save the Children's cross-border humanitarian program for Afghans. "I went from editing and writing articles to negotiating with 50 guerrillas to ride Kalashnikov-style 'shotgun' on top of our relief trucks to protect them," she says.

That yearning for personal connection to a story becomes almost irresistible when the journalist's own homeland is in a state of civil war. Ayse Nur Zarakolu, who runs the Belge International Publishing House from a basement in Istanbul, has been to prison four times for publishing books that condemn the Turkish government's violent suppression of Kurdish and Armenian minorities. Lucy Sichone, a columnist for Zambia's leading newspaper the *Post*, became a fugitive with her three-month-old daughter to avoid imprisonment for writing articles critical of the government. Christine Anyanwu, editor-in-chief of the independent Nigerian news weekly *The Sunday Magazine*, was tried by a secret tribunal and is now serving a life sentence for exposing the fraudulent basis of the military regime's annulment of presidential elections.

Like Yelena Masyuk, a special correspondent for Russian independent television and one of six journalists awarded this year's Press Freedom Awards from the Committee to Protect Journalists, the people who take those kinds of risks have more at stake than a news story. Masyuk, who has reported for NTV from such hotspots as Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Pakistan and Iran, gave something extra on her two tours in Chechnya. Despite threats against her life, in May of 1997 she returned to the secessionist region in order "to show the Chechen side of the story, to give them a chance to tell their point of view, to show how terrible the war was for civilians and even Russian soldiers."

The selflessness of Masyuk's motive was lost on the Chechen rebels, who kidnapped her and her cameraman and sound engineer, then held them under inhumane conditions mostly in mountain caves for 100 days. She and her crew were released on the day of a meeting in Moscow between Russian President Boris Yeltsin and President Asian Maskhadov of Chechnya. A month later, she was back on assignment in Kamchatka.

There is no question that Masyuk is a risk-taker. "I want the exclusive story," she said, "the story that no one else would be able to get." With death threats hanging over her head, she took a terrific risk going back to Chechnya. Luckily for her, she got away with it. Some journalists don't.

The murder of a journalist touches other reporters with a deep sense of grief. But such tragedies also make them uncomfortable, because they bring into sharp relief subjects they hate to talk about—the journalist's sense of invincibility and the apparent recklessness it sometimes leads to.

Veronica Guerin, an investigative crime reporter for a major Irish newspaper, the *Sunday Independent*, was gunned down on the streets of Dublin in the summer of 1996 by a gunman allegedly dispatched by one of the crime bosses she was investigating. Brave, dedicated, passionate about the justice of her work, Guerin left behind a husband, a five-year-old son, and the stories she would never write. Her death was an outrage. But Guerin was not assassinated out of the blue. A year earlier, she had been shot in the leg by a gunman who came to her front door. On other occasions she had been beaten, shot at, and subjected to vile telephone threats. Alarmed, her editors offered her any other news beat of her choice. Characteristically, she refused. "Somewhere I cannot see myself reporting from the catwalks or preparing a gardening column," she wrote.

But she also refused the police protection that her newspaper had arranged for her (It got in her way, she said.) She also made no attempt to alter her work patterns or to make herself less of a target—and that has stirred conflicting feelings in other journalists.

"Was Veronica Guerin reckless? Was she noble?"

Heidi Evans grappled with these questions in a thoughtful piece for *The Nation*. "I can only guess she was driven to do what she did for many of the same reasons we all do what we do—a passion for justice and the truth, [and] the thrill of living a reporter's life," she says. "But some of us have more of a taste for the edge than others, for the adrenaline rush that a big story brings, no matter the price."

Every front-liner has a secret story about a time she went too far—and was damned lucky to get away alive.

Judith Miller mentally flinches remembering the close call she had with a sniper in Lebanon. ("Gross stupidity on my part.") Yelena Masyuk had grave doubts about returning to Chechnya only two
the futility, anyway?

weeks after getting a death threat; but she went anyway, and was kidnapped. Goodwin was convinced she wasn’t coming home when she and her Afghan rebel guides were pinned down for hours by Soviet helicopter gunships. And she also remembers the neophyte American journalist who “bragged too loudly” about his contacts with guerrillas and was shot through the head execution-style in his hotel room, close to where she was staying, shortly after he arrived in El Salvador.

“As journalists, we think we have a patina of protection,” says Goodwin, “and much of the time we do. But there are certain things you do and don’t do. There was a reminder of that on the wall of the international press room in El Salvador; a large sign that read: “No story is worth your life.” You take calculated risks, not foolish ones. And luck also plays a part. I’ve lost a number of journalist and photographer friends to land mines.”

Behavioral specialists like Marvin Zuckerman, Ph.D., a clinical psychologist at the University of Delaware, view the impulse to take risks as an aspect of high-sensation seeking, “a trait describing the tendency to seek novel, varied, complex, and intense sensations and experiences; the willingness to take risks for the sake of the experience.” Although earlier generations of psychologists viewed the pursuit of skydiving and other high-adrenaline activities as death-wish behavior, Zuckerman attributes such thrill-seeking behavior to low levels of an enzyme known as monamine oxidase (MAO). Other behavior researchers link high-risk pursuits to a variation of the D4 dopamine receptor (D4DR) gene, dopamine being a neurotransmitter strongly linked to pleasure-seeking behavior.

Frank Farley, a Temple University psychologist and past president of the American Psychological Association classified such individuals as “Type Ts,” thrill-seekers who are not necessarily weird, just wired differently. Type Ts fall into four categories, he says, those who take mental risks and those who take physical ones, and those who take smart, positive risks and those who take dumb, negative ones.

Pioneers and social activists, such as America’s founding fathers and Martin Luther King, Jr., were probably T-mentals and T-positives, he believes. His theory holds true with other professions, too. One of the world’s most talented and risk-taking neurosurgeons is Keith Black, of California’s Cedars-Sinai Medical Center, who operates successfully on brain tumors other surgeons are too afraid to touch. Out of the OR, the physician, who has been dubbed “Indiana Black” by his colleagues, relaxes by skydiving, climbing Himalayan peaks, and white-water rafting in Africa.

Daredevils, then, will be daredevils. But when a war-zone correspondent is also wife, mother, or primary caretaker, the responsibility to one’s professional ideals collides head-on with one’s familial duties.

Some journalists admit to having conflicted feelings on the issue. “Is she the most noble person in the world for her journalistic coverage?” Heidi Evans asked herself about Lucy Sichone’s flight through the Zambian underground with her infant daughter. “Or should someone phone the child-abuse hotline?” Others reluctantly admit that marriage or motherhood has made them curtail their adventurism—or at least, consider doing so. “I would love to hang out in Kosovo,” says Michele McDonald, who is eager to record the clandestine network of social services operated by the Albanian underground in that former Yugoslavian city. “But since I adopted my two and-a-half-year-old daughter, I am much more careful about throwing myself into a situation where I might get killed. And to do that sort of work, you really have to take that risk.”

The only other thing that seems to quench their indomitable spirit is the occasional bout of depression, which terrifies them because it so closely resembles burnout. “I have to push myself,” Judith Miller says of her assignments to the Middle East since the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin and the virtual collapse of the Arab-Israeli peace talks. “You don’t come back energized and full of insight, but very down, very depressed about where the whole region is going. It’s much more debilitating than covering a war. Send me to cover a war, but not a stalemate.”

---continued on page 60
Algeria
Unexamined
Tens of Thousands Dead
and It's Barely News
by Laura Flanders

There's a crime against humanity being committed in Algeria, but you wouldn't get that impression from reading American newspapers or switching on television or radio news.

An October issue of Time magazine featured a spread on Algeria stuck between an ad for Virginia Slims and an article on Martha Stewart; titled “Drumbeat of Death,” the two-page montage consisted almost entirely of gruesome photographs. One shot showed a blood-splattered village morgue, complete with mutilated corpses; another, a young boy with a slashed throat being hoisted out of a well. The brief text read: “After shooting the men, the assassins slit the throats of women and children, decapitate the victims and mount their heads on stakes outside.” There was also an equally scanty time-line chronology of Algeria’s agony, which mentioned that “thousands die.” And that was it. No story, no byline, no reporter sent to the scene.

Time’s spread detailed in technicolor a massacre in which several hundred people—adults and children, all civilians—died. And in the newsweekly’s favor, at least they did note the event. The rest of the nation’s media have maintained a virtual silence on the almost daily slaughter of Algerians since 1992. The abduction and rape of hundreds, perhaps thousands, of Algerian women and girls in the conflict has gone completely unregistered.

Remember how late, and how reluctant, news media were to grasp the significance of what was happening in Bosnia—in particular to the women there? Compared with the way the media have covered Algeria, the Bosnian story broke early and fast. Yet according to a recent Amnesty International report, at least 80,000 Algerians, and may be considerably more, have died in this conflict. The respected British newspaper The Independent sets the death toll at 150,000. Whichever figure is more accurate, the dead still number considerably more than the 50,000 Americans who perished in the Vietnam War.

In 1995, Zazi Sadou, an Algerian feminist, shared her research on rape and kidnapping with the UN World Conference on Women: “[The girls] were forced to cook, wash, and be successively raped, beaten, burned and mutilated. Some of them were later found decapitated.” And Sadou read a litany of the victims’ names: “Zoulikha, 20-years-old, Saïda, 16, Ourda, 17, Amel, 20....”

Human rights observers like Sadou have given foreign journalists this same research, but none has followed up on it. No Algerian rape survivor has appeared on prime time American television to tell her story—though Sadou knows at least one who would. No newspaper or news weekly has shared her testimony with their readers, though the killing began half a decade ago and the assaults on women started long before that.

In January 1992, Algeria’s military-backed government annulled the country’s first free national elections since independence because the Islamic Salvation Front party (known by its French acronym: FIS) looked set to win. Claiming that the government’s action left them no option but violence, the FIS and various spin-off militias made war on the state aiming to terrorize the regime into conceding power, or losing control. But though the Islamists’ objective is political, their primary victims have been unarmed civilians, particularly women. For its part, the regime has responded by stepping up arrests, incarceration, intimidation, and censorship. Despite the routine killings involving beheadings, throat-slashings, dismemberment and rape, however, Algerian authorities merely condemn the terrorism. The state security forces have repeatedly failed to intervene to stop attacks.

You might think that such violence—occurring in a country of some 28 million people, just a short plane hop from Madrid or Rome—would be a hot story for ambitious reporters, or at least a priority for responsible news media. You would be wrong.

In the fall of 1997, Islamic militants mounted two major massacres (claiming over 500 lives apiece) four weeks apart. In the following days, armed Islamists killed 17 students in their school
As the slaughter accelerated, an exception to this lack of coverage or comment was a November column, in which New York Times writer Bob Herbert sounded an alarm. "The situation in Algeria needs to be seen for what it really is. The atrocities are, indeed, crimes against humanity—in other words, crimes against the whole world. It would behoove the rest of the world to pay closer attention." But America, at least, is not. Herbert's was the first piece about Algeria to appear on the Times opinion page since 1995. Asked why his own paper, and the influential media in general, have so far failed to "pay attention," Herbert admits he is baffled. "I've been asking myself the same question. It deserves serious newspaper and TV attention. I don't know why it's not getting it."

Neither The New York Times, The Washington Post, Time, Newsweek, nor any of the broadcast networks has a bureau operating in Algeria or a regular correspondent posted on the ground. Peter Harris, a staffer on The Washington Post foreign desk, blamed the violence: "It's one of the most dangerous places in the world for a journalist," said Harris. Does that mean the Post only covers safe wars? Bosnia, Chechnya, Rwanda—any country in conflict—were not exactly picnic spots, but American journalists went.

It's true that Algerian journalists have been prime targets of political terror year after year. In 1995, Algerians accounted for nearly half (24) the world total of murdered media professionals, according to the New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists. Algerian reporters are forced to live in safe houses, and they must work under conditions of severe repression and government censorship. But they are Algerians, and national reporters frequently have it bad in a political crisis. The life-threatening situation of the locals, however, does not explain the quiet on the foreign media front. As the Committee to Protect Journalists confirms, there has been no widespread killing of foreign journalists.

"I just don't believe that news directors think this story is too dangerous to cover," said Herbert. "I've never heard of a story too dangerous to report. There was, after all, the Second World War...." Though foreign news budgets have been slashed at most news outlets, Herbert didn't believe finances were to blame, either. "I just don't think it's considered a big enough story," he admitted reluctantly. If that's true with at least 80,000 dead, how many more adults need to be decapitated, and kids have their throats cut, and how many women must be reduced to sex slaves, before the American media take note? In the absence of news reporters doing the work he thinks demands doing, Herbert was planning to pursue the Algerian story himself. "Someone's got to do it," he sighed.

At Time magazine, a senior editor confirmed Herbert's view. At the height of Haiti's violent turmoil, they had had to assign a reporter to go. "She was thrilled to get the story... Dying to go," he recalled. "Usually reporters are."

The Washington Post's Harris laid the blame for the lack of coverage at the Algerian government's door. "They don't want a harsh light shined on what they do," he said. And it is indeed true that journalists find it difficult to obtain entry visas, and that inside Algeria, official restrictions are stiff. But if obstacles having to do with official permission were enough to dissuade determined reporters, we'd have had no news from Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, or Bosnia, to cite just a few locations.

Sarah Chayes visited Algeria for National Public Radio with a pack of foreign correspondents in October 1997. "All the foreign journalists who have come to Algeria are kept in the same hotel. It's basically an armed camp," she reported, on "All Things Considered" on October 24. "You can sign up to go to various places. You go with either 10 or 20 other journalists in a little tour bus."

Clearly, the Algerian authorities do their best to manipulate the media; on this occasion they could only gain politically by offering foreign journalists a glimpse of their opponents' brutality in the weeks before new municipal elections—the first since 1991. But from Iran to Grenada, from Panama to Peru to Pakistan, governments are always trying to obstruct—and instruct—journalists, to tell them where to go and what to say. Some, like Chayes, get on the government's bus, but report the facts. Others, like Youssef Ibrahim of The New York Times, seem mostly content to let government press releases frame the story they tell. But there are others who "miss" the bus, shake off their official government
"minders," and do their own reporting.

As in the Persian Gulf War—when the U.S. imposed severe restrictions on reporters—there are journalists who go along with the pool system and still find a way to file investigative stories, and reporters who break out and report on what the government would prefer they never saw. Robert Fisk, correspondent for The Independent, traveled to Algeria several times in 1997. After every trip his articles presented damning criticisms of the corrupt Algerian regime.

An ABC World News team visited Algeria at the same time as Chayes. Anchor Carole Simpson introduced their short report by saying, "Overseas in Algeria, a civil war is raging, but in this war there are few reporters to tell the story. Many have been killed and most of the rest have fled."

But that's simply not true, says Danny Schechter, a producer who has worked with ABC's "20/20," and "Rights & Wrongs," a human rights report that aired weekly on PBS and covered the world's most terrorized states. Two years ago, "Rights & Wrongs" ran a segment on Algeria for which Schechter used footage from local sources in Algiers, supplemented by interviews with exiles living in New York. It's a misguided news director who relies exclusively on his or her own U.S. team, he says. "Sure, it's dangerous to go there, and difficult to get visas, but footage has been available for years," says Schechter. French reporters regularly come out with pictures, he explains. "U.S. reporters could have acquired those."

