

**This e-book was commissioned by the Joint Working Group (JWG) in 2005
and completed by Triangle Project.
Subsequently, the JWG has expanded to include new members.**

Contact details of the Joint Working Group members involved in this product completion:

Triangle Project

Tel: 021 448 3812
Email: info@triangle.org.za
Web: www.triangle.org.za

Behind the Mask

Tel: 011 403 5566
Email: info@mask.org.za
Web: www.mask.org.za

Durban Lesbian and Gay Community Health Centre

Tel: 031 301 2145
Email: info@gaycentre.org.za
Web: www.gaycentre.org.za

Forum for the Empowerment of Women

Tel: 011 339 1867
Email: info@few.org.za
Web: www.few.org.za

Gay and Lesbian Archives

Tel: 011 717 4239
Email: gala@library.wits.ac.za
Web: www.gala.wits.ac.za

OUT LGBT- Wellbeing

Tel: 012 344 5108
Email: administrator@out.org.za
Web: www.out.org.za

UNISA Centre for Applied Psychology

Tel: 012 429 8544
Email: ucap@unisa.ac.za
Web: www.unisa.ac.za/dept/psy/centre

In particular, we would like to thank the following people,
who were involved in the story selection, editing and commentary processes:

Ruth Morgan, GALA
Anthony Manion, GALA
Thuli Madi, Behind the Mask
Melanie Judge, OUT
Dawn Betteridge, Triangle Project

e-book

Editor: René Lötter
DTP & Layout: Daniele Michelini
Publishing Project Co-ordinator: Antonia Venturini (Umzantsi Publishers)
Proofreader: Sharon Wilson
Publisher: Umzantsi Publishers

All rights reserved. Other than for personal use, no part of this publication may be reproduced,
stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying,
recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

Copyright © 2006 Triangle Project



**This e-book is dedicated to the memory of Zoliswa Nkonyana, victim of a hate crime,
who was tragically murdered on 3 March 2006.**

Foreword

Where it all began...

Going back a few years, a group of LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) organisations and associated partners got together to start looking at identifying the major issues facing the LGBT community in South Africa. It was our intention to begin a process of understanding our community, and its needs, on a national level. Growing out of the process was the beginning of the Joint Working Group (JWG), a group of organisations committed to a process of joint work, focused around four main areas. One of these areas was Lesbian Visibility.

The JWG identified two projects in order to increase lesbian visibility: a lesbian conference, and this product.

About this e-book...

This book creates a space for women's voices. The JWG ran a competition for lesbian and bisexual women, encouraging them to submit short stories and poetry about various topics. Stories and poems were selected by a panel, and those selected were given a financial reward, as well as the opportunity to see their work in print, in this publication.

We decided on an e-book in order to ensure that it is available free of charge, and is widely accessible. LGBT partner organisations have agreed to download this book and make it available, at no cost, to women who do not have direct access to the internet.

This book is a celebration of lesbian women's lives and stories. As much as we come in all shapes and sizes, so too do our lived experiences and our stories. We hope this book will reflect both the richness of our diversity and the strength of our common humanity as women who love women.

This project was led by the Triangle Project, on behalf of the Joint Working Group.

Contents

Introduction	05
1. COMING OUT	
Coming out, coming home	07
Such Strangeness <i>Estelle Steenkamp</i>	09
To be or not to be....Out <i>Leisha Nilsson</i>	10
Tears for queers <i>Ulla Kelly</i>	11
Coming out, staying in	12
The way that I am <i>Hazel</i>	12
Straight out of Africa	16
Unyankwabe: A wife for Zodwa's ancestors <i>Nkunzi Nkabinde</i> <i>with Ruth Morgan, Gay and Lesbian Archives, South Africa</i>	18
2. HOMOPHOBIA	
Trapped, Gagged, Tongue tied	25
African Goddess	26
Prison letters	27
Breaking the Silence <i>Vanessa Fredanus-van Gelder</i>	31
Till death do us part, in sickness and in health	32
Will you say something please? <i>Mercia Schoeman</i>	34
3. DIVERSITY	
Through joy Cooking juices <i>Cam du Plessis</i>	41
New shoes <i>Bernadette Muthien</i>	43
And through sorrow The Smell Of Winter <i>Vanessa Fredanus-van Gelder</i>	43
sacrifice – making holy <i>Bernadette Muthien</i>	44
thick, and thin	45
Really bad lesbian pottery <i>Ulla Kelly</i>	45
token	45
how to write a really bad lesbian poem	46
lesbian anthem	46
fuýr alyce	47
graydar	47
bent, bewildered, bemused	48
The Puzzle <i>Alex Tobias</i>	49
4. HOPE	
What if <i>Zama Zungu</i>	54
What's in a broek? A woman in any other clothes would taste as sweet* <i>Yvonne Shapiro</i>	55

At the tender age of 19 you were clubbed, kicked and beaten to death by a mob of men.