If the lack of coverage isn't logistics, perhaps it has to do with profits. "We're constantly told there's no appetite on the part of the American public for international news," says Andrew Cockburn, an award-winning TV journalist. Andrew and Leslie Cockburn's reports on covert U.S. operations around the world have been broadcast on CBS's "60 Minutes," ABC's "20/20," and on PBS's "Frontline"—and played as part of a hearing in Congress. But it's getting harder and harder to get assignments, says Andrew (who is also this writer's uncle).

"The evening news won't cover any story that hasn't been on the front pages for at least a week," says Cockburn. "If a subject's uncovered, it stays that way. It's a stupid, vicious cycle. Eventually the whole world becomes a far-off place we know next to nothing about." An extreme irony at a time when technology has given us the ability to be a global village.

According to media-watcher Andrew Tyndall, author of the weekly "Tyndall Report," there's been a 50 percent fall-off in foreign news reporting on TV over the last ten years. A national survey also shows that 40 percent of local news broadcasts in this country carry no foreign news at all. Human rights reporting makes up less than one percent of all the news that TV executives consider worth airing.

Ted Koppel, anchor and managing editor of ABC's "Nightline," expressed his frustrations about American news priorities at the Committee to Protect Journalists' International Press Freedom Awards ceremony this fall: "Even as we honor journalists abroad for risking personal and political peril... their own stories and the stories they cover are increasingly unlikely to lead any of our broadcasts or to appear on any of our front pages. We celebrate their courage even as we exhibit increasingly little of our own," he declared. Leading journalists all seem to agree, the problem is not that there's no way to cover Algeria; rather, it is that there is no will.

For Algerian Zazi Sadou, that's the only explanation that finally makes sense. "I read The New York Times and The Washington Post and I have a hard time believing that they're talking about the same country that I know," Sadou said on a recent trip to the States. The U.S. version of events is sporadic, driven by the dramatic and deadly—just the kind of coverage that is most vulnerable to manipulation by government authorities and terrorists alike. Poorly prepared, lacking the expertise that comes from focusing on a region, or time spent on the ground, American reporters bone up by reading the work of other American reporters, whose expertise is as thin or as nonexistent as their own. Or they are briefed by State Department officials, who are themselves frequently ill-informed or inaccurate, or whose perspectives may be slanted. Then they simplify the picture—for their readers, and themselves.

"In American coverage, there are only two sides," sighs Sadou. Following the traditional news guide "what bleeds leads," reporters look for the gory tale, the loudest players with the biggest arsenals. And reporting like that isn't just inadequate, it's misleading.

The Algerian situation is complicated, Sadou is willing to grant. There is no simple, good-guy/bad-guy story line. But U.S. reporters, she says, tend to cast the story solely as a confrontation between two distasteful players—armed fundamentalists versus corrupt, Army-dominated government autocrats. In so doing, they miss some cen-
central characters—what Sadou calls the “historic, anonymous resistance” of massive numbers of civilian Algerians who oppose both the intransigence of their current regime and the edicts of the fundamentalists claiming to represent Islam.

In March, 1995, Sadou and her organization, the Algerian Assembly of Democratic Women, held a mock people’s tribunal in Algiers that tried the men they considered most responsible for the tragedy her people have been through. In the dock stood not just the leader of the Islamic Salvation Front and the head of the Armed Islamic Group (GIA—its French acronym, the paramilitary organization blamed by the Algerian government for the majority of civilian deaths), but also the former president of the Algerian republic. “Six hundred people risked their lives to attend,” Sadou remembers, tears pooling in her eyes. “They showed up just to have the chance to name their perpetrators, even if only symbolically.”

Since 1995, hundreds of Algerians have announced their willingness to name their perpetrators in a real-life court of law. Rhonda Copelon, director of the International Human Rights Law Clinic at the City University of New York, has received a flow of letters from Algerian activists petitioning her to file a suit on behalf of several Algerians, mostly women victims of terror, all of whom are ready to name names. The defendants are the FIS and Anwar Haddam, a so-called “representative in exile” of the FIS in the United States. Though the FIS would have the acronym, the paramilitary organization blamed by the Algerian government for the majority of civilian deaths), but also the former president of the Algerian republic. “Six hundred people risked their lives to attend,” Sadou remembers, tears pooling in her eyes. “They showed up just to have the chance to name their perpetrators, even if only symbolically.”

Sadou’s tribunal was only symbolic, but the sexism underpinning the fundamentalists’ war is far from make-believe. A few weeks before coming to New York, Sadou visited Bin Talha, the site of a massacre on September 22. Around midnight that night, 200 armed Islamists invaded the row-house community and started hacking people apart in their homes. Well organized and unhindered, the guerrillas killed people throughout the night, while Algerian soldiers stood by in an army post within sight of the slaughter. (On no occasion has the Algerian military intervened to stop or prevent any of the massacres, or to arrest those responsible.) The terrorists murdered as many as 600 women, men, and children, and not quickly or cleanly. Survivors described watching their husbands and grandfathers being bound, beaten, and disemboweled before their eyes; their wives tied up and slashed across the throat. Dozens of women and girls were seized, then disappeared. The killers dismembered the dead and dying, then burned their bodies, or tossed them off rooftops to pile up in the streets below.

“Enter those homes and you come out black: your hands, your clothes, your face are covered with ashes. Everywhere there’s the smell of death and of blood.”

A few days later, villagers found the corpses of 30 of Bin Talha’s missing women. The bodies had been dumped into a well. All had their throats slit. All had been raped before dying. Among the papers left by the militia, journalists found a fatwa decree, signed by a self-proclaimed emir in the Armed Islamic Group, which used his perverted interpretation of Islam to authorize combatants to rape any woman they desired. His instructions were quite specific: “Each woman is first desired. His instructions were quite specific: “Each woman is first the property of the emir. It is up to him to offer her to his men. Each man may take ten minutes with each woman or girl, but there are some restrictions: No man should rape both a mother and her daughter. The same women should not be raped by a father and his son…” The sickening document goes on.

Despite the horror of September 22, it would be a full three months after the event before The New York Times, for example, devoted any space to what had happened there. As this issue of OTI goes to press, subsequent devastating massacres received equally scant coverage in the U.S. The fatwa did not come from nowhere, says Sadou. If reporters had been present, it would have
been easy to track the fundamentalists’ assault on secular civilian life—and in particular, on women—and watch it escalate. Long before the voiding of the elections five years ago, she says, Islamic militants had attacked and murdered Algerian women and girls for wearing short skirts, or going unveiled, or drinking in public. The first documented reports of fundamentalist violence against women date from 1987. When civilians are killed by ideologically-driven terrorists in other places—in Israel, Paris, or New York—U.S. government leaders call for international action, and mainstream media echo and amplify their outrage. “There are declarations and sanctions against Hamas, for example,” says Sadou, referring to the Palestinian suicide bombers who have targeted civilians in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. “Everyone recognizes and condemns that sort of terrorism—why not this?”

To date, U.S. officials have maintained a very low-key response to the crisis in Algeria. The policy was summed up on October 1 by Ronald E. Neuman in his parting address to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee as he left his post as U.S. Ambassador to Algeria: “We fully support a policy of economic liberalization, and political pluralism, including strengthening parliamentary institutions.” It’s hardly the response one would expect to what Herbert called a “crime against humanity.”

According to Andrew Cockburn, U.S. news media tend to act like palace reporters—when the politicians are quiet, so are they: “Court journalism follows the court.” And when it comes to Algeria, there are powerful courtesans with the ear of the American establishment who would heartily oppose any international action, such as economic sanctions, that might affect business as usual with Algiers.

As the reports of the latest killings hit the newswires last fall (albeit briefly), U.S. companies, including Exxon, ARCO, and Bechtel, were announcing healthy third-quarter profits from their investments in Algeria’s rich oil and gas reserves. The United States is Algeria’s second largest trading partner after France—and the country’s oil industry is almost entirely dependent on U.S. technology and aid.

Business before Lives

The same Algerian government that has failed, or declined, to protect its own people, has ensured that as of now not one American citizen has been assassinated in Algeria since 1992. Oil and gas workers toil in a virtually autonomous militarized zone in the south, from which most Algerians are barred by military guards. “The Americans are safer than any Algerian,” says professor Marnia Lazreg, Ph.D., an Algerian sociologist and feminist currently at New York’s Hunter College, who has written extensively about Algeria.

“The chaotic situation is tragic for the people but fine for foreign business,” says Lazreg. “Businessmen fly into Algeria, are picked up in bulletproof cars, driven to perfectly safe oilfields, then driven out again.”

And a recent report from the California-based RAND organization suggests that even the worst-case scenario in Algeria—a fundamentalist takeover—wouldn’t affect U.S. interests too badly. In 1996 the U.S. Army asked RAND to investigate what would happen if Algeria’s fundamentalists came to power. Titled “Algeria: The Next Fundamentalist State?” the RAND report concluded: “The Islamic Salvation Front will almost surely seek to impose a level of Islamic austerity as a way of life—in dress (especially for women), ban of public sale of alcohol, and censorship of films and TV. It will not oppose women in the workplace but may strive to separate them where readily feasible. It will probably adopt separate-sex educational institutions...”

Such “austerities of lifestyle may be uncongenial to Westerners, and to many Algerians as well,” RAND’s writer Graham E. Fuller went on, but “adoption of these practices should be of no strategic concern to the West unless gross violations of human rights should take place outside the context of austere Islamic law.”

In the calculating language of international finance, Fuller reflected that Algeria’s fundamentalists are “likely to welcome U.S. private-sector investments in Algeria and to undertake close commercial relations with the United States.”

Then, with breathtaking disregard for the quality of women’s lives, indeed, their ability to survive at all, RAND’s man concluded: “The West is almost certain to encounter the FIS as a major player in Algerian politics in some form. It might, furthermore, well be able to live with an FIS regime.”

There it is—in those calm unruffled sentences: the same complacent tone that makes it possible for someone to approve a “thousands die” no-story photo-spread like Time’s.
Over 20 percent of children in the United States—one-quarter of those under six—are born into, and live in poverty, according to a new UNICEF report, "The State of the World's Children." This is more than double the rate of most industrialized countries. Poor nutrition, of the mother while pregnant and/or her child, is implicated in over half of all child deaths worldwide, a proportion unmatched since the Black Death, says the study. And children who survive often suffer impaired brain growth—low birth weight, for example, can reduce IQ dramatically—and poor physical development. These "social and economic costs strangle development and snuff out hope," says UNICEF.

The United States, the fabled land of plenty, currently ranks 29th in infant mortality. Babies born in Singapore, Slovenia, the Czech Republic, and even tiny Andorra, have a better chance of survival than they do here. In America, the causes, while complex, are invariably related to poverty and racism. Many such children are born into families that belong to the rapidly growing class of the "working poor."

Five years ago, Boston, embarrassed by its high infant mortality rates, especially in a city recognized internationally as a medical mecca, launched a $25 million "Healthy Start" program to help women keep prenatal appointments, develop nutrition programs, and deliver food to hungry families. "Healthy Start" has reduced the city's infant mortality rate to its lowest level since 1980. Despite this improvement, however, black babies still die in Boston at more than twice the rate of white babies. And federal budget cuts threaten the sustainability of the program. Nationwide, at least 35 states have higher infant mortality rates for children of color than Massachusetts.

Patricia recalls the night her baby died from Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, SIDS. At the time of the tragedy, she was homeless, living in a welfare hotel, and sharing her bed with her other three children. Her partner Robert (in the background) was in a different shelter, for homeless men, that night.
The parents of a baby girl who died of SIDS keep a lock of the infant's hair in their Bible, next to a passage they underlined that gives them some comfort. But the mother cannot accept her infant's early death and continues to mourn.

Then eight-months pregnant, Maria and her 12-month-old son traveled from Lynn, Massachusetts to Boston's Codman Square, a journey that can take three-and-a-half hours via public transportation, to obtain prenatal care. She frequently had to make the trip several times a week. Maria (whose name has been changed because she's an illegal alien and fears deportation) went to great lengths to have a healthy baby, and her efforts paid off. Her daughter is thriving.
Roxbury Comprehensive Community Health Center, in Boston, provides health services to a community where even a small budget cut can have major detrimental results. And prevention programs and follow-up care are vulnerable services where benefits aren't always quantifiable or otherwise obvious—authorities can't compute, for example, the number of single teenagers who do not become pregnant and have children. Dexter, almost a year old here, and his sister Tyisha, three, play while waiting for a check-up following his treatment for pneumonia.
The Healthy Start program has nurses and advocates who visit high-risk mothers at home, or in shelters, and who try to assist women with their medical and social needs. Paulette, a nurse with the program, holds a two-and-a-half-month-old boy while advising a new mother at home. The mother had no prenatal care during a previous pregnancy, and was fearful of the racist and patronizing attitudes she might encounter at community clinics. That changed when she met Paulette, through a neighborhood health clinic.
Jo-Anna, above, a midwife, gives a prenatal check-up. She sees a lot of women who have been written off by society, she says, and believes that America needs a "Marshall Plan" for the inner cities to save the next generation.

Elizabeth's six-month-old son, above, lies in a coffin. The infant is one of many who do not make it to their first birthday. During her pregnancy, Elizabeth says, she did not use drugs, smoke cigarettes, or drink alcohol. But she did find Boston's hospitals insensitive and indifferent to her problems—those of an impoverished, Spanish-speaking mother.

Michele McDonald is a freelance photographer from Arlington, Massachusetts, who was formerly with The Boston Globe. In 1997, she was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize in feature photography.
In 1887, Wimbledon’s Centre Court: England’s Lottie Dod races from baseline to net. Lunging, she returns her opponent’s serve and, in the process, marks her place in tennis history as the youngest ever player to win a Wimbledon title. Dod, 15 years old, overwhelmed her more senior, more experienced opponents, and stunned spectators when she used the overhead smash and volley—the first time such techniques were employed in women’s tennis.

In between matches, Dod and her co-competitors retired to the dressing room to free themselves of their floor-length skirts and petticoats, peel off their stockings and unhitch their bloodied corsets. As they endeavored to twist, turn and lunge on the courts, the women were repeatedly stabbed by the metal and whalebone stays of these cumbersome garments, which encased them from tits to tush.

The corsets were so injurious that a special bar was installed above a stove in the locker room on which the contraptions could be hung to dry. Pity the poor player who forgot to bring a change of outfit: she was forced to wrap her body in the blood stiffened garment for yet another match. Not surprisingly, in outfits such as these, the pace of women’s tennis, even at Wimbledon, was only as fierce as fashion dictates allowed. Regardless of the players’ athletic efforts or skills, competitive matches more often resembled sedate garden parties.

It’s hard for today’s female athlete, raised on technically engineered sportswear designed to maximize performance and comfort, to imagine that women competed in garments so restrictive and damaging, or that tennis was once quite literally a blood sport for women. As you work out on your gym’s StairMaster wearing form-fitting Lycra shorts, run a 5-K in shoes pumped full of “gel” or “air,” or hike with equipment perfectly proportioned for a woman’s frame, consider our grandmothers’ or great-grandmothers’ generations. Sportive women of those eras were obliged to play basketball in full-length frocks, ride horses sitting dangerously sidesaddle, and trudge up mountains or through tropical rain forests wearing high-fashion bustles and boots. All these outfits were de rigueur for one’s reputation, yet they were more suitable for drawing room teas than exploring the great outdoors.