Why? For being a lesbian.

You were chased, pelted with bricks and finished off with a golf club.

It took two weeks for the story to trickle through to the news.

This happened on February the 4th, 2006, more than 10 years after South Africa's new progressive Constitution and its accompanying human rights were written into law.

As you lay bleeding in the streets of Khayelitsha, thousands of people were celebrating the annual Cape Pride Festival in the streets of the Mother City.

Yet the shame of your death barely registered a decibel.

You ended up, a small article on page 6 in local newspapers.

This anthology is dedicated to Zoliswa Nkonyana.

On this island where we live, keeping what we do not tell, we have found the infinite variety of Woman.

On the Mainland, Woman is largely extinct in all but a couple of obvious forms. She is still cultivated as a cash crop, but is nowhere to be found growing wild.

Jeanette Winterson – The Poetics of Sex – I 1993

Introduction

Loving, where society dictates otherwise, constitutes far more than just sex. It's subversive; it challenges a wide spectrum of norms, shifting parameters that range from cultural identity to socio-economic power.

Being a lesbian is, and has always been, in a way, politically subversive.

Yes, lesbians grow wild.

However, throughout history lesbianism has not been outlawed in the same way as homosexuality between men was banned. Historians agree that while lesbianism was hardly encouraged, it was generally ignored; 'below the radar'. Women could easily be controlled – or should one say weeded – in other ways.

Definitions of identity are difficult to compose if you are invisible.

Therefore 'real' lesbian literature – those tales of challenging taboos – was hard to come by until the 20th century.

How have things changed 100 years later? Is society making it easy for lesbians to come out and live a fulfilled life without the risk of rejection, harm, and discrimination?

In South Africa today, a progressive Constitution and new legislation gives hope.

Attitudes have changed over the years, and great legal and political strides have been made.

But even brave new laws mean little more than the paper it's written on in the face of entrenched popular customs.

As the poems and stories in this anthology will show, being a lesbian in South Africa is hardly a walk in the park.

Still, there is hope.

This anthology of South African lesbian experiences is published on the eve of ground-breaking changes that may legalise same-sex partnerships. Some of the stories are universal in theme – falling in love, family acceptance, the sorrow of broken hearts, and coping with the death of a life partner. Some are written by members of diverse racial or ethnic groups within the lesbian community. These women from the various ethnic, racial, religious, and socio-economic backgrounds are at different stages of discovering their identities. These are stories by bright new voices that offer some insight into what it's like to be a lesbian in South Africa today.

Material here is organised in subsections and thematically, but a central framework emerges as representing the universal stages in growing toward acceptance.

Coming out, coming home

While many lesbians realise at a very young age that something is different, it's usually only in our teens, that most recall 'getting it' – or rather, not getting it: The fascination, the physics, the physiology of the hetero dating game.

When your girlfriends gush about hot cricket celebrities, you suddenly know you have a lot more to say about Makhaya Ntini's bowling than, well, his buns

And so the realisation gradually dawns – with varying degrees of delight and devastation– that you're also batting.

For the other team, that is.

Still, many plough on through the years; undetected, passing for 'normal'.

A friend, who came out late in life, only once her daughters finished school, explained her experience as follows:

To come out as a lover of women ... I am reminded of a parable I once heard in a Pentecostal revivalist tent, about an eagle's egg that was placed under a chicken. Once hatched, the eagle chick waddled around with the chickens. One day he looked up at the sky and saw an eagle gliding on the wind. It made his spirit soar. It hit him like a bolt from the blue: I wasn't meant to scratch around in the dirt with the chickens ... I was meant to FLY!

Fly, how exactly? If you know you may come down hard, on a rock solid bed of cultural and religious prejudice? Some never muster up the courage to break the news to family and friends. Most are still not one hundred per cent lesbian, everywhere and all of the time.

In Hazel's story in this section, her family preferred an appearance of heterosexuality to their child's happiness.

We may cheer on her brave retort: 'You can change me on the outside, but you can't change me on the inside.' But the opposite often applies to the work zone: 'If it may harm our careers, we gaily deny that we are queers'. We slam the locks of our own self-imposed closets when we enter those shiny boardroom doors.

Coming out publicly may for many begin as a fiercely private decision. For others it can open up a whole new political role that makes one grow as a lesbian, and as a human being. Coming out or trying to accept the coming out of somebody dear to you can be a strange awareness at first.

But what sweet strangeness, once we realise that sexual orientation does not limit us – on the contrary – it can make all of us fly higher instead.