Through the ages, adventurous and athletic women have had to struggle not only with the harsh elements and a variety of adversaries, but also their clothing. Yet they competed for Olympic medals and traversed unknown regions, simultaneously defying death and natural fibers. Despite sartorial limitations and the lack of such modern-day essentials as Gore-Tex, polypropylene, plastic or nylon, our sporting female predecessors still went off to explore “Darkest Africa” and climb hazardous mountain peaks.

Mercifully, times and equipment have changed, but then so have perceptions about women and their bodies. The idealized
female form was once fleshily full and thus the epitome of fecundity, which was considered a woman’s most important characteristic. Today a woman’s body is more likely to be toned. We are no longer urged to cover ourselves from head to toe for the sake of propriety and our oh, so precious reputations. On the contrary, females who participate in sports are encouraged to shed as much clothing as safety will allow.

These days, we wax lyrical and at length about the titanium in our bicycle components, the water-repellent qualities of our outer shells, and the ability of our undergarments to wick perspiration away from our bodies. Where women’s sporting attire was formerly an athletic handicap, now—from our designed-for-aquatic-speed swimsuits to our sports bras—a woman’s active wear is meant to promote rather than hinder her performance and her prowess. From Lottie Dod’s era, it took more than 50 years of play at Wimbledon before women felt they could appear on court sans those lethal corsets or with their legs bared. May Sutton, an American, was barred from Centre Court at Wimbledon in 1905 because her forearms were exposed and her tennis dress revealed a “flash of ankle.” She lowered her hemline, lengthened her sleeves and returned to win the singles title that year. Finally, in 1933, American Alice Marble broke through the “no skin” barrier at Wimbledon by wearing shorts. She shocked the public and the press, but delighted other female players.

The decorous and often dangerous garb of these early competitors shows how pervasive a society’s values can be in the face of good health and reason, to say nothing of the desire to win. Dress was intended to convey and reinforce severe Victorian standards of propriety—this was a time, after all, when one didn’t dare to mention any human body part in polite society, and even the legs of pianos were hidden under “modesty skirts.” Women were weighted down by gowns that contained as much as 20-30 yards of fabric and that were worn over an additional five to ten petticoats.

Nineteenth-century female fashion dictated ridiculously tiny 18-inch waists. Women laboring to breathe in their too-tight corsets suffered swooning attacks so frequently that special “fainting couches” were strategically placed for the purpose. Such fainting attacks helped reinforce the stereotype of a frail and helpless creature unsuited to the rigors of sport. The medical opinion of the day—that physical activity of the sporting kind would damage a woman’s reproductive organs—also held sway.

Yet despite all the social, moral and physical restrictions of the last century, a number of wealthy and adventurous women left their cloistered homes to literally explore the world. French countess Henriette d’Angeville was the first woman to climb 15,771 ft. Mont Blanc in 1838, and she did so wearing an ankle-length skirt. Frightfully British and utterly proper Mary Kingsley, who explored West Africa in the 1890s, believed that one had no right to be seen there in clothes one would be ashamed to wear in public in England. As she traveled through parts of the continent few Europeans had ever ventured into she was daily bedecked in white blouses with high, ruffled, necklines and long sleeves, and heavy floor-length skirts of black serge-wool.

For Kingsley, maintaining correct standards rather than promoting comfort, was key. She also slept in her tall lace-up boots because when they were soaked, as they frequently were, they would shrink overnight and become unbearably tight.

We can snicker at the “there’ll-never-be-an-England” image she must have made, but Kingsley claimed her Victorian wardrobe once saved her life. Traipsing through the jungle on one occasion, she fell into a 15 ft. big-game trap, and her massive skirt and multiple petticoats saved her from being impaled on the 12-inch ebony spikes at
the bottom of the pit. Lost to history, of course, is whether she fell into the trap in the first place because of her highly impractical outfit.

Historians have suggested that explorers and colonialists—and in those days they were often one and the same—clung to their European styles of dress, no matter how unsuitable they were for the climate or terrain, because the clothes were comforting in their familiarity as well as symbolic of foreign power in the newly subdued states. Whatever the reasons, they must have been compelling to keep women like Kingsley swaddled by their fashions as they waded through leech-filled swamps or rivers, often up to their necks in water, or hiked through the tropical sun. But perhaps it was simply misguided vanity.

Over the years, women athletes began to modify their dress when they encountered adverse physical conditions. American mountaineer Annie Peck, a fashion pioneer, bravely ditched her skirts, petticoats and corsets when she headed for Switzerland’s Matterhorn mountain in 1896. She climbed the 14,690 ft. peak wearing an outfit that was very liberated for the era: canvas knickerbockers, puttees—strips of cloth wrapped around the legs, a forerunner of women’s leggings— heavy wool sweaters, a felt hat and a woolen ski mask.

As women explorers were circumnavigating the globe in the late nineteenth century, back home the bicycle was becoming popular. Said Susan B. Anthony: “Bicycles did more to emancipate women than anything else in the world.” Unfortunately for women cyclists, the emancipation from cumbersome clothing was less than immediate. To make bike-riding less treacherous, elastic loops—the precursors of toe clips—were attached to the bottom of skirts so women could hoop them over their feet. Tiny lead weights were also sewn into hems to prevent the fabric from becoming entangled in gears and wheels. By the end of the century, vast bloomers became acceptable as a wiser choice.

As sports for women gradually became less restrictive, so too did women’s lives. Female athletes not only modified dress codes for women, they also changed attitudes about what “the weaker sex” was capable of achieving. And gender politics was not far behind. Annie Peck combined mountaineering with feminist goals when she unfurled a “Votes For Women” banner on the summit of Mt. Coropuna in Peru. And while not every sportswoman has considered herself a feminist, the accomplishments of female athletes have made them empowering role models—women who have gone beyond the limits imposed by society.

The abandonment of corsets and petticoats, the rise of hemlines, and the acceptance of pants for women all had their beginnings in costumes that began in women’s sportswear. By 1926, British Vogue was proclaiming: “Sport has more to do than anything else with the evolution of the modern mode.” Just as tennis outfits influenced styles on and off the court, so too did the sweater filter into mainstream fashion via golf. The adoption of these new sporty styles called for a sporty figure to match. Zaftig women began to slim down, as legs and arms were bared and torsos newly outlined. The one-piece, revealing swimsuit replaced the sack-like, woolen bathing costumes of yesteryear.

Acceptance and even idealization of the athletic female body in the early part of this century led to what has been called the Golden Age of Sport. Women’s swimming debuted at the Olympics in 1912. In 1926 Gertrude Ederle became the first woman to swim the English Channel and did it faster than any man. Five years later Aviator Phoebe Omlie won the first National Air Race between men and women. And in 1934 Babe Didrickson pitched a full inning against the Brooklyn Dodgers. (Over the years a handful of women have played in men’s pro leagues, but never for very long.)

Post-WWII, as women became more competitive and serious about sporting pursuits, concerns arose that they were becoming “unladylike and masculine.” A backlash occurred, with hysterical charges of lesbianism in sports. After all, went the claims, female athletes who exhibit tenacity, toughness and competitiveness are displaying specifically masculine characteristics. These fears of a new, threateningly “butch” woman athlete seemed to require
sporting attire that was blatantly feminine. Women's sportswear was manufactured only in pastel colors, and tennis underpants were adorned with tiers of ruffles more suitable for the rear ends of real infants.

As part of this retrograde trend, the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League added charm school to spring training, teaching players how to walk, sit and talk in a "ladylike" manner. Team players were responsible for maintaining "feminine" propriety during competition, and fines were imposed on those who transgressed the strict rules regarding hair styles, dress and behavior off the field.

At the same time, athletic clothing and equipment improved drastically. Nylon, first developed in 1938 and used by the military in WWII, suddenly became the fabric of the moment in active wear. Lightweight nylon backpacks with aluminum frames replaced the poorly designed, heavy canvas and wooden models. As a result more women took up hiking.

In the 1960s, the female athlete temporarily took a backseat to the highly domestic image of June Cleaver and the shapely, yet not in shape, "ideal" body of Marilyn Monroe. Fashion reversed itself again a decade later. The sporting image became prized once again when the passage of Title IX in 1972 led to increasing numbers of women and girls participating in athletics. Within a few years, the "Me Generation" appeared and women joined men in taking up jogging, aerobics and lifting weights in search of the "body-beautiful." Though more women became physically active, they lacked high-end sporting gear designed especially for their body sizes.

Those who were serious about sports had no choice but to buy or borrow equipment and clothes that were designed for men. Looking like kids in their big brothers' cast-offs, they rolled up the overly long sleeves, swamped their torsos in male parkas and wore men's hiking shoes—which caused painful blistering because they were too wide in the heel, says Andrea Gabbard, a senior editor at "Outdoor Retailer Magazine, who also tests and evaluates women's sporting gear for fitness magazines. (In fact, not until the late 1980s did hiking boots sized to women's feet become readily available.)

A decade ago, manufacturers finally took note of the ever-increasing numbers of women participating in sports and began to develop specialized women's sportswear and equipment. Initially, this represented little more than paying lip service to form and ignoring function. The only real difference was a wider choice of colors, since the "new" garments were simply smaller versions of men's designs. The first sports bra was based on the idea of two jock straps sewn together, a fitting reflection perhaps, of how men viewed women's needs. And it wasn't until 1987, when 42 percent of all runners were female, that the first women's running shoe came on the market.

In the 1990s, manufacturers began to invest time and money in developing designs based on a woman's physique. "In the last three years, women's lines have taken off," says Robyn Hall, design director for Columbia Sportswear. "We've sold twice as much as we anticipated." This is not surprising since, according to the U.S. Sporting Goods Manufacturers Association, women now spend more money on sportswear than do men. Women's sports apparel accounts for 40 percent of purchases, compared to 36 percent for men and 24 percent for children. And women pay more per item than men do, reports Maria Stefan, executive director of the SGMA. This, of course, is not good news, but simple industry sexism, stemming from the same unwritten law that decrees a woman's dry-cleaning and haircuts must cost more than a man's.

Lottie Dod and Mary Kingsley might be scandalized by our modern sportswear, but they would also be a great deal safer and a lot more comfortable. Today's women know they can go the distance, and they are no longer held back by what they wear.
“I had only nine-tenths of a centimeter tumor. All my lymph nodes were clear,” Myra Finkelestein whispers conspiratorially. “I had a good prognosis.” She almost laughs as she recalls her initial diagnosis of stage-one breast cancer. Then she learned that her stage-one cancer had unexpectedly progressed to stage-four metastatic disease, with a median survival time of about a year.

Now, the 48-year-old chiropractor hunches over a long mahogany table in the library at the New York Academy of Medicine, poring over the *Principles of Oncology*. The library, the only medical research facility in Manhattan open to the public, attracts thorough physicians as well as cure-seeking patients like Myra. “I spent a long time with Myra,” recalls Maria Theodoulou, M.D., the oncologist who broke the news. “You try to cushion it, but most people feel like, ‘It’s time to buy the plot.’ All they’re seeing in front of them is that white light.”

Myra (no relation to the writer) is not the type to passively cross off days on her calendar. As she started chemotherapy at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center, where Theodoulou practices, she also started to read. The bookshelves in her small Manhattan apartment filled up: Dr. Ralph Moss’ *Questioning Chemotherapy* and *The Cancer Industry*, Dr. Susan Love’s *Breast Book*, newsletters by the dozen. And she grew skeptical. “I kept thinking, what they’re offering me is not all there is,” says Myra. “The questions began to come: Are the doctors telling the truth? Are they just trying to make money? Are the researchers trying to save me or save their data?”

Myra is a growing generation of medical sleuths, patients who consider research an essential survival tactic. According to a 1994 Lou Harris poll, almost half of all on-line searches are made by consumers seeking medical information. Managed care, in part, has inspired this research boom. “As time with physicians gets squeezed, patients want more information,” says Kathy Gardner, a public affairs specialist at the National Library of Medicine near Washington, D.C. Worse, many sick people consider research the only way to keep tabs on the doctors they don’t trust to tell them about treatments their HMOs might not cover. In an all-consuming research project to save her own life, Myra combed through library archives and Internet communiqués; she canvassed networks of patients and support groups for information.

She consulted a nutritionist, who persuaded her to swear off dairy and begin taking alternative supplements: coenzyme Q-10, shark cartilage, algae, cat’s claw, and calamo, to name a few. For $300, she bought a personalized twenty-page report from CAN-HELP, a research service in Port Ludlow, Washington (tel: 360-437-9384), that provides cancer patients with detailed information about up-to-the-minute treatments. She conferred with a woman on Long Island whose struggle to get a bone marrow transplant had been described in a daily paper. She contacted a clinic in Japan that makes vaccines from patients’ urine. Her mother arrived from Florida to help, moving into a nearby hotel. Her sister, Rita, an assistant principal in Queens, became her de facto mediator with the medical community.

Four months after the diagnosis, Rita snagged a flier from a doctor’s desk for a populist health seminar at a midtown hotel, sponsored by the Foundation for Alternative Medical Education. She arrived to find lines around the block, and people scalping tickets for $400 apiece. “My sister has cancer. I need to be in there!” she pleaded. Finally, she stumbled across an old high-school friend, who sold her two tickets at $40 each. Inside, the auditorium was half empty, as many of those who had pre-purchased tickets didn’t show up. “You feel desperate for information,” said Rita. “You’ll pay anything.”

As Myra now explains her strategy, “It’s naive to believe there’s only one way of treating this disease. There’s a lot of information out there. It’s like buying a couch; you go from store to store.” But is Myra right? Is shopping for a cure the same as shopping for furniture? Could she sample an array of alternative and conventional cures without one interfering with the other? Could she keep all her options open and still make headway against what she has been told is probably a fatal disease?

Although Myra fired Dr. Theodoulou, she stopped discussing extra-curricular treatments with her. “No physician tells straight...
she insists. Her research project took on the quality of a covert operation. Indeed, without Theodoulou's knowledge, Myra and I were on a plane three days after we met, headed for Tijuana, Mexico, to research alternative cancer clinics.

The Tijuana clinics dotting the U.S.-Mexico border across from San Diego were established in the 1950s to provide non-toxic alternatives to standard chemotherapy and radiation. Since then, the original two clinics have burgeoned to 18, all of which purport to somehow bolster the immune system or purge the body of contaminants. The remedies, while unproven, unregulated by the Food and Drug Administration, and denounced as quackery by the medical establishment, draw an intrepid minority among America's 1.38 million cancer patients.

Once we land in San Diego, our destination is the International Motor Lodge, squeezed between a Denny's with menus in Spanish and a Mobil gas station. Behind the check-in counter are books for sale with titles like You Don't Have to Die. A sign explains that the lodge provides a courtesy shuttle bus to take patients clinic-hopping.

In the morning, sick-looking people are everywhere, many of them in wheelchairs. As they queue for the shuttle bus, Myra emerges from her room looking incongruously healthy and hip: black blouse, black skirt, large hoop earrings, metallic sunglasses. As usual, her face is impeccably made-up, and she wears a shoulder-length wig to cover the effects of chemotherapy. "I'm too young for this disease," she says quietly.

In downtown Tijuana, we are ushered into the hot, airless office of Dr. Eladio Medina Ibnez, who greets us effusively, then begins a two-hour dissertation. "I microwaved patients with radiation, fried patients with chemo," he says as though regretting a criminal past. Without a pause, and in his rapid broken English, he moves on to white blood cells, which are lacking in cancer patients who received chemotherapy; to rogue, free-radical molecules, which need to be squelched; to possible cures that he calls "catalyte correctors."