Such Strangeness

Estelle Steenkamp

We were inches away from each other. The sun was streaming in through the window warming my already feverish body. I had my back to her, eyes closed, wanting, needing her to touch me. Seconds stretching into minutes, into hours, yet only 5 minutes would pass. Palpable. Inches between us, lunging into miles. Touch me. Please? Touch me? My eyes; squeezed shut, in prayer. Please God, make her want me the way I want her. Please God, please?

Just talked. We just talked. She told me about her ex. I listened. She told me what she was into. I listened. I wanted her to give her body to me as willingly as she gave her words. I listened.

I was afraid to face her lest she could see it in my eyes. Surely she could see it in my body. Dead fucking give away; arched, involuntarily reaching for her, subconsciously bending into her, consciously bending into her. Knowing that if she reached for me, my senses would go into complete and utter overdrive.

Quiet. Silence enveloping us into a bubble of perceptible passive foreplay. I had known this girl for only a few hours, for only a few hours, yet pieces of me were as familiar with her as I am with myself. Such strangeness. I was new to this. If I had known how to turn around and take her into me, I would have. Is touching girls different to touching boys? It must be, since I couldn't make my hands do what my mind could see. But she knew how! Fuck! God! Why won't she touch me? Oh dear God, she's touching me! Her hand on my hip. Did she feel the quiver that rippled from the very point where her skin was touching mine? Could she hear my breathing growing shallower, sharper, shivering through my lungs and escaping through my mouth? Grip tightening, she guided me into the cave of her groin, spooned. Her breasts against my back, our fingers found each other. My spine curving into her, down to my toes, our ankles kissed, toes touched, tentatively. A bead of perspiration slipped between my breasts, the rhythm of our bodies tuning in and zoning out.

There was no more talking. I listened. Breathing. The silence of the sun growing hotter, bodies blessing each other in sweat. Sweet sweat, salty sweat. Such strangeness. She held me. Such sweet, sweet strangeness.



To be or not to be... Out

Leisha Nilsson

I t's cold in here

I'm alone in here

Crimson pain flowing

The cracks now showing

of my self-doubt...

To be In or to be

Out?

Her body dances through my mind

My mind dances through her body

Ah – to be Free

to just be Me

To be unchained and sing unrestrained

Ah – beautiful dream wrapped in muffled scream

Could my voice – one-day, reflect my choice?

The risk is great

Must I contain others' hate?

Their rejection, their disdain

Critical footprints in my brain

Should I stay In

or dare I be Out?

It's cold in here

I'm alone in here

Tears for queers

Ulla Kelly

we cry for those who died of aids
try not to underpay our maids
lust after closeted movie stars
are seen in trendy friendly bars
but if it might harm our careers
we'll gaily deny that we are queers

we'd like to see the streets drug-free
we'd like to buy better quality e
we think tolerance is what the world lacks
we skinner about everyone behind their backs
we join pride marches once a year
and daily deny that we are queer

Coming out, staying in

South Africa could soon be the fifth country and the first on the African continent to legalise same-sex marriages.

But how will the broader South African community react once this happens?

There is an old saying that no written law has ever been more binding than popular custom supported by traditional beliefs. And South Africa is still a country plagued by narrow-mindedness. Homosexuality is seen by many to be unAfrican and is not accepted by most religious belief systems.

The issues that working class or lesbians from previously disadvantaged communities face are often harder.

The trials and tribulations of township lesbians are vastly different to those that suburban lesbians face when coming out.

Or are they?

Hazel is fifty-two-years-old, and identifies as coloured. She lives in the east of Johannesburg. In 2005 the Gay and Lesbian Archives (GALA) interviewed Hazel about her life as part of an oral history project on the cultural identity of coloured lesbians and gay men in Johannesburg and its surrounds.



The way that I am

Hazel

I first started developing feelings for girls when I was fourteen. I'd sit in the classroom looking at girls and fantasizing about being intimate with them. The feeling was so intense. Why did I feel this way? It confused me, because I never felt that way about boys. One afternoon I read in a magazine about the lesbian affair of a star actress. I thought, 'This is how I feel!' I ran to my mother and asked her what a lesbian was. She said, 'Ag man, that's crazy people. You won't understand'...

My mother's originally from Pitrivier in the old Eastern Transvaal, where she met my father. He worked in a glass factory making spectacles. I don't know anything else about him except that he married

my mother and left her. By the time I was born they were living in Noordgesig, Johannesburg. My father didn't stick around for long, leaving my mother and grandmother to provide for six daughters. My mother worked as a machinist in a clothing factory, and my grandmother had to go to work as a maid for white people in order to make ends meet. It wasn't easy; we never had luxury. But as time went by my older sisters were sent out to work, and things got better.

I grew up like a boy between all these girls. I would do everything boys would do. Only better. I adored soccer. I never played with dolls. The Christmas before I turned twelve my mother bought me a doll, and the next morning I dug a hole and buried it. I told her 'If you wanna get me something, buy me a ball.' I was like that. My mother would send me to the store to buy clothes for myself, and I'd come back with shirts and trousers. When she'd ask me why I did this I'd lie and tell her the store had run out of dresses. My mother never interfered; she didn't seem too concerned that our neighbours called me a 'tomboy'.

Things went on like that until I was seventeen, and fell in love with a married woman. That's when the trouble started. It was 1970, and I had just left school to start working. When my family learned of the affair most of them turned against me, including my mother. 'You're a disgrace' I was told, 'You don't belong in this family'. The weekend that they learned of our affair I slept over at the woman's house. On the Monday my sisters came and stripped me of every single piece of clothing – from my pants to my shoes. They gave me high heels and dresses to put on; even a handbag.

I was devastated. 'You can change me on the outside,' I told my mother later, 'but you can't change me on the inside.'

My family took me to a number of psychiatrists; but nothing changed me. I started to believe my sisters when they told me I was a freak and that I had no morals. I started to believe that I was not worthy to be part of the human race. My grandmother was the only person who took my side and pleaded for me. But in 1973 she passed away and things deteriorated.

There was no one in my family to back me up; no one I could turn and talk to. The bottle became my refuge. I started drinking heavily. I stopped caring. I went from one relationship with a woman to the next during the years that followed. I lost many partners because of my drinking.

About fifteen years ago I reached a low point. I remember standing in the kitchen of a friend's house one Saturday morning, reaching into the fridge for a beer and thinking to myself, 'There's got to be a way out of this.' I didn't want to be a drunk. It's not what I planned for my life. I explained to my friend that the minute I take the bottle and take a drink, I can't stop. She went into her room, and came out with a big book on Alcoholics Anonymous, and said to me, 'Read this.' I'd been praying to God so hard for sobriety, and for so long. Here was the answer. I walked into an AA meeting five nights later, and I've never looked back.

Over the years I've learned a lot about myself. I've learned to accept myself the way that I am, and that my family can't rule my life, or tell me who to be with. Near to the end of her life my mother started protecting me again; like I needed wrapping in cotton wool. I clung to her in return. I was reminded of what it was like to be a child in her house, before the troubles started. I picked up a lot of resentment against my family, but I could never hate them. It's too heavy a burden to carry. I've got no time for burdens.

I met my life-partner ten years ago now. The one thing I have no regrets about is getting involved with her. I love her completely. She has four children from the time she was married, and I love them too. The children see me as a father figure. We have our difficulties, but there is mutual respect. The children sometimes call me 'the preacher' – I have a tendency to preach. Their mother and I were open with them about our relationship right from the beginning. We encouraged them to be open with us as well. Recently, the youngest came to me and we spoke about the birds and the bees. She opened up to me completely.

My partner and I got married in December 2004. It was amazing; everyone smiling and happy. My partner's eldest daughter got up and

made a speech. 'It's about bloody time the two of you got married after so many years living in sin!' she said.

But it worries me that our marriage is not legally recognized. If something happens to me today, my family will walk in and claim everything that my partner and I have worked hard to put together over the years. Same-sex marriage should be legalised. Marriage gave me a sense that I belong to someone. I feel dignified, respected and loved. I never had children, and suddenly here I have four!

Straight out of Africa

When South Africa became a democracy in 1994, our Constitution came into effect. For the first time, South Africans had the right to love who they wanted to love, across colour and gender lines. For the first time, all religions were equal. No religious grouping had the right to force their beliefs onto another.

On paper anyway.

Even though same-sex relationships and religious freedom, including traditional beliefs, were protected, negative attitudes towards homosexuality amongst the general public prevailed. Same-sex love is not accepted as part of African culture. Meanwhile, the majority of Christians still believe that same-sex relationships are sinful.

Ruth Morgan and Saskia Wieringa, write in *Tommy Boys, Lesbian Men and Ancestral Wives* (Jacana Media, 2005): ‘Same-sex practices in general, and more particular women’s same-sex relations, have been difficult to research in Africa due to the fact that many African leaders declare it taboo – unAfrican; a western import. The general homophobia of post-colonial governments, apart from South Africa, is compounded by the local patriarchal system in each country, making lesbian women doubly oppressed.’

The book documents the subtle but traditional ways in which African women conducted same-sex relations across the ages. These include forms of traditional same-sex practices, such as ancestral marriages of traditional healers (*sangomas*) in South Africa.

Lesbian *sangoma* Nkunzi Nkabinde co-authored a chapter on ancestral wives amongst same-sex *sangomas* (traditional healers). She explains how *sangomas* are powerful people at the centre of African culture, occupying a special position in society as they are respected and feared. In South African townships, as the chilling truth about Zoliswaya illustrated,

lesbians are often harassed, attacked and in extreme cases, raped. Methods employed by thugs in order 'to teach visible lesbians a lesson'.