"What's your feeling about shark cartilage?" Myra asks, interrupting the flow. "Good!" he exclaims, but then lectures us about the impurities that lurk in various supplement warehouses and packaging plants. "He knows a lot," Myra murmurs. After he proposes that she get her blood and urine analyzed to screen for toxins, and start a regimen of intravenous Vitamin C and other supplements, Myra makes an appointment to return. As we leave he calls after us, "In five months, you are going to be completely healed."

Outside, Myra turns silent. The momentary enthusiasm in swapping cancer arcana gives way to the grim reality of her prognosis. She is seven months into a 12-month death sentence, and has limited financial resources. (Medina said his cure would cost at least $2,000.)

Our next stop is the Bio-Medical Center, well known in the alternative world for its Hoxsey tonic, named after an American farmer who created a mixture of herbs that cured cancer in his horses. Here, Myra hunts down the center's director, Mildred Nelson. The wrinkled American nurse looks to be in her late 60s and sits wreathed in a halo of cigarette smoke. She puffs compulsively, as dying patients shuffle past her open office. She invites us to sit down. "I wouldn't go for that cryosurgery," Nelson advises, referring to an innovative procedure to freeze and remove tumors from the liver, to which Myra's cancer had spread; Myra had learned about the treatment from a TV documentary. Instead, Nelson recommends a three-week regimen of tonics.

She doesn't say a thing about possible side effects or risks of the Hoxsey potions, though their efficacy and safety are far from guaranteed. The inventor's great-grandson, Harry Hoxsey, who founded the Hoxsey Cancer Clinic, died from prostate cancer in 1974, after...
Research is Myra's lifeline, and a seawall protecting her from the enormity of the disease. Yet three days of exhaustive clinic hopping leaves her nowhere closer to deciding which costly regimen holds the key to survival. Her answer is to do yet more research, which seems like a way to avoid decision-making altogether. I wonder, too, whether her medical wanderlust will jeopardize the effectiveness of the treatment she has been receiving at home.

Myra is adamant about staying on in Tijuana. I return to New York to meet with her doctors at the Sloan-Kettering breast center. Larry Norton, M.D., a trim, tireless man who seems to embody establishment medicine, meets me in his impeccably organized office. From here, he tries to satisfy his patients' unquenchable thirst for information. Every day, Norton gets almost 100 e-mail messages, 200 phone calls, and six inches of faxes from prospective patients or those seeking advice. His patients also have taken to the Internet, where technical data once guarded by the white-coated elite is available.

The technological stampede kicks up good dialogue and a lot of dust, but also ill-informed, potentially harmful advice. Norton recalls one patient who almost took a toxic dose of a cancer drug called doxorubicin, based on the scuttlebutt from her on-line chat group. "When patients do their own research, their understanding can be different from the facts. Nothing will substitute for expert consultation," he says.

"But aren't the experts themselves overwhelmed with information?" I ask, thinking of Dr. Theodoulou and the unread two-and-a-half foot pile of published research teetering on her office windowsill. According to the National Library of Medicine's Gardner, even a doctor who reads two medical journals a night, cover-to-cover, will be 550 years behind in his or her reading within a year.

Norton smiles knowingly: "Just because a patient can get published data doesn't mean she's getting the best stuff. All the published literature is two years out of date. Part of my job as an expert is to know what's out there, published or unpublished. If I had to base my understanding on published data, I'd be an ignoramus."

Norton explains that, unlike Myra, who had refused a sixth round of chemotherapy recommended by Theodoulou because she was convinced that it weakened her immune system, the vast majority of patients follow Sloan-Kettering's protocols. "Chemo is the best way to increase cure rates," Norton says.

So, what is the appropriate balance between blindly following orders and being a medical vigilante?

"Patients should always ask their doctor, 'How do you know?' And, 'Because I say so,' is not an adequate response. As LBJ used to say, 'Let us reason together.'

When I describe Myra's Tijuana venture, Norton launches into a diatribe against untested, alternative remedies. "I tell patients, 'You wouldn't get on an airplane if the CEO of the company said he had read an ancient Tibetan text and had a dream of how to build an airplane. So why would you put something in your body, based on that kind of logic?' But he also doesn't think patients should discount their intuition when making medical decisions. 'I'm an expert in medicine. But each patient is an expert in her own life,' he says.

Myra and her sister have latched onto a pervasive alternative-medicine belief that the medical establishment is deliberately withholding cures in order to profit from costly but ineffective treatments like chemotherapy. At the idea, Dr. Theodoulou exclaims, "My dad's got cancer and he is probably going to die real soon. If I had the magic in my pocket, wouldn't I give it to him?"

Myra's disenchantment with doctors began after her lumpectomy and radiation, when she hand-picked a prominent chief of surgical oncology at a leading Manhattan teaching hospital to guide her follow-up care. The protocol, he said, was routine: a breast exam every six months, a mammogram once a year. "Don't worry about this anymore. I'll do the worrying for you," Myra recalled him saying soothingly. Eighteen months later, the oncologist assured Myra that the growing hardness in her breast was scar tissue from radiation treatment. Only on her urging, she says, did he perform a test that revealed suspicious calcifications. When he recommended a mastectomy, Myra insisted he give her a CAT scan, which led to a liver biopsy. By then, she had scheduled an appointment with Theodoulou for a second opinion. The biopsy indicated that the cancer had spread through her system.

Theodoulou believes that Myra's anger at her doctor is a misplaced response to her poor prognosis. Her older sister feels a cool, more detached rage. "Someone should have said, 'This is breast cancer. This can kill you.' Instead, you have these condescending doctors who tell you everything will be okay. How dare they?"

Shortly after Myra returns from Tijuana, having opted for one day of the Hoxsey tonic and a blood work-up from Medina, she again
Myra discovered the radiology department at Long Island's North Shore Hospital, which operates one of several Positron Emission Tomographers (PETs) in the country. Myra is injected with radioactive dye that collects around any tumor activity in the body. Myra made an appointment for the $1,800 procedure, again without consulting Dr. Theodoulou.

In the week she must wait for the PET scan results, Myra has another appointment, this time with breast surgeon Dwight De Risi, whose prowess had been trumpeted by CANHELP. Rita, Myra, and I pull up in the parking lot at 7:00 a.m. (De Risi is known for office hours that run as late as 1:00 a.m.) Inside, an indifferent receptionist tells Myra to sit and wait. Two hours later, she is still waiting. "I called to confirm the time of my appointment," she complains to the receptionist. "The doctor had an unanticipated emergency."

"Called to confirm. Don't bullshit me," Myra pushes her way through the swinging door and confronts the receptionist head on. "Miss, we are not bullshitting you..."

"How can that be when I called ten minutes before coming over here, and you were running on time?" The office clerks are snickering. Rita follows Myra through the door. "My sister has cancer!"

"Everyone has cancer here," the receptionist replies sharply. "Let's communicate!"

"I called to confirm. Don't bullshit me." Myra pushes her way through the swinging door and confronts the receptionist head on. "Miss, we are not bullshitting you..."

"How can that be when I called ten minutes before coming over here, and you were running on time?" The office clerks are snickering. Rita follows Myra through the door. "My sister has cancer!"

"Everyone has cancer here," the receptionist replies sharply. "Let's leave. This is what my experience tells me," Myra blurts. The other patients, waiting quietly, look up from their magazines.

Just then, Dr. De Risi emerges from his office, shepherding a shell-shocked family toward the door. Dark circles are chiseled beneath the otherwise youthful-looking doctor's eyes. Myra scurries up to him, looking a stack of her medical records.

"The breast is probably the grayest area in medicine. No doctor wants to put their foot down and say 'Do this,'" he explains. I venture the details of our Tijuana trip and am startled by his response. "Chemotherapy is not the answer and everybody knows that," he says, and explains how it destabilizes the immune system. "I've seen some pretty remarkable stuff that patients have done for themselves." Rita clasps her hands anxiously when he leaves the room. Within twenty minutes, he returns, a large smile illuminating his face. He says no new growths during the manual exam, he says, and new tumors would be palpable. He sees no need for surgery. When Myra enters the room, he says what she's been waiting to hear: "Keep doing what you're doing. Do it all."

Recent studies indicate that cancer patients who express emotions like antagonism and rage have better clinical outcomes than patients who behave nicely. In a ground-breaking 1989 study, Stanford University psychiatrist David Spiegel discovered that cancer patients who participated in group psychotherapy sessions doubled their life expectancies.

Based on this research, Roger Dafter, Ph.D., a psychiatrist and associate director of the Mind/Body Medicine Group at UCLA Medical Center, argues that emotions traditionally considered negative actually can have positive biomedical properties. "Because turbulent emotions heat up the system, they can help to counter cancer. In reality, you need emotion to help you survive," he explains.

Myra bounds over to my apartment with her sheepdog, Benjie. She is beaming. The results of her PET scan have come back, and they also look good. No new tumor growth. "For all of Myra's wonderful activism, she's being treated via the mainstream effectively."

While Myra is not out of the woods, the spot on her liver has melted away. A small area on the breast, which might be cancer but is more likely scarring from radiation, is visible through ultrasound. She must remain watchful. In truth, it is impossible to know what's working. Perhaps tomorrow, or activism, or hope. Or rage. Myra has come over to tell me she's decided to spend two weeks at the Janker Cancer Clinic in Bonn, Germany. Today, however, she announces, "I'm taking the day off."

Katherine Evan Finkelnburg is a contributing editor for On The Issues and New York magazines, and has written extensively about the politics of health care.
Here I sit, head bent, writing you an intimate letter. I sense your presence, even though I don’t know your name. I envision you as a young woman, possibly a young man, somewhere between the ages of eighteen and thirty-five, but you may also be a decade older—or younger—than that. You may not yet be born. Perhaps I am trying to speak to my own younger self when I was coming of age—a process which is still far from over—no one ever spoke strong truths to me in a loving voice. When I was your age, I did not know what I needed to know in order to understand my life—anybody’s life. Perhaps, in writing to you, I wish to correct that, to make amends.

Perhaps you believe you can “have it all”—a brilliant career, a loving, lifelong marriage, healthy children (or no children), enough money, and happiness too. If you’re anything like I was, you probably believe that whatever awful things may have happened to women in the past, or still happen to “other” women today, cannot happen to you.

I don’t want to frighten you away, but I don’t want to waste your time either, so I can’t pretend that simply because you or I want it to be so that in fact women and men are equal.

Even when men and women do exactly the same thing, it means something different. The father who changes a diaper is often seen as a hero; not so the mother, who is, after all, only doing what she’s expected to do. This is not true in reverse. The woman who succeeds in a man’s world—although she is not expected to do so—is rarely treated as a conquering hero. She is more often seen as an aggressive bitch. She may well be aggressive—but no more than her male colleagues are. And if some women try to prove their worth by outdoing their male colleagues in tough, anti-female behavior, others feel compelled to behave in “feminine” or “maternal” ways to appease those who would otherwise punish them for stepping so far out of line. Thus, unlike her male counterparts, the chief judge pours her own coffee, and the police officer may not use what she’s learned on the job to stop her husband from beating her; whatever she’s learned at work can’t override what she’s learned all her life about being a woman. The female employee—not her male counterpart—is still expected to buy the cookies for an office party, babysit her employer’s child.

Yes, the world is different now than it was when I was your age. In only thirty years, a visionary feminism has managed to seriously challenge, if not transform, world consciousness. But the truth is women are still far from free. We’re not even within striking range.

The most extraordinary legal victories are only scraps of paper until human beings test them on the ground. Women are still punished for trying to integrate male bastions of power. Like their African-American counterparts before them, these women will not be deterred—but they will pay a high price. As feminists, we learned that one cannot do such things alone, only together.

I want you to know what our feminist gains are, and why you must not take them for granted. (Although it is your right to do so—we fought for that, too.) I also want you to know what remains to be done. I want you to see your place in the historical scheme of things, so you may choose whether and how to stand your ground in history.

You must stand on our feminist shoulders in order to go further than we did. Stand up as early as you can in life. Take up as much space in the (male) universe as you need to. Sit with your legs apart, not together. Climb trees. Climb mountains, too. Engage in group sports. Dress comfortably. Dress as you wish.

How do we stop injustice? We begin by speaking truth to power. That child who told the emperor he was naked is one of ours. We begin, of course, by fighting back.

To quote Edmund Burke: “All that is necessary for the forces of evil to win in the world is for enough good men to do nothing.” Ah, Burke, evil also triumphs when good women do nothing. Toward that end, you must move beyond words. You must act. Do not hesitate because your actions may not be perfect, or beyond criticism. “Action” is how you put your principles into practice.
vately, toward those less fortunate than you. Not just toward those who are (safely) far away, but toward those with whom you live and work. If you're on the right track, you can expect some pretty savage criticism. Trust it. Revel in it. It is the truest measure of your success.

Those who endure small humiliations—daily—say that the most lasting and haunting harm resides in growing accustomed to such treatment, in large part because others insist that you do. After all, they have. What's so special about you? “So your boss asked you and not your male colleague to make coffee at the meeting—Big Deal. At least you have a job.” “So, your husband keeps forgetting his promise to help out with the housework—at least you have a husband. Always implied, though unspoken: “It could be worse.” But things could also be better. That will not happen if you do not act heroically.

Asking a rape survivor, “Why did you go out with that guy in the first place?” helps shame a woman into silence and inaction. Such comments forbid her to storm the gates of power. In a sense, this kind of gatekeeping constitutes bystander behavior. Survivors of serious atrocities say they are haunted by those who heard their screams but turned their backs, closed their doors, remained neutral, refused to take any stand other than an opportunistic one.

tells me two things: that women are likely to be pushovers for the slightest bit of maternal warmth that comes our way, and that women need only a small amount of encouragement and compassion in order to keep going. With more than a little, who knows how far we might go?

There is a great advantage to knowing that, at any moment, you may become a casualty in the war against women. If you know that this can happen—that there's nothing you can do to avoid it—you can learn how to sidestep some blows and endure the unavoidable ones, by keeping your eyes open, maintaining clarity, and naming each blow accurately, for what it is. You do this to aid yourself in remembering that you have not caused your own pain. It is psychologically crucial that you not blame yourself and not automatically take things personally. The truth is that many so-called personal things are quite impersonal—e.g., being captured by enemy soldiers, never being hired, being first fired, being rejected by your light-skinned family because you are dark, being rejected because you are homosexual or lesbian. I am not suggesting that you become fatalistic or go limp in the jaws of adversity. While you must understand reality with some detachment, you must, at the same time, learn how to take radical responsibility for what you do or fail to do. You have a responsibility to see that your wounded self does not get in the way of your warrior self. Therefore, act generously, not enviously. In my time, older women told younger women very little about what it takes for a woman to become whole, stay whole, and survive. If they had, we'd have understood, early on, that our first and greatest search should have been for ourselves, not for a prince (or princess), no matter how charming.

In my time, catcalls, smacking noises, and offers of money were what constituted “the outside world” for most unaccompanied young women. I could not sit on a park bench and gaze at a tree, listen to a soft rain fall, stand before a magnificent painting for the first time, or read a book in a cafe without being interrupted, or without fearing or hoping that I might be interrupted, by some male stranger. Only in retrospect do I understand that what I once did is different now than it was when I was your age...But women are still far from free. We're not even within
experienced as reality "heightened" was, in effect, reality nar-
rowed.