Sangomas who are involved in same-sex relationships are not subject to the same levels of harassment. However, sexuality within same-sex partnerships is still seen as a taboo by the majority of heterosexual *sangomas*.

Nkabinda explains how one becomes a *sangoma* and how ancestral wives are chosen.

'A person needs to receive a calling from their ancestors. Ancestors play a critical role in the life of a *sangoma*. The ancestors are the holy spirits of deceased family members, and provide us with the gift of healing and the ability to predict what will happen in the future.'

Both male and female *sangomas* are allowed to have ancestral wives to help them with their healing work. The ancestral wives are identified by the ancestors. Ancestral wives help the *sangoma* in their daily tasks and their interaction with the ancestors.

'Although same-sex relationships within ancestral marriages are supposed to be taboo,' says Nkabinde, 'some modern *sangomas* are using these marriages to have secret sexual relationships in rural areas. In urban areas some of them are being more public about their same-sex relationships. It's generally believed that women *sangomas* have always used ancestral wives as a way to have secret same-sex relationships. Obviously a well-kept secret, since so many people still think that same-sexuality is un-African!'

The following coming-out story of a South African *sangoma* is very unique. Her dominant ancestor Muzi happens to be a relative of her husband and sends her husband messages through dreams. Her husband was told by Muzi to leave her alone sexually as she belonged to the ancestor.

In the end, her husband is used as mediator to find an ancestral wife for her. In return, he is granted his one big wish in life.

Unyankwabe: A wife for Zodwa's ancestors

By Nkunzi Nkabinde with Ruth Morgan

Gay and Lesbian Archives, South Africa

[M]y name is Zodwa. I was born in a small village in South Africa. My father had twelve wives of whom my mother was the fifth. My mother had four children. I have sixteen half-brothers and sisters. My father had twenty children but only ten of us are left as the others passed away over the years. Their mothers also passed away. Only my mother is still alive.

I had to get married to the man that was chosen for me. When I was fifteen I was told that I should not continue with school because people from the Dlamini family were going to come at the end of the month in order to pay *lobola* for me. That meant that I was going to be someone's wife. I remember the date in May because I wasn't supposed to go against my father's wishes. I didn't say a thing, as I had to do as I was told. The end of the month came and the date was arranged. The Dlamini family brought 18 cattle - two bulls and sixteen cows, as I was a virgin.

Two weeks after the *lobola* was paid we got married. Two cows and two goats were slaughtered from my family's side and the Dlamini family slaughtered two cows and two goats. They did this to join our family ancestors. After that I had to go and live with him. When I arrived there I found that he had three wives. I was going to be wife number four. He didn't have any children with his wives. Because I am not a talkative person I would sit in my room and listen to my thoughts. I stayed with this man for four months. Throughout these four months he never came to my room at night. I would only see him, when he came to say good morning. One night he came to me. As I was fast asleep I didn't hear him. I woke up when he started to kiss me and I didn't know what to do because that was the first time I had a man next to me. My body started to shiver and my heart was beating so fast! He told me to relax, that everything was going to be all right and then he undressed me. A part

of me wanted to cry, another part of me wanted to run away. Inside my heart I knew I didn't want this man and I didn't have feelings for him. Suddenly I felt something sitting on top of my stomach and as he tried to get on top of me I thought that surely it was a snake. Then he jumped off me and yelled, 'There is a snake on top of you on your stomach.' I sat up straight and the snake kept on playing around my naked body. The snake crawled down from my bed to the floor and out of my bedroom.

'Your ancestors are strong,' my husband said.

I went back to sleep. He slept in my bedroom but he didn't do what he wanted. In the morning when we woke up he told me that he dreamt of his great-grandfathers. They told him not to touch me until I was 18 years old.

When I was 18, I was already grown up. One day when I went to fetch water from the dam I saw the face of an old man, I looked behind me thinking that he was standing behind me, but to my surprise there was nobody. I turned back and looked right into the water. The old man's face was still there, and he said:

'I am your great-grandfather in law. I am the one who sent your husband to pay *lobola* (bride price) for you. I want you to go and take the divination bag of bones that were mine when I was a *sangoma* there in the cave, don't be afraid. I will tell the family where you are. I want you to go now. Don't look back.'

I found myself going to that cave that the old man was telling me about. On the way I keep on hearing the voice of this old man saying 'don't look back', but in my heart I wanted to look back. When I arrived at the cave it was late and dark. When I got there I found an old lady standing outside the cave. She said to me:

'I have been waiting here for you. Your ancestors told me to expect you.'

She took me inside; dressed me in *amabhayi* (wrap around cloths) put this white *muthi* (medicine) on my face and all over my body. She

twisted my hair into shapes. She taught me how to grind the *muthi* and how to use it.