I loved the attention. I did not think of myself as prey on the
move. I had no way of knowing that such men treated most young
girls like this, that their noticing me was not really a compliment.
I felt no danger. I felt invincible. I wanted to be as free, sexually, as
boys were. I hadn't a clue that a double standard existed that
would penalize me for doing the exact same thing that boys did.

Know that, while your struggle for independence may be dif-
ficult, even painful, remaining unconscious, denying reality, exacts
an even higher price. I came into consciousness on my own, main-
ly through books. Because I live in my head so much, and in books,
what I'm about to tell you is, for me, very personal. From kinder-
garten until I was nearly thirty, I, the nonstop reader, knew prac-
tically nothing about women writers, painters, scientists, spiritual
or political leaders, feminists, union organizers, revolutionaries. If
only I had stumbled upon the writings of Mary Wollstonecraft or
Matilda Joslyn Gage or Sojourner Truth, or Susan B. Anthony,
surely they might have strengthened me, given me some self-
respect, a clue, some company. What we don't know can hurt us.

Forgetting, not knowing your own story, is dangerous. If you do so,
you will have to reinvent the wheel, fight the same battles again
and again, with no guiding role models.

My generation had it easy. We had no Rolodexes. We didn't
network. We didn't need to. Some of us had been active in
the civil rights and antiwar movements of the 1960s, where we
had been expected to make the coffee and enable the men to shine.
(I was.) Some of us came from Ivy League colleges and suburban
able. The media covered our every statement. Whatever we said
was considered news.

We didn't work for this; it was simply ours, an opening in his-
tory, a miracle. Overnight, or so it seemed, we formed organiza-
tions, ran for public office, sponsored legislation, created rape cri-
sis hotlines and shelters for battered women. Consciousness-rais-
groups educated and empowered us to enter previously all-
male professions.

Women's entrance into higher paying jobs did not come easi-
ly. Once we became conscious, we still had to fight unimaginably
hard for each small gain. But we had each other, which made all
the difference. It made having to fight—which we often experi-
enced as "losing"—bearable, possible.

Without class-action lawsuits, I doubt that many of us could
have borne the continual indignities and injustices at work.
Without lawsuits, one by one we each would have been iso-
lated, humiliated, threatened, fired. Had we tried to speak out as indi-
viduals, our allegations might have been brushed off as the mis-
guided beliefs of a few crazy or difficult women. Had we not fought,
the next generations of feminist scholars would never have gained
even a toehold in the academy.

You are entitled to know our war stories. We cannot, in good
conscience, send you into battle without giving you a clear idea of
what may happen there. Submission and humility will not protect
you from the injustices of this war. Nothing can. But clarity, and
solidarity in action, will allow you to fight back—and to keep sane,
no matter what happens. I was incredibly naive when I was
younger. I thought I should be offered a place of honor at the patri-
archal table—for my feminist work. I was foolish, but human, for

Today, feminists are divided into many factions. Too oft
causes, but no Cause. We have no unifying motivation fo

marrriages, where we had been expected to do the same damn
things. There was a new spirit in the land: a new organization too:
the National Organization for Women. We joined. We were main-
ly, but not only, white and educated. We'd had enough of being
handmaids. We were ready to say goodbye to all that.

One fine day, we opened our front doors and, like Ibsen's
Nora, simply walked out. Unlike Nora, we were not alone. There
were thousands of women in each city on the move. Overnight,
there were consciousness-raising groups, speak- outs, marches,
demonstrations, meetings, campaigns in every major American
city, on most college campuses, within many professional associa-
tions. Thousands of them. It was thrilling, miraculous, unbeliev-

wanting that. It took me time to understand that women—myself
included—would remain oppressed for a long time, no matter how
fast any individual woman could dance and shine. As Aristotle
once wrote: "Revolutions may also arise when persons of great abil-
ity, and second to none in their merits, are treated dishonorably by
those who themselves enjoy the highest honors." He was right.

Do not try to win approval from your opponents. Merely
fight to win. Keep your eyes on the prize. Do not let a little ver-
bal shaming slow you down. Aim for Greatness, not "Goodness."

Excerpted from Letter to a Young Feminist by Phyllis Chester, published
letter to an older feminist

By Sanda Balaban

Dear Phyllis: As you know, I was born in 1972, the same year as your book *Women and Madness*. In the twenty-six years since the so-called Second Wave of feminism flooded the world, doors have been flung open, and young women of my generation have passed through them. And this, perhaps, is the problem that perplexes, even paralyzes too many of us: Where do we go when we can go anywhere, when the options and opportunities are countless? Or are they?

Existing in tandem with this freedom are insidious forces that operate to undermine the accomplishments of your generation. It seems there was backlash before many of us had even batted an eyelash. Coexisting with our feminist freedoms are restrictions on what we can or do if we want to be “real women.”

Today, feminists are divided into many factions. Too often, we have many causes, but no Cause. We have no unifying motivation for mobilization. We become active only in opposition; that is, we are more likely to hit the streets to rally against than to advocate for. What if we were to come together to ask for—no, to demand—what we want: the elimination of the glass ceiling, the provision of adequate day care, the recognition of domestic partnerships (both gay and straight) etc., etc.? What if we could set aside our concerns about ourselves and our individual successes and come together as a community to construct the world we want to live in? Fear of falling was the metaphor-du-jour of some seventies feminists, but fear of failing seems to be the undoing of my generation.

Even now, just a few years out of college, I fear that the revolutionary fire my peers ignited is being snuffed out, with only activist ashes left in our wake.

Where once we didn’t hesitate to question (and even to question the questions), now we are less vociferous. We are settling for, instead of struggling against. Or striving to create. Can it be that we feminist firestarters are ambivalent about our desires and abilities? How do we work toward our dreams when we have few models of what such radically reconfigured lives will look like? Too often, the only models society presents us with are Supermodels. Or Superwoman models. Or Anti-models.

In trying to create the kind of life that questions so many of the constructs society has historically set forth as “all-American ideals,” many former givens are called into question. Perhaps the most central question revolves around what we replace these rejected ideals with and how we gain recognition and respect for these alternative choices. For example, I (like many other “liberated liberals”) have no interest in ever marrying, and no fear of being alone. Instead of opting for a single romantic relationship, I prefer to immerse myself in a sea of significant relationships, which offer a variety of meaningful connections. Still, it’s sometimes hard to remain immune to others’ well-meaning “pity” about my unaffiliated status. When people ask, as people do, “Are you seeing anyone?” I reply, “Yes, I’m seeing many people.” And then I recount the recent accomplishments of my most beloved friends, whose everyday victories make me extremely proud in the same way that a wife might extol her spouse’s virtues. While I experience utter fulfillment in my independence, I often feel like I’m fighting against a powerful cultural current.

I think what plagues me most is never knowing if I’m “right.” If I’m doing the “right” things, making the “right” choices. Not that there is a single, straightforward “right,” but I do think there is “wrong,” and so much of what I see in society—the savage inequalities between classes, races, genders, sexual orientations—seems more wrong than right. But in seeking out the right reconstructions, in listening for a different drummer and determining to move to her beat, how do I know if I’m engaging in the right dance? As feminists, how do we lead lives of “radical responsibility,” managing to stay true to ourselves while simultaneously serving others in worthwhile ways? How do we make necessary compromises without compromising ourselves and becoming complicit in the very complacency we currently criticize?

As a twenty-something feminist with the greatest admiration for my feminist foremothers, I frequently find myself frustrated by the lack of meaningful connections that are made and sustained across the generational lines. In a world where we barely take time to talk to one another; much less to write long letters and share seasoned secrets, I appreciate the overture of your letter, your willingness to open a dialogue with us young feminists. Too often, such conversations simply are not started, or are squelched as soon as they are.

As products of our society (albeit critical ones), we are inevitably affected by the societal inclination to divide and dichotomize. As a result, unnatural separations and schisms are created among us, when our efforts would be better served by uniting...
as Vegas, city of swank and high rollers, plays host each year
to millions of Americans who arrive at this desert oasis to ful-
fill their jackpot dreams, to live it up in one of the city’s numer-
grous glitzy casinos. But while $100 bills are tossed on gaming tables
and stretch limos sidle up to nightclubs like felines insinuating meal-
time, the underside of Vegas toils in anonymity, struggling against
working conditions as exploitative as the town is garish.

Until the union that represents the hotel workers who pour the
drinks and make the beds started winning drastic concessions from
casino-hotel owners, workers’ job security was hardly a sure bet.
“Workers could be fired for wearing a union button in a nonunion
place or for talking union to another worker,” recalls Marsha
Buchanan, a former hotel cocktail waitress. “They could fire you for
putting an eyebrow on crooked.” In the 1950s, hotel housekeeping
staff earned $1.25 an hour. Today, they generally are paid $10 an
hour—an impressive advance for service employees, long at the bot-
tom of the pay scale. Many enjoy the security of a model health-and-
welfare plan, paid by the hotels, which includes hospitalization cov-
erage up to $1 million and $150 a week after the fifth day of illness.

One of the principal forces behind this achievement is Hattie
Canty, a 65-year-old African- American. In 1990 Canty became the
first female president of Local 226 of the Hotel Employees and
Restaurant Employees International, also known as the Culinary
Workers. Her leadership reflects the return of labor militancy. From
her childhood in Alabama, where she never owned a pair of pajamas
because her family couldn’t afford them, and through her present
success, Canty has developed a ruthless toughness against hotel corpo-
ration and a grandmotherly devotion to her members.

Bugging the Opposition
“She’s got a big mouth. She’s afraid of nothing,” says Patricia Grant,
a hostess at the Union Plaza hotel who’s on the union steering com-
nittee. To wit, in battling the ARK Restaurant Corporation—which
runs restaurants on concession in many Las Vegas hotels and which
crushed the union by bringing in nonunion workers—Canty led
dozens of Culinary Workers into the New York-New York hotel,
where they took tables, ordered coffee and for several hours blocked
regular patrons from entering. Canty’s strategies are often uncon-
ventional. Once she bought scores of cockroaches for $24 and caused
havoc by releasing them in a hotel the union was picketing.

Before the union gained strength, Vegas was a company town,
and the local government was hardly union-friendly. Nevertheless,
when police arrested Canty for placing a picket line at the site of the
planned Venetian hotel (now under construction), she won a court
injunction allowing the sidewalk demonstration. “It pisses me off that
I don’t have the right to walk on my own sidewalks,” Canty says.

Though she is a woman who seems undaunted by nature,
Canty was intimidated during her first speech as union president.
She thought then that everyone had to talk like D. (Donald) Taylor,
a college graduate and the union’s organizing head. At first she read
haltingly from the speeches prepared for her. But eventually she
threw away her notes and let her feelings dominate. “I’m not an ora-
tor,” Canty insists. “It’s just that people motivate me. I’ve tried to
bring a sense of bonding to Local 226 and to make us feel like an
extended family. My mission is to pull everyone together.”

According to staff organizer Peggy Pierce, Canty has a gift for
public speaking as well as building community. “I love to hear her
speak,” Pierce says. “She makes you understand the dignity of labor
and that a maid’s work should be just as honored as every other type
of work. She makes you proud of her roots and your roots.”

Canty was born in the small Alabama town of St. Stephens in
June 1933. Her father died when she was 18 months old, leaving
Hattie with one younger brother, two older brothers and her mother.
Her grandmother, who worked in the cornfields and cleaned houses,
looked after the family, though at times they had only sugar water and
cornbread for meals. Canty aspired to become a school teacher but,
lacking the money for college tuition, she worked instead in a restaur-

ant in Mobile. She later married a man who turned out to be a phi-
landerer; after the birth of two children, the marriage ended in divorce.

As a single mother of two, Canty cleaned homes for a living. “I
was never ashamed of cleaning and insisted on doing the best job,”
she reflects. “When I couldn’t go in the front door of houses I cleaned,
I saw immediately that civil rights issues were linked to union issues,
and why Martin Luther King had given up his life while trying to
help the garbage workers organize.”

During her second marriage, to James Canty, a construction
worker, she had eight more children. In 1969 the Cantys moved to
Las Vegas, where the hotel-casino building boom had generated enor-
mous opportunities in construction. Four years later, Hattie got a job
as a powder room attendant at the Thunderbird, one of the first big
casinos. Her pay was $37 a day, less than half the wages a union
member in a similar job makes now. Though the family could cer-
tainly use the money she was making, Canty’s husband tried to make
her give up the job. He even disabled their car so she couldn’t drive to
work. “If a woman worked, he felt, she was trying to be the man of the
family and that would mean she didn’t need a man.” Despite the fact
that her husband “wanted total control of my life,” Canty wouldn’t be dissuaded and kept working. After her husband died of cancer, Canty worked as a housekeeper at the Maxim Hotel/Casino. On her days off, she cleaned houses, bringing home about $275 a week.

During this period in the 1960s and 1970s, the pinnacle of Las Vegas’s hotel-casino popularity, Local 226 was run by Al Bramlett, who made a cozy deal with the Mafia. Bramlett recruited workers from out of state who would accept pay just above the minimum wage. In return, he won union recognition from the owners and a “sweetheart” contract that made him a rich man, with an impressive house and swimming pool in the best neighborhood.

Las Vegas was now packaging entertainment for the masses and, with theme hotels ranging from Egyptian pyramids to Roman temples, drew 30 million tourists a year. But Bramlett’s kingdom began to crumble when Howard Hughes, billionaire entrepreneur, began buying Las Vegas real estate and building his own hotels on the condition that the city administration force the mob out of town. In 1979, Al Bramlett was found dead in the desert, shot in the head and chest.

A Sea Change for Local 226

The “old boy” leadership of Local 226 was just marking time when in 1984 the hotel owners formed a common front in negotiations and broke a city-wide strike by bringing in scab labor. Many owners settled after a few months, but the Culinary Workers lost six major hotels and were close to collapse. In 1987 Jim Arnold, a senior union official, finally challenged the old regime. Arnold ran for union president and won on a platform of bringing democracy to the union. As a result of his management, mob influence has been eliminated, and union officials are considered incorruptible.

Arnold’s introduction to labor came when he was 13 and working as an apprentice sheet-metal worker. Later, as a valet and then bellman at two hotels, Arnold, who is white, recognized the increasing importance of color and ethnicity in union membership. At the next election, Canty, already known as a fiery leader on picket lines, was urged to run for a trustee seat, and she and most of the other reformers were swept in. In 1990 she was drafted to run for president and won. (Her third three-year term ends in 1999.) “I didn’t realize how powerful I was until politicians started phoning me,” she says.

One of the union’s most notable achievements is the development of the union’s training schools, particularly for the advancement of women. One school focuses on potential leadership and trains workers to become shop stewards, the official representatives of the union at each hotel-casino. Another school, located in a federal housing project, accepts women regardless of their educational or language abilities and trains them in hotel housekeeping.

Beginning in 1988, after Margaret Elardi and her sons bought the 15-story Frontier hotel-casino complex just before the old union contract expired, the union faced a grueling test. Instead of bargaining in good faith as required by law, the Elardis broke many provisions of the National Labor Relations Act, and the National Labor Relations Board found them guilty of unfair labor practices. The Elardis reduced salaries drastically and abolished seniority rules. When they stopped contributing to the union’s pension fund, the Ninth Circuit of the U.S. Federal courts ordered that payments be resumed. After making a partial payment, the Elardis once again stopped contributing to the fund. The Frontier strike lasted for six years until the hotel was sold at the end of 1997 to a new owner who will accept union representation. Did the lengthy battle depress Canty? “You can’t let one hotel beat you,” she says.