This is how I started my training to become a *sangoma* (traditional healer). I stayed for two years, training. Sometimes I went to live under the water to learn from the ancestors who dwelled there, and then I'd come back to the cave.

The main ancestor – the most important one – is Dabula. He is the one who appeared to me in the water and the bones that I went to find are his.

On the day of my 20th birthday I was sitting with my trainer. She asked me if I had ever slept with a man. When I replied 'no', she asked: 'What about a woman?'

I replied: 'How can I sleep with a woman if I am woman?'

She said: 'You can because I know inside of you there is a part that wants another woman.'

I couldn't disagree with her because I knew she was telling the truth. There is a part of me that I chose to ignore. When I was staying with my half sisters sometimes I wanted more from them, I wanted to kiss their lips and touch them. But I couldn't tell anyone because I knew I would be beaten if I spoke about that kind of thing in my family.

She told me to get undressed and be naked. As she was my trainer, I didn't argue and she instructed me to go and swim in the dam. After 20 minutes I should come back. I did as I was instructed and after 20 minutes I came back naked to the cave. It was dark when she was sending me to swim at the dam. Upon my return I found that she had put *icansi* (grass mats) on the floor for me to lie down. She told me to lie down on my back and relax. I did as she said. As I was lying down, she came in naked and knelt down next to me. She started to caress me, kissing my body all over. I was nervous, my body was trembling. Then she said: 'Do you want to have a woman or not?'

I found myself giving in.

I was able to be free.

After three days, my husband went to his family to tell them that I was missing. They went to all the *sangomas* in the area who all told them the same thing. They could not see where I was but wherever I was, I was doing the ancestors' work.

They told my family they shouldn't worry, as the ancestors would send a message to tell them where I was.

I never saw my family and my husband for the whole 2 years that I was training.

When the time came for me to go home, my husband arrived with my father and my uncle. I asked them how they knew where to find me. My uncle said he had a dream of an old man telling him that he had taken me to find his bag of divination bones. He showed him how to get there.

When my husband heard of the dream, he said that this ancestor, Dabula, is his great-grandfather who drowned in the dam after leaving his bag of bones (*isikhwama samathambo*) in the cave. No one had ever gone there to look for it.

My family and my trainer arranged a date for me to go back home. The family had to make welcoming arrangements and invited all the neighbours. I went home and everything went according to plan.

They hid a cow. I had to search for it until I found it.

My initiation ceremony as a *sangoma* (traditional healer) was on a Friday night and then I was to go home to my husband. The ceremony lasted until Sunday morning. Everything was so wonderful. I was so happy to come back but another part of me wanted to stay at the cave with my trainer because of what we shared. I didn't want to come back home.

Although I was married my husband didn't have sex with me. I asked myself what if he wanted to sleep with me and found out that I was no longer a virgin. When I was left alone with my man, we sat down and he told me that his great-grandfather Dabula had been coming to him in his dreams telling him that he should leave me alone as I did not belong to him. I only belonged to his great-grandfather. When I was gone he had married another woman. Because I'm the woman of his ancestors, he gave me his grandfather's house. He said if I needed anything I should ask. That's how I separated from him.

When my husband found out that he couldn't have children although he had four wives, he came to me and told me that he did not know what to do. He wanted one child of his own blood so that if he died he would know that he had left some of his own blood behind. He asked me to plead with him to the ancestors. He had spent loads of money going to medical doctors and traditional doctors, all in vain. He said he had obeyed the ancestors when they told him to leave me alone and he respected the fact that I didn't belong to him as I belonged to the ancestors.

We made our plea by slaughtering a goat. We performed a whole ceremony for the ancestors. A week after the ceremony my husband came to me and told me that the ancestors had given him an answer. They had shown him in a dream that if he wanted to have a child, he had to go and marry a girl who must stay here with me. I didn't disagree with him!

I told him that if his grandfather wanted him to do this, he shouldn't wait.

We agreed that he would go and pay the *lobola* (bride price) for the ancestors but the girl was going to stay with me. She would be my *unyankwabe* (ancestral wife). *Unyankwabe* is a person you are given by the ancestors. If you are a *sangoma* you have to have someone to look after you. It may be your husband, your sister or your uncle – anyone that the ancestors will choose for you to trust and believe in, that is *unyankwabe*.

Two days later he had found the girl's family. Busisiwe's family said they would send for her. The following month Busisiwe arrived. My husband explained everything to her. They were sitting in my husband's house. I wasn't there, I just heard from my trainees (*amathwasa*). She wanted to see me and they brought her over.

We went into my house, closed the door, sat down and started to talk. I just looked deep inside Busisiwe's eyes and she was looking into mine. There was a vibration between us. I started to have those feelings I had when I was with the trainer. Those were the feelings that I had never told anyone about. She told me that my husband had explained everything to her, but she didn't understand how she could marry an ancestor who is a man while she did not want to be with a man. I had to tell her that the ancestor that she was going to marry was in me – she would never have to be with a man if she did not want to. She said if she was going to be forced to accept the proposal she could not say no, but otherwise she didn't want to accept this.