Culinary Workers, the fastest growing local in the country, has almost tripled its membership in the last decade, to about 43,000. Most of its members are women; 35 percent are Hispanic, and African-Americans and Asian-Americans are also well represented. Canty’s successes reflect a new phenomenon among unions belonging to the AFL-CIO, which aims to revive its dwindling membership by concentrating on organizing women and boosting them to leadership positions. AFL-CIO membership is currently half of what it was 40 years ago. This is largely due to the virtual abandonment of organizing campaigns and to the determination of many corporations to break the unions that represent their workers, following the example set by President Reagan when he destroyed the air traffic controllers’ union.

In the face of such monolithic opposition, Canty only stands taller. “She sets no limits as to what she can accomplish,” suggests staff organizer Julie Pearlman. And she never coddles her organizers. “I tell them I came from nothing. If I can do it, you can do it too,” Canty says. “If someone tells me they haven’t time to attend a rally, I tell them I always found time when I was raising 10 children.” Tough as she may be, the door to her office is never closed. Reverting to Alabama folksiness when a woman member complains about the possible loss of funeral benefits through a technicality, Canty drapes an arm around her shoulder and assures her, “Don’t fret, dahlin’. We’ll bury you as big and black as you are.”

Lawrence Lader, author of 11 books mainly on abortion rights and family planning, was founding chair of the National Abortion Rights Action League (NARAL) in 1969, and now heads Abortion Rights Mobilization.

on the issues - 47
Where women are concerned, 1997 was a particularly schizoid year: You might sum it up with the old saw, “When it’s good, it’s very very good, but when it’s bad it’s horrid!” There will be plenty of candidates for Best Actress and Best Supporting Actress Oscars, as opposed to the 1970s, a whole decade in which the pickings were so slim several critics’ groups lodged a protest. But generally, anyone who thought the extraordinary line-up of good women’s roles in 1996 portended great things to come will have been sadly disappointed as 1997 unspooled one male-stuffed and male-oriented movie after another. Whether it’s the early life of the Dalai Lama and his retinue of monks (Martin Scorsese’s *Kundun*) or the hunky rebel slave in Steven Spielberg’s *Amistad*, or just the boys-will-be-boys cops and robbers of *Donnie Brasco* and *L.A. Confidential*, this was definitely a guy year. And I’m not even talking about the testosterone-pumped thrillers and special-effects extravaganzas that are now routine fare for male teenagers. Men in groups, gays out of closets, Woody Allen as a one-man scourge of women as wives, Jews, analysts; there was even a mini-trend featuring men who ditch and humiliate beautiful and sexually hungry women.

In Alan Rudolph’s *Afterglow*, Nick Nolte and the perpetually enchanting Julie Christie play a husband and wife who have sworn off sex since the tragic disappearance of their daughter. In a modus vivendi that is somewhat unbalanced (presumably because she had the child with another man), he can have flings, while she nurses her grudge; but when she finally comes to him in the night, he turns away. Earlier in the year, *In the Company of Men* offered a disturbing portrait of a man who deliberately cons a vulnerable deaf woman (beautifully played by Stacy Edwards) into loving him so he can reject her in the most excruciating manner possible. A cutting film about corporate ruthlessness, sexism and male savagery, *Company* was squirm-inducing and cruel as well. In the absorbing, if implausible, *Good Will Hunting*, Matt Damon gives a star performance as a mathematics prodigy from the wrong side of Boston who is taken under the wing of an unorthodox therapist, played by Robin Williams. The lovely and extravagantly talented Minnie Driver plays the girl who finally breaks through his defenses—only to be left in the cold when she has the courage to tell him she loves him.

The guy thing is between Damon and Williams, just as the emotional kick in *In & Out* is in the daring coming-out scene, when Tom Selleck declares his “orientation” to Kevin Kline. Well, okay, that’s the story, and witty gay playwright Paul Rudnick (the pseudonymous Libby Gelman-Waxner, faux matronly reviewer for *Premiere*) has deliberately written a screenplay that is meant to charm mainstream Americans out of their homophobia. But does Kline have to discover his gayness not only preposterously late in life (he’s a middle-aged schoolteacher) but at the altar, as would-be-bride Joan Cusack waits and wilts in distress?

Anne Heche, notorious as Ellen DeGeneres’s main squeeze, had what might have been a juicy role in *Wag the Dog*. Barry Levinson’s politics-and-media satire from a script by Hilary Henkin and David Mamet. But she was reduced to a cipher in a movie that, in typical Mamet style, reserved all its good roles for men. The story, about a group of White House handlers, a sexually indiscreet president, and an orgy of media manipulation and damage control that almost ends in World War III, has some very funny moments, but the movie is as disturbingly slick and cynical as the image-mad media it purports to send up. David Mamet (*Glengarry Glen Ross*) is of course the poet laureate of men in groups, and the bonding here is between Robert De Niro as the spin doctor and Dustin Hoffman as a Hollywood producer who orchestrates the De Mille-size diversion. Heche, whose real-life sexuality presumably made everybody nervous, is given no personality or desirability: she is even rejected, at close quarters, by the ominorous sexual predator played by Woody Harrelson. And in *Donnie Brasco*, the same enormously talented actress played the thankless role of the out-of-the-loop wife who stays home and agonizes while her husband (Johnny Depp) is into mob fun and games.

With the notable exception of the women of Henry James (reviewed in the last issue), a few others in movies I’ll come to shortly, we spent the whole year in the company of men and male fantasies, yet—most disturbing of all—there was hardly a voice raised in protest!

*Kiss the Girls*, a sleazy serial-murderer movie that should have been slapped with a class action suit for its abuse of women, came and went without a murmur of revulsion at the way the murderer’s baroque torture methods are gleefully and lovingly portrayed. Morgan Freeman and Ashley Judd, two fine actors, are used in a calculated way to give class to a project
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that is pure, shoddy exploitation. Why no outcry? Have we become inured to abuse, or only sensitive to it when it shouts at us from the tabloid front page? (And even then, does the battery of women by high-paid athletes come in a ho-hum second to the biting of a male ear and the throttling of a male umpire?)

Woody Allen's Deconstructing Harry reaches some sort of nadir in ill-tempered misogyny and putrid self-absorption. We are asked to believe that Harry, a writer played by a wizened, unappetizing 63-year-old Allen (never a dreamboat but now an eyesore) is madly desired and/or adored by a host of women, ranging from Julia Louis-Dreyfus and Judy Davis to Elisabeth Shue and Demi Moore, who—with the exception of the vanilla-beauty Shue—are portrayed as such harpies that he is justified in fleeing them on sight. A sort of Stardust Memories revisited which makes that pretentious descent into misanthropy look winning by comparison, this nasty and jagged work reeks of desperation. With a packet of F-words, and black and Asian hookers thrown into the stew, Allen appears to be trying to reach a younger audience. Marriage and Jewishness are conflated into one institutional female-identified evil, and we keep wondering: Is he aware of how he comes across? The self-deprecating insights into male egomania are meant to offset the self-justifications, but the proof is in the pudding: Mean-spirited caricatures of others confirm his vision of himself as a privileged artist and god's gift to the undeserving female sex.

A number of women began to boycott Woody Allen films after the Soon-Yi affair. They saw his seduction of Mia Farrow's underage adopted daughter as a crime, even though he didn't. Indeed, it was precisely his strategy of unaccountability—claiming immunity on the technicality that he wasn't married to Farrow—that made his crime all the more offensive. In real life, as in Hannah and Her Sisters as well as Deconstructing Harry, he allowed himself to enjoy the fantasy of indirect incest (mothers, sisters, children) without labelling it as such. Ever since Crimes and Misdemeanors, he's been asking whether you can commit a crime and get away with it. My own feeling is that the new film answers that question in the negative.

Allen's post-release marriage to Soon-Yi (making Mia Farrow his mother-in-law) will probably not win him back any of his once ardent, now disaffected, women viewers. How the nuptials will play out in his art—whether she will be his muse or his nemesis—remains to be seen.

Most good women's roles emerge, not from Hollywood, but from Europe, from independent cinema, or from marginal and non-mainstream sources. Some of the entries in the Banner Year for Women of 1996 were Fargo, Shine, The English Patient, Mother, and Lone Star—all from independents—or films driven by one of the handful of women stars with producer clout: Goldie Hawn and company in The First Wives Club and Barbra Streisand's The Mirror Has Two Faces.

Except for the amazing Titanic, with a whole line-up of interesting women culminating in the strongminded and goddess-like Kate Winslet, almost all the bolder women's roles of 1997 are in independent movies. One of the best, and one of the few films to deal with issues of masculinity and femininity in a truly modern way, was Chasing Amy, Kevin Smith's provocative—and passionate—love story about a virginal young man (Ben Affleck) and a lipstick lesbian (Joey Lauren Adams) with more sexual experience than he can handle. Newcomer Adams is a delight, a breathy, thoughtful heroine with sly humor and full-throated emotion. The characters actually talk, make tough choices and life decisions, and ponder with humor and nervousness a world in which men no longer have a monopoly as hunters and gatherers in the sexual arena but where the double standard tenaciously persists.

Eve's Bayou, a stunning first film by black actress Kasi Lemmons, tells the story of a 10-year-old girl's awakening to the harsh facts of adult life during...continued on page 58
The Cultural Politics of Fur
by Julia B. Emberley
Cornell University Press, 1998

This past October, The New York Times announced that fashion had resurrected fur. Look around and you'll see it, too: the fur ads, the glossies—Vogue, Elle, Harper's Bazaar; store windows, catalogs, society pages. It does indeed appear that fur is back.

"The anti-fur movement had its moment and spent itself," opined scholar Julia Emberley when she was quoted in the Times article. Commenting on fashion's revival of fur, she blamed the anti-fur movement: "Consumers have become cynical because the movement presented itself in a very morally self-righteous way. Many consumers feel that it is effectively an issue of consumer rights."

Emberley, author of The Cultural Politics of Fur (which is more accurately the British and Canadian politics of fur), elaborates on this position in her book. After years of hearing from animal advocates that "fur is dead," the fashion industry, driven by profits not ethics, of course, is seeking to reestablish the notion that fur is glamorous. "Heroin chic" has suffered a backlash, and fashion is now offering a revived hidebound fad. Pelting us with it, so to speak, "choice." As they do so, they borrow language from the abortion rights movement as they proudly declare that fur is about "choice." As they do so, they borrow language from the abortion rights movement to legitimize conspicuous consumption.

Perhaps fur's new exoticism is directly connected to its bloody history. Maybe the message of fur is not only "I, as a consumer, have the right to make a choice about what I wear," but also "I have the right to have others killed on my behalf." Maybe fur is back precisely because the message that fur is dead has been heard and absorbed by fashion. But before we accept this thought—the complete amorality of consumers—let's consider other explanations.

Perhaps it wasn't effective for anti-fur activists to link their campaign to the issue of dead animals. Was the pitch to women on the street so confrontational that consumers could not separate the message from ordinary street harassment? Did the message become yet more urban pollution to ignore?

Couple that possibility with the recent financial wooing of fashion designers by the fur industry—which has spent millions of dollars to send designers, all expenses paid, to Europe to learn how to work with furs. The fur industry is sophisticated in finding the weak spots in the fashion world and manipulating them: young designers; the constant need to feed consumers something new; advertising dollars. Fad is fundamental to fashion, and this season, the newest must-have status symbol is clearly fur.

It's harder to determine if fur is back to stay. There's certainly an upsurge in fashion coverage and media attention right now. Fur sales are increasing—from $987 million in 1991 to $1.25 billion last year—but it is yet to be seen if they will rebound to the 1987 high of $1.8 billion. Since most of the companies in the fur industry are not publicly owned, they don't have to post their earnings. Significantly, a number of fur salons have closed in the last decade. And anti-fur activists have changed their tactics. Their confrontational actions now target stores rather than individuals, and their aim is to disrupt business. Civil disobedience strategies include activists chaining themselves to the doors of fur-selling department stores.

If fur is being revived as acceptable, even enviable fashion, then we must ask: Did the anti-fur movement fail to get its message out? Did we get it out only to have it usurped? ("Fur is dead. So what? It looks good.") Or is faddishness so compelling that activism will never prevail against the cultural pressures to imitate the celebrity look?

Emberley sees the anti-fur movement as an attempt by alienated middle-class whites to join, on their own terms, the progressive groups that emerged in the 1970s and 1980s.

Emberley's Cultural Politics of Fur places itself squarely in this area of the contested meaning of fur. The strength of her book is that it shows the complexity of the meaning of fur and how deeply it is part of our cultural history. We all know that fur is associated with wealth, and Emberley examines this history. In the Middle Ages, legislation in Britain, even now a bastion of class-consciousness, regulated which fabrics could be worn by the nobility, the clergy, and the peasantry.

"This legislation was meant not so much to curb extravagance as to preserve certain commodities for the wealthy; ensuring that symbolic displays of wealth were reserved to the property-owning classes," Emberley writes. In 1355 prostitutes were forbidden to wear fur. And wearing pelts became one way for aristocrats and bourgeois women to create "a symbolic code of female economic power that could be misread as identical with the economic and political realities of their husband's material wealth and social power." In the recent past, fur-wearing women were seen as symbols of their husband's financial success. Emberley tries to show that for women in earlier centuries fur-wearing was an attempt to negotiate not a reflective status vis-a-vis a man, but their own. Today, of course, that is also true. Modern advertising often suggests that a dress-for-succes wardrobe for any professional—female or male—is incomplete without fur, and women are urged to purchase their own.

Fur is also a sexual fetish, and Emberley examines this association as well. Fur provides tactile sensations, as well as feelings of mastery and control. Emberley proposes that "the fur-clad white woman fetishizes the fear of a masculine loss of power and authority." She points out that in the 1960s the British
anti-fur group Lynx used fetishistic pictures of fur-clad female tyrants in ads to portray fur-wearing women as indifferent to suffering. Thus whether she is a fetish fixation or a reprehensible symbol, “the fur-bearing woman, as a class unto herself, collectively [appears] as a cold and cruel monstrosity, an accessory to the crime, who would wear her capacity for terror and violence on her sleeve.”

When I first read Emberley’s book, I was disturbed by it for several reasons. To begin with, it’s burdened by a dense, academic style and long, convoluted sentences. Moreover, Emberley is rather careless in handling the reality of the anti-fur movement. She’s quick to damn the movement for ignoring it has on the lives of Native American trappers. She reminds readers that, “For northern indigenous peoples, fur trapping represents one means of material support, as well as symbolic tie to traditional ways of life.”

Emberley sees the anti-fur movement as an attempt by alienated middle-class whites to join, on their own terms, the progressive groups that emerged in the 1970s and 1980s. But this is a limited analysis. Emberley focuses on one British organization and makes it representative of all anti-fur politics. From this perspective, activists appear reactionary or moralistic, and the movement looks naive in its attempts to use the fashion industry to critique the fashion industry.

One would never know from reading her book that feminists have protested both the killing of animals for fur and sexism in the anti-fur movement. Yet we have. One would never know that animal defense organizations led by women—such as Friends of Animals—have pioneered nonsexist ads, for example: “Get a feel for fur. Slam your fingers in a car door.” And one would never know that there are Native Americans who protest the fur business and its effects on indigenous peoples.

The Native Animal Brotherhood has argued for many years that the fur industry is anti-traditional and that it was a primary force behind the historical subjugation of native peoples. They argue that the industry undermines the economics of the native environment by killing many small carnivorous animals rather than one large herbivore. (I learned of the Native Animal Brotherhood in the space of two phone calls and a few hours. This group is based in Canada, where the author resides. Emberley began her book in 1992, yet in all this time she has apparently not discovered its existence.)

As I reread Emberley’s book, I began to wonder if she herself is anti-fur but disturbed by the anti-fur movement’s limited approaches in the 1980s. Her book would then be an attempt to increase the sophistication of the anti-fur movement, to show us how completely fur is embedded in culture.

Emberley reminds us that in northern Canada the First Nation’s lack of access to organized labor complicates the goal of eliminating the trapping of animals. She examines texts that “not only challenge the idea that the fur trade is a historical component of indigenous people’s lives, but also question whether the trade, in its present reality, would be necessary if Dene and Inuit women and men had access to organized labor.” If she had incorporated the efforts of the Native Animal Brotherhood in her book, her arguments would have been even stronger. Emberley mobilizes British history, film studies, literary studies and colonial studies to demonstrate how many-layered are the texts of fur, so that wealth, libido, and the “femme” as fur-wearer all coalesce. The “symbolic capital invested in this figure of the fur-clad bourgeoisie woman” is so enormous that anti-fur groups haven’t been able to let go of it even in their own ads.

For Emberley, fur has multiple meanings, but the anti-fur movement has only one representation: disturbing, dated advertisements from Britain. These ads never represented the entirety of the anti-fur movement, yet she grants them near-legendary status. In doing so, she freezes the anti-fur movement rather than allowing it a dynamic and changing nature. She does to the animal defense movement what she portrays it as doing: treating its target as one-dimensional.

Students of culture such as Emberley tell us that fur and the anti-fur movement are never solely about the animals. Well and good. Who would disagree with that? And it is important for us to recognize just how freighted the issue of fur is. But the issue of fur is never not about the animals, either. Can the determinedly fashionable fur-wearing woman be completely oblivious of the association between fur and the animals who die to provide it? Living, active rabbits, beavers, muskrats, foxes, raccoons, minks, lynx, otters, and other assorted fur-bearing animals are never mentioned in Emberley’s book.

Does this mean that the animals’ experience of fur is not part of “the cultural politics of fur”? Even if culture and fashion can neutralize the reality that fur is dead, what about the process of killing? Behind the trappings of fashion are leg-hold traps, anal electrocution, and neck-breaking. What Emberley proves, perhaps unintentionally, is that the barbarous methods of turning fur into fashion are so explosive—fur consumers of fur as well as consumers of culture—that they can’t circulate freely. Thus like the fur-bearing animals themselves, the meaning of fur remains trapped in a human context. Animal defenders are left to gnaw at the steel traps of cultural discourse.

In Brief
The Wrath of Angels: The American Abortion War
by Jim Risen and Judy Thomas
Basic Books, a subsidiary of Perseus Books

Written by two of this nation's top reporters covering abortion, Wrath of Angels is at once a substantial contribution to the historical record and a painful disappointment. While the authors brilliantly recount the build-up, in the late 1980s and early 90s, of the so-called rescue movement—the combative mass blockades of abortion clinics and of women's health facilities that included abortion among their services—they miss the most damaging part of the campaign: the devastating strategy of covertly exerting pressure "where they live" on abortion providers, their associates, and their patients, and the long-term effects this has on the individuals involved.

Wrath of Angels omits completely this domestic terrorism: the insidious, invidious nastiness that is part of the daily life of abortion providers targeted by hardcore zealots. As one of the most heavily targeted abortion providers in the country, it is something that I have been dealing with week in and week out since 1989. It was then that the anti-abortion activists developed this new tactic, and a cadre of career fanatics began trying to put my small Florida clinics out of business by making, not only me and my family, but our staff and their families, and often, our patients, the targets of actions designed to disrupt, even destroy, our personal lives.

Such covert actions include canceling credit cards after gleaning information from stolen garbage; giving numerous fraudulent notices of changes of address; telephone jamming; electronic surveillance; making false complaints to government agencies; license-plate tracking of patients, followed by mailings to their homes; and harassment of clinic landlords and neighbors, of judges and representatives of the media. Clinics around the country are targeted in this way, all the time.

Yet in reading Wrath of Angels, one is left with the impression that neither Jim Risen, who reports on the U.S. Supreme Court for the Los Angeles Times, nor his co-author, Judy Thomas, of the Kansas City Star, quite believes that any of this really happens. If they do know better, and both writers are well-versed in the abortion wars, why do they leave it out?

Thomas, who was formerly with the Wichita Eagle, came to the abortion issue during the 1991 "Siege of Wichita," when Operation Rescue, in a __continued on page 61__

In Brief
The Feminist Dollar: The Wise Woman's Buying Guide
by Phyllis A. Katz and Margaret Katz

I'm in aisle three of my local supermarket debating whether to buy a Snickers bar. Snickers, made by Mars, is on the no-no list, not because of its impact on the waistline but because of Mars's employment policies on women. A wiser choice for that candy bar, apparently, would be one of Hershey's; Hershey gives its female employees a much better deal, including a full year of job-guaranteed parental leave. According to The Feminist Dollar: The Wise Woman's Buying Guide, Mars, which also produces Uncle Ben's rice and M&Ms, is not a female-friendly company, ranking as it does below other food corporations in pay equality between men and women, benefits plans, and the number of women in the upper levels of management.

The Feminist Dollar analyses how 400 companies treat female employees. Written by mother-daughter team Phyllis A. Katz, Ph.D., an editor at the Journal of Social Issues and a former professor at New York University, and Margaret Katz, a writing consultant, the guide suggests that women, who account for 80 percent of all consumer spending, should "vote" with their wallets, and support only those businesses that have equitable gender employment policies, while shunning those companies that don't.

Such economic clout can be used effectively, as anti-abortion groups demonstrated when, by threatening to boycott drug companies planning to market the abortifacient RU-486, they successfully hindered its release in the United States. Nike, too, felt consumer anger when its exploitative manufacturing practices in the developing world were disclosed. "The guide is meant to be used for all your purchases. Take it grocery shopping, consult it before buying a car, a computer, or an airline ticket," the authors recommend. Indeed, the book is easy to use and has a comprehensive list of product names and companies. The next time you are shopping for a car, for example, note that the guide, which reviews eight automakers, recommends only General Motors and Toyota. GM, in fact, ranks first among the 400 companies surveyed for its family-friendly benefits: job-guaranteed, two-year parental or family emergency leave; and flex-time, job-sharing, and work-at-home options.

Volkswagen, Chrysler, Mitsubishi Motors, Nissan, Ford, and Honda of America all receive below-average ratings. As do other household-name companies: Sharp Electronics, United Parcel Service, U.S. Life, American Insurance Group, ITT Sheraton, Weston Hotel, Bear Steam, and Fidelity Investment.

Among the big-name drug companies, Johnson & Johnson (TYLENOL, Hibmanal, Band-Aid), Merck (prescription drugs), and Procter & Gamble (NyQuil, Vicks, Pepto-Bismol) score above the industry average. Those that rank near the bottom include Carter-Wallace (First Response pregnancy tests and Trojan condoms) and Unilever (Q-Tips, Vaseline).

The Feminist Dollar offers valuable insights into sexism in the workplace. But without any accompanying media campaign, will corporations realize why sales are dropping off, if in fact, they do decline? And will Americans (men, one hopes, as well as women) abjure brand loyalty and personal preferences in order to further the cause of women's equality? Those who care certainly will. But even if American companies are kept in the dark about what is hitting their bottom lines, women can rest easier knowing that they are championing those firms that are female-friendly.

Reviewed by Lisa Vincenti, a writer and editor based in New York City.
On the Issues for a Deeper Conversation

It's a rapidly changing world out there. And as you evolve to keep up, so too, do we. You've probably observed that we've revamped our appearance. And in upcoming issues, you'll notice developments in our content. Now we need to know about you and the issues that most concern you. Tell us what you feel passionate about, what your opinions are.

1. Your current choice of roommate (check up to two):
   - Married
   - Separated
   - Divorced
   - Widowed
   - Single as a matter of principle
   - Single through circumstance
   - Living together; not married
   - Living with a (non-sexual) roommate
   - Living in a gay relationship

2. How you nurture (check any that apply):
   - Number of children you have (circle the figure that applies):
     - One
     - Two
     - Three
     - Four
     - Five
     - Six or more
   - I would like to have had a child, but did/could not
   - I'm trying now
   - I'm seeing a fertility specialist
   - I've adopted children
   - I'm a lesbian and my partner underwent artificial insemination
   - I'm a foster parent
   - I'm a surrogate parent/aunt to the kids of friends/relatives
   - I never wanted kids
   - Being a grandmother is a lot more fun, and less work
   - I live with companion animal(s)

3. What religion means for you (check any that apply):
   - Religion is an important part of my life
   - I attend services regularly
   - I attend services on high holy days
   - I find my religion comforting
   - I pray regularly
   - I pray when I'm in trouble or need
   - I believe in heaven and hell
   - My prayers have been answered
   - I donate to my place of worship
   - I might be more religious if women were permitted to play a more of a role in formal religion
   - Religion is not relevant to my life
   - I agree with Marx that "religion is the opiate of the masses"
   - I am spiritual, not religious

4. The religion you were raised in (check any that apply):
   - Protestant; please state denomination:
   - Catholic
   - Jewish
   - Muslim
   - Buddhist
   - Evangelical
   - Born-again
   - Other; please specify:

5. Health issues that concern you most (check up to four):
   - Alcoholism
   - Arthritis
   - Breast cancer
   - Cancer
   - Diabetes
   - Drug addiction
   - Finding good health care
   - Heart disease
   - HIV/AIDS
   - Infertility
   - Losing health insurance
   - Mental health
   - Not being able to pay for health care
   - Osteoporosis
   - Other; please specify:

6. Your views on alternative medicine (check up to two):
   - I'm delighted we now have an alternative to allopathic medicine
   - I prefer and trust my mainstream physician(s)
   - I only use alternative practitioners
   - I switched to alternative therapists because conventional physicians couldn't help
   - I use both mainstream and alternative therapists, depending on the condition
   - I've never been to an alternative practitioner, but I use natural supplements
   - I'm a physician
   - I'm an alternative therapist

7. Sports versus couch potato (check any that apply):
   - I'd rather watch than work up a sweat
   - I'd rather read a good book
   - I work out daily
   - I exercise for my health
12. Your views on domestic issues (check any that apply):
( ) I am pro/con affirmative action (choose one)
( ) Justice should be blind, but is sometimes/usually/always carried out in racist/sexist/classist/ageist ways (circle any that apply)
( ) Safe sex should/not be taught in schools (choose one)
( ) Safe-sex/condom advertising is/is not vital in an HIV/AIDS era (choose one)
( ) Our immigration laws are as they should be/not strict enough/too strict (choose one)
( ) Police brutality is/is not an issue today (choose one)
( ) Our environmental laws are fine as they are/not strict enough (choose one)
( ) Global warming is a concern today/too much hot air (choose one)
( ) Government intrusion in our lives is a concern/at a necessary level (choose one)
( ) Privacy snoops in the computer age are/are not a concern (choose one)
( ) I believe in equality of opportunity, not necessarily equality of results

13. Your views on welfare (check up to two):
( ) People in need deserve it
( ) It's far too frequently abused
( ) Strict limitations are essential
( ) Workfare seems a better way to go
( ) I would never take it
( ) I have taken it
( ) There must be a less humiliating alternative

14. Your views on abortion (check any that apply):
( ) There should be abortion on demand
( ) Without legal abortion, deadly backstreet abortions would return
( ) Without legal abortion, I would have had an unwanted child
( ) Without legal abortion, I would have given birth to a disabled child
( ) Accessible, legal abortion is necessary for women's freedom
( ) It should not be used as birth control
( ) It should be banned after the first trimester
( ) It should only be permitted for certain medical or psychological reasons
( ) It should be banned; it's murder
( ) Federal funding should not be used to pay for it
( ) I had a backstreet abortion, in the days when there wasn't an alternative
( ) I had one, and I'm not sorry
( ) I had one, and I regret it
( ) It's against my religious beliefs

15. Pastimes you enjoy (check any that apply):
( ) Creating art of any kind
( ) Crafts
( ) Cultural events
( ) Dining out
( ) Entertaining at home
( ) Gardening
( ) Hiking
( ) Listening to music
( ) Movies/videos
( ) Reading
( ) Shopping
16. Kind(s) of music you enjoy (Check any that apply):
- Alternative
- Baroque
- Blues
- Classical
- Choral
- Country
- Classic Rock and Roll
- Folk
- Gospel
- Hip Hop
- Jazz
- New Age
- Opera
- Rap
- Rhythm and Blues
- Techno/Ambient/Jungle
- Top 40
- World Music

17. What you would save first in a fire (assuming loved ones and animals were safe); number in order of importance to you:
- Antiques
- Appliances
- Books
- Car
- Clothes
- Computer
- Furniture
- Furs
- Heirlooms
- Jewelry
- My own creations
- Photographs/mementos
- Sound system
- Sports equipment
- Important documents, records

18. Please indicate which of the topics below you would like to see MORE of in OTI in the future (check all that apply):
- Activism
- Alternative health
- Arts and culture
- Cultural criticism
- Current events
- Economics and finance
- Environment and ecology
- Essays and humor
- History
- Human rights
- International affairs
- Law and legal issues
- Lifestyles
- Literary criticism
- Medicine, health, and wellness
- Personalities
- Personal meditations
- Philosophical theory
- Political analysis and commentary
- Popular culture
- Profiles
- Religion
- Reviews
- Sexuality and relationships
- Spirituality
- Sports and physical activities

19. Please indicate which of the topics below you would like to see LESS of in OTI in the future (check all that apply):
- Activism
- Alternative health
- Arts and culture
- Cultural criticism
- Current events
- Economics and finance
- Environment and ecology
- Essays and humor
- History
- Human rights
- International affairs
- Law and legal issues
- Lifestyles
- Literary criticism
- Medicine, health, and wellness
- Personalities
- Personal meditations
- Philosophical theory
- Political analysis and commentary
- Popular culture
- Profiles
- Religion
- Reviews
- Sexuality and relationships
- Spirituality
- Sports and physical activities

20. Your level of education (check up to two):
- Did not graduate from high school
- High school graduate
- Some college, or other post-high school education
- College graduate
- Master's degree(s) or equivalent
- Doctorate(s)
( ) Some post-graduate study
( ) Degree(s) in a profession (e.g., medicine, law)
( ) Plan to return to school

21. How you support yourself (check any that apply):
( ) Professional
( ) Top management
( ) Middle management
( ) Academic/teaching
( ) Creative/arts
( ) Health care of any kind
( ) Clerical
( ) Sales
( ) Service
( ) Sports/fitness
( ) Construction
( ) Transportation
( ) Factory
( ) Employed part-time
( ) Job sharing
( ) Self-employed
( ) Unemployed
( ) Unemployed but hopeful
( ) I receive government aid
( ) I have a trust fund
( ) Supported by partner or family
( ) Pension

22. Your approximate household income (from all sources) before taxes:
( ) Less than $8,000
( ) $8,000 - $14,999
( ) $15,000 - $24,999
( ) $25,000 - $34,999
( ) $35,000 - $44,999
( ) $45,000 - $54,999
( ) $55,000 - $69,999
( ) $70,000 - $99,999
( ) $100,000 or more

23. Your primary residence (check up to two):
( ) I own my house/co-op/condo free and clear
( ) I have a mortgage
( ) I'm renting
( ) I rent space in someone else's home
( ) I share with roommate(s)
( ) I live in a dormitory
( ) I live with my parents
( ) I live in a specialized community
( ) I live in an institution

24. Secondary residence(s)/real estate (check any that apply):
( ) A vacation home
( ) A weekend home
( ) A time-share
( ) A sleep-in camper/boat/recreational vehicle
( ) I own land
( ) I own one or more dwellings for income
( ) I wish

25. Your age group:
( ) Under 18
( ) 18 - 25
( ) 26 - 35
( ) 36 - 45
( ) 46 - 55
( ) 56 - 65
( ) 66 - 75
( ) Over 75

26. Primary reason(s) for reading OTI (Check up to two):
( ) It gives me the unexpected
( ) It makes me think
( ) It challenges me
( ) I learn about issues that I couldn't learn about elsewhere
( ) It takes up controversial issues
( ) It outrages me
( ) It makes me zone out and puts me to sleep at bedtime
( ) Other; please specify

27. How you discovered OTI (choose one):
( ) Its cover caught my eye
( ) I was browsing at the newsstand and it looked interesting/different
( ) Through a friend
( ) At a conference; specify which/when
( ) At my school; specify which/when
( ) A gift subscription

28. How much of each issue do you read (choose one):
( ) Cover to cover
( ) Selected articles that appeal to me
( ) When the pix/graphics catch my eye
( ) Browse through it, but read little

29. Please list other magazines you subscribe to:

As the law-makers must surely have anticipated, the legislation has compelled welfare mothers to enter the paid workforce—ready or not.