I had to explain to her that she was going to be free and that no one was going to take her freedom away. She asked me if I was a same-sex oriented sangoma using the isiZulu words '*ngabe uyinkonkoni yesangoma*'. I told her that I didn't understand the words. It was a question I had no answer for, because it was never asked. I never saw myself as anything. I just saw myself as a *sangoma* and a woman who had feelings for another woman. I never expressed my feelings to anyone else. It's just something that I felt with my trainer and once, kissing a child at school. I never had anyone in my life love me or share my feelings. I realized that I had been alone all my life.

I said 'I don't know but I have feelings that I never told anyone about. I feel more attracted to women than to men.'

She smiled at me. She said: 'Your secret is safe with me. Tell your husband that I said its okay he can come and pay the *lobola* for me.'

After that she left and I told my husband that she had agreed to marry my ancestor. My husband went back to her place with his family members, to pay the *lobola* and she came to join the family.

After they paid *lobola* for her she didn't waste any time moving in with me. Two weeks later, one day we were alone when my *amathwasa* (trainees) had gone to the fields to look for *muthi*. She started to ask me why I had married.

Then, during our lovely conversation she asked me what I felt for her. She wanted to know if I felt attracted to her. I didn't know what to say then. My heart started to beat so fast I found myself mumbling. She kissed me and said that we had to hide our feelings. We kissed and we never told everybody.

Now we sleep together staying in the same house. She helps me inside the house. She even helps me to teach the *amathwasa*. She has learned to beat the drums and the trainees take her as their mother as they love her so much. They don't know that we are lovers it is just between her and me.

In the month that she was living with the family my husband's first wife announced that she was pregnant!

After that, all of his wives got pregnant! All these years, because I'm secretive, I never told anyone a thing.

Even in his old age my husband never suspected a thing.

Trapped, Gagged, Tongue tied

Homophobia. The dictionary defines it literally as fear of homosexuality. A dread of being in close quarters with homosexuals, and in the case of some homosexuals themselves, a self-loathing revulsion. Homophobia is most often used to designate a prejudicial hatred of homosexuality comparable to racism. Homophobia can be and often is institutionalised in anti-gay laws, policies, and the pronouncements of church and state. It also manifests itself in individuals, where its effects can range from verbal abuse to gay bashing and even murder. One of its most unfortunate manifestations is in homosexuals who have been convinced by society that their affections and desires are monstrous and deserving of punishment.

As this book was being compiled, lesbian football player Zoliswa Nkonyana was chased, stoned and stabbed by a mob of township men for being a lesbian.

That murder happened at the very minute South Africans were in the streets celebrating Gay Pride in the streets of South Africa's cosmopolitan cities.

Lesbian organisations quote statistics: A survey of almost 300 black lesbian women from Gauteng and Kwazulu-Natal townships. Nine of the women said they had been raped over the past two years. 15 reported being subjected to physical abuse and 40 to hate speech for being a lesbian.

All of this, more than ten years after one of the world's most liberal new democracies was born.

African Goddess

I fell in love
with an African Goddess
an ebony princess carved to perfection
just like a wooden sculpture
she is sweet as the honey
dripping from her lips
as gentle as the wind
that blows through her hair
my ebony queen is as strong as a warrior
she would fight for me with every strength
that lies in her femininity
I love my princess I adore her smile
without them I would be lost
just like the day without the sun
she lights me up
with a deep fire in my soul
but our love was never accepted
religion racism and no gay rights
I was forced to leave her
Now I am lost without her
every night I weep for her
Just like a lighthouse in the dark
Calling, calling her name
Wishing and praying
She would see my light
So I can follow it back
Then I can lead her back home
To where I am still standing

Prison letters

Dear Mr/Mrs Editor

My friend wrote these letters before she died and since I don't know any of her family, I wondered if you would please publish them. I'll give the family, the original letters, if they want. I think they'll want something in her handwriting once they've read them.

Before you read the letters, I want to tell you about Nats, Natasha. I only got to know her in the last 5 years and I am going to miss her till the day I die and join her in the grave. In the first year, I thought she was mute. She didn't speak a word to me or anyone else. She seemed so scared and small and with the silence, she was even smaller. I decided there and then that I was going to protect her.

I heard from the wardens that Nats was in for murder. She killed her husband. Found him on her daughter, walked out of the room and when he followed her to the kitchen, she stabbed him. She took her daughter and they left the house.