Statistics show just how big a hit working mothers took last year: Two-thirds of part-time, year-round employees are female. It is this type of work that mothers of young children are most likely to seek and find.

Economist Chris Tilly, co-author of the just-released book Glass Ceilings and Bottomless Pits: Women's Work, Women's Poverty (South End Press, Boston) reports that the number of women in this category who earned $20,000 or less jumped by 356,000 in 1996, while the number of those who earned more than $20,000 rose by a meager 31,000, an increase of slightly more than two percent.

The group for whom the gender gap widened most was the same one that is most vulnerable to employment discrimination and exploitation: African-American women in their prime early childbearing years, ages 16 to 24. Historically, these women earned slightly more than African-American men their age (an indication of the employment and educational disadvantages the men still experience, rather than a measure of how well-off the women were). In 1996, their median weekly pay dropped to 94.9 percent of that of their male contemporaries.

If pressed, the drafters of the welfare law would no doubt state that the drop in women's median wages is an unintended consequence. Yeah! And that guy with the gray gloves wanted a copy of my résumé. Just as I believe I know what that man's question truly meant, from the context and from his tone and demeanor, I also believe I know what the underlying premise of the new welfare bill is: If mothers with young children become financially desperate enough and are coerced by local governments, many will agree to perform any work at any wage.

Any doubts I had about my theory were assuaged by a conference last spring at Columbia University. "Welfare to Work: Can the Business-Government Partnership Succeed?" featured Jonathan Tisch, chief executive officer of Loews Hotels; Herman Cain, president of Godfather's Pizza chain, and Janet M. Tully, director of Marriott International's community employment and training programs.

With Tisch nodding in frequent agreement, Cain spoke as a representative of the restaurant industry, explaining to the crowd of academics and policy wonks that his industry "was delighted at the welfare bill because its turnover rate of 100 percent three times each year left it in need of a constant supply of potential employees." He did not provide the median wage of a restaurant employee or a baker of pizzas.

Tully was the person who really caught the audience's attention, however. Beaming with enthusiasm and using only the most gracious language to refer to the participants, Tully described in glowing terms the success of the Marriott program that recruited welfare recipients and trained them full-time for six weeks before offering the graduates a job. She explained that the program will be expanded to take advantage of the section of the welfare bill that permits states to provide income subsidies or "hiring incentives for potential employers."

The trainees are supported by their welfare checks while they go through the program, she said. In addition to on-the-job instruction—studying how to clean a hotel room for six unpaid weeks—they take such courses as "Giving and Accepting Criticism," which are part of the basic attitudinal skills curriculum.

Now, if I had been a participant in Tully's program way back when, I might have objected loudly to cleaning hotel rooms for a large corporation for six weeks for no compensation. Indeed, I might have flunked my attitude course.

In fact, when I was confronted with Mr. Graygloves' inquiry, I hopped out of the stopped car, began to scream invectives, and slammed the door. And right now, I am wondering to whom I should direct my shouts about the new welfare laws. Will you join me at the Marriott? Or should we grab a bite at Godfather's Pizza?

Rita Henley Jensen is a prizewinning journalist and an adjunct professor of journalism at Hunter College in New York City. A survivor of six years of domestic violence, she raised two daughters while on welfare and attending college. She is now working on a book about successful welfare mothers.
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FILM –continued from page 49

one fateful summer in her family’s enclave in Louisiana. Eve (a ferociously impressive Jurnee Smolletti) competes with her older sister for the attentions of their charismatic father, a doctor played by Samuel L. Jackson, whom Eve discovers in the arms of another woman. The extended Batiste family, descended from a Union soldier and the slave who saved him, occupy their own corner of the state—a Southern Gothic landscape of low-lying land, water and Spanish moss—into which Lemmons weaves images of memory and mysticism, as the workings of psychological realism and Creole Voodoo merge to determine the tragic collision that lies in store.

Standouts in a superb cast include not only the two sisters, who begin as Oedipal rivals and end as soulmates, but their competing “witch” mentors: Debbi Morgan as an aunt with the gift of sight and Diahann Carroll’s richly detailed voodoo priestess.

How to explain the short run of this riveting picture: Was it the fact that the story deals not with stereotypically funky blacks, but with a more complex middle class? Or that it focuses so intensely on a whole range of women rather than emphasizing the male consciousness, as most films (even most independent films) typically do?

As Good As It Gets, James Brooks’s strange, compelling, somewhat tortured romantic comedy, thrusts Jack Nicholson’s obsessive-compulsive writer and Helen Hunt’s harried, wisecracking waitress into an encounter that resembles a cock-fight as much as a love story. In two superb Oscar-worthy performances, Nicholson is a basket case of obnoxious clinical symptoms, and Hunt is more prepared to accept him than we are.

The winsome wry star of TV’s “Mad About You” is almost unrecognizable as the prematurely aged and tired-to-the-bone mother of an asthmatic son, a divorced woman without resources whose maternal ministrations take up every ounce of her being. What other thirty-something actress, at the point where she is poised for movie stardom, would allow herself to appear so haggard that her leading man, in a characteristic burst of non-gallantry, would tell her, truthfully, that she looked fifty! Hunt gives a performance so wrenchingly real, so generous, so lacking in star narcissism, that you’ll go anywhere she goes...even if it’s into the arms of the egoist played by Nicholson.

Gender Roles Questioned

As Good As It Gets, like Chasing Amy and In the Company of Men, asks questions about what it means to be a man, and a woman, at this stage in our liberated but uneasy lives. Another film that asked troubling questions and was mostly ignored was G.I. Jane, in which Demi Moore plays a Navy SEAL recruit. She’s gone into the program halfheartedly and for political reasons, and barely holds her own through boot camp, but having survived, she is seized with gut enthusiasm and decides to go for it. She does split-leg push-ups, shaves her head, and begins out-performing the guys, but the vision of Moore pumping iron makes audiences (including me) a little uncomfortable...the way Arnold Schwarzenegger did when he endured pregnancy and childbirth in the role-reversal comedy Junior.

At the heart of the film is the controversial and extremely timely question of whether women in the armed forces should face the same strength and speed requirements as men. G.I. Jane asks not just Demi Moore, but the audience, how far we’re prepared to go in putting women into combat roles, and asking them (or allowing them) to turn into war machines. Anne Bancroft, superb as the calculating senator who pushed “Jane” forward and now wants her out, says, “Americans aren’t ready to see women come home in body bags.” Is she wrong?

Savviest Female Role

Who would have thought that Quentin Tarantino would feature the savviest and most unexpected female role of the year! The director of such ultra-hip, male-oriented action films as Reservoir Dogs and Pulp Fiction lured Pam Grier, former star of blaxploitation pictures, out
of “retirement” to play a 44-year-old stewardess and con woman in Jackie Brown. Tarantino’s new seriocomic thriller, adapted from a novel by Elmore Leonard, thus defies not only the racial taboo but the age taboo as well. Grier is an imposing if unusually quiet (as opposed to ass-kicking) heroine, a calm center in a storm of criss-crossing and double-crossing felons, druggies, victims and opportunists (played with delicious off-center dopiness by Samuel L. Jackson, Robert De Niro, and Bridget Fonda). Grier’s gravity as Jackie has to do with a very real sense of desperation: She has a record, and she’s no spring chicken, so if she loses her last-resort job on the bargain-basement airline she uses to shuttle money and drugs into and out of Mexico, she’s got no place to go. Moreover, Grier looks real, not buff, or trying to look younger than she is, but someone with a lived-in body and life. How she works out her rescue, with the witting help of a sweetly sympathetic bail bondsman played by Robert Forster, and the unwitting help of a Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms operative played by Michael Keaton, makes for one of the few “cool” movies that’s fun for both sexes.

Role reversal, the fragmenting of lives, the two-career marriage, the questioning of marriage, the effort to combine work and love, the loss of faith in the large answers, sexual openness and confusion: All these entail psychological violence, even madness. It’s no wonder, then, that so many films escape from the firestorm altogether. Yet the questions seem to hover in the atmosphere, as invisible but ubiquitous as carbon dioxide, applying pressure, causing anxiety. You could even see Woody Allen’s hysteria as not just the sexual and artistic panic of an aging reprobate but as backlash against the demands of women—to be treated as subjects, as human beings. Is that really as impossible as movies sometimes make it seem?

Molly Haskell is the author of Holding My Own in No Man’s Land (Oxford University Press), and From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies (University of Chicago Press).
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STASIO - continued from page 23

Between the depression and the danger, the fear and the futility, what makes these women go through this kind of hell, anyway? Few of them receive the glory accorded CNN’s Christiane Amanpour, or her salary. And even Amanpour, who is invariably found in the world’s worst trouble spots, ignores her star status and gets into the story so intensely she often forgets she hasn’t changed her clothes in a week.

“It’s the thrill—and don’t let anyone tell you differently,” says Lindsay Miller, a senior editor for National Public Radio, who was sent to Bosnia by the U.S. Department of Information to train young Bosnian reporters in the techniques of journalism and in the workings of a free press. “I’m fifty years old, and I felt like a new kid, myself,” she says. “The excitement, the adventure can act like an addictive drug. I saw it in the young ones, the way they go out and drink, party, and have intense love affairs. I’m not saying this cynically; I’m just saying it.”

By portraying herself as a grizzled veteran, Miller can get away with that kind of talk. It doesn’t come as easy, though, for combat journalists, many of them with international reputations, who perceive their work in ideological, even humanitarian terms. When asked about the thrills of the job, Judith Miller talks about the exhilaration of covering “a very dynamic society” like Iran. Michele McDonald gets charged up when she thinks about the medical clinics she saw in Kosovo. The thrill of Ayse Nur Zarakolu’s life is “striking down all the taboos” for the sake of a free Turkish press. Yes, the mission is the thrill, Lindsay Miller agrees; but there is also the indescribable rush of getting the story—especially when you have to cheat death to do it.

“There’s a certain machismo, even if you’re a woman, about being in a war,” says one veteran combat reporter. “Unless they are lying through their teeth, any journalist can tell you there’s an incredible adrenaline rush being out there in the thick of things and coming out alive. There’s no high like it.

“You only have to watch reporters around the hotel bar, if there is one, after a day out on the front line. Male or female journalists—talk about cojones. It’s pure The Year of Living Dangerously, as they recount their war stories. Then that adrenaline high drains away. Unless they are already permanently numbed by what they’ve seen, they get blind drunk to mask the terror of the moment, or they go off with one another and fuck like crazy as a comfort mechanism.”

Dickey Chapelle, who didn’t feel alive unless she was living on what she called the “bayonet borders” of the world, would understand. Making parachute jumps, learning to fly a plane, slogging through the mud and the misery of Vietnam, she did what she did for the mission—and the joy—of being the photojournalist who had “stayed the longest and gone further forward than any reporter, man or woman.”


BALABAN -continued from page 45

Bosnian journalists are not a one-way street. Finding meaningful mentors entails that we be responsible mentees; reciprocity is a prerequisite if these are to be real relationships. We need to find ways of merging what we each have to offer, engaging in cooperative back-scratching instead of combative back-biting.

Feminist mentoring isn’t easy. It doesn’t mean never having to say you’re sorry and it does not mean simply soaking up the attention of an experienced elder. It entails significant respect and responsiveness. It is an invitation to action. For me, the knowledge that someone I so admire believes in me (when I myself may feel skeptical about my abilities) is an inspiring impetus. Feeling connected to something larger than oneself—to a movement like feminism that started before and will continue beyond our own time—is empowering.

The essential question facing my generation of feminists is this: How do we begin to understand that the issue is not that “we won’t go back,” but that we must go forward? How do we mobilize a movement in the midst of chronic complacency? Of course the fact that we’ve become so complacent is in many ways a sign of our success—many of us have achieved enough to be quite comfortable. But we must open the umbrella still wider, pull up sister, mothers, daughters up beside us and extend our individual and collec-
tive agency even further. We need to recognize that a significant fight remains if we are to level the field for everyone.

When you write that “Being a truth-teller and a warrior for justice is a great privilege; perhaps it is its own reward,” you offer me a reminder of the intrinsic satisfaction of the struggle, and the joy of knowing that others are engaged in similar efforts. I thank you for sharing your legacy with the next generation of female samurai. — Sanda

Sanda Balaban, 25, is working toward a Masters degree at the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

TRINITY -continued from page 19

The solution to the problem of sexist Christianity is not to make Mary an aspect of the patriarchal God, but to recreate the image of the Sacred. This has been the creative aim of feminist theology for the past 25 years. The long-term goal of feminist, womanist, and mujerista (pertaining to feminist religious liberation among Latina women) theologies is not to supply token women to the Christian God-head or the ordained priesthood. Our project is to generate fresh, woman-affirming, spiritualities that will infuse the sacred work of justice-making with compassion.

If the Trinity is to receive new members, let it become not a Quartet but an orchestra, and let it play its heart out in celebration of all women and children and men and creatures, great and small.

Carter Heyward is a lesbian feminist theologian and an Episcopal priest. She is on the faculty of the Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge, Massachusetts.
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I'M BUSY COMING UP WITH NEW WAYS TO NOT GIVE MONEY TO QUALITY...

BUT I'M LOOKING FOR...

YER ANNOYING MR. GATES

SORRY... IT'S A CLOSED SESSION OF CONGRESS!

WE'RE VERY BUSY CUTTING SUBSIDIES! VERY VERY BUSY!

GET LOST... WE'VE GOT PLENTY OF GOOD CHRISTIAN LOVE OF OUR OWN...

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OKAY, OKAY.

SAY...

BUT...

...WHAT'S THAT ON YER ARM?

OH, ER... IT'S JUST A LIL SCRATCH...

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