But that's not all I want you to know about her. She was very good at drawing and she was going to turn 31-years-old this year. I'll only keep the drawing she made of me, the rest I'll give to her family. Nats was lonely, sad and lonely. When we walked around the quad, even later when she started talking, she would look lonely. But sometimes, when she smiled, and she gave a proper smile, I'd feel like the sun was warming me. On cold nights, I got to lie next to her and even when I'd put my very cold feet against her warm ones, she wouldn't pull away or even make a sound. She'd allow me to hold her too. I'm really going to miss her.

So you see she was really beautiful too.

LETTER 1

Paulie,

I hope you forgive me for killing your Daddy.

And for the other thing too.

When I came home early that day, it was so I could cook for him – he was already getting gatvol of eating spykos (leftovers) every night. I was also going to let him you-know-what so that he would be in a good mood by the time you came back from your school play practice.

The bus kept stopping and stopping. At every bus stop there were people getting off and on. It felt as if it was moving slower than usual. When the people got into the bus they shoved past me impatiently because they couldn't see why I was standing in their way, when I wasn't getting off. I could have pushed the bus, if I knew that it was going to go faster. The fumes and the sweat made me feel even sicker on top of the nerves twisting my stomach. I ran home from the bus stop, but I was still later than I had planned.

By the way, I still want to know, why were you home early that day?

In the kitchen I put the pots on the stove and took the meat out the fridge, before I thought I heard him in our bedroom. You know that man really made me nervous, cause I hesitated before I came around the corner. Then the knot in my stomach suddenly jumped to my throat, when I saw him, and you.

My baby, I know that I should have marched right into that room – not away. I'm really sorry. I couldn't breathe, and I don't know how I could walk.

He had his shirt tucked into his pants and his zip was up when he eventually walked into the kitchen.

The knife I held in my hand was originally intended for me.

I meant to kill myself cause I couldn't continue living knowing that you saw me and that I turned around and walked away.

He walked in with a look that seemed to say, casually; 'What's for supper?'

The knife was for me, but I stabbed him instead.

My baby, when you're ready please forgive me.

Mummie

LETTER 2

Ma,

Happy New Year Ma! I really miss you. I hope you'll forgive me Ma for not listening to you when you told me that he wasn't good enough for me. I hope you'll love me again.

Ma, I am born again. I have found Jesus and I've given my life to him. I also haven't done anything with any of the women here. Anyway Ma, with Samantha I really was wrong – even the Bible says so. Girls are not supposed to love girls. Maybe Samantha did something to me; you know there was witchcraft even in the Bible days. I am not even writing to her, she's not speaking to me either. When I told her that I had a boyfriend, she was so angry she asked me to prove it, so I kissed him in front of her. You see I was trying to get rid of her bad influence in my life. In the beginning he was so proud that I had chosen him, but he wanted to be sure that I wasn't going back to her, so I had to prove to him too that I really loved him. Then I got pregnant. But I don't mind Paulie; I really love her so much.

I wasn't being a rebel when I chose him. Other guys tried to take me from him, but he would always tell them about me. I stayed so that he would keep our secret. Just didn't want to continue hurting you, I knew if I didn't stay with him I was going to go back to Samantha.

Forgive me.

Natasha

Dear Mr/Mrs Editor

When Natasha eventually started talking, I was the first one she told why she went back later to kill him.

Not only for what he did. But for the fact that she had a secret – and he was going to tell.

The police picked her up from her Ma's house. When they questioned her, she just told them that he deserved to die.

Then a cop told her that he wasn't dead – he was in hospital.

She stayed in jail over the weekend, but that Monday they let her go by mistake after a bail mix-up.

She got into a taxi and she went to his ward. That's where she killed him.

Nats stayed alive long enough so that she could finish drawing all the pictures of everyone she loved most.

One of them must be of Samantha.

Samantha, if you are reading this I had to fight for her attention, I had to fight bigger girls than me, but she never really let me near her.

She really loved you. And I was very jealous of you. Like when she told me of the Valentine's Day card you gave her in Standard seven. Every year she stayed here, on Valentine's she wrote those words to herself, and then she did not want me to touch her for at least a month.

I'd really like to meet you sometime.

Prison number 48473529

Breaking the Silence

Vanessa Fredanus-van Gelder

On Sunday afternoons,
It was her father's friend;
The family favourite;
'He's so good with the children,' they had said
He, who stole youth from the young,
And the cousin – the elder, boy, cousin,
The one who liked her to play in his room
With the door closed.
No one noticed he was too old for 'playing',

It was a Sunday night, and he,
a complete stranger to her,
She a young woman,
Alone in the night
Who carried within her, a world of possibilities
'What was she doing there anyway?' the infamous they would say
'What was she wearing? Was she drunk?'
The black hole, they, would say
As they recount the story of what was taken from her,
On a library pavement where I spent my childhood years,
Drinking in the innocence of Judy Blume and Nancy Drew.

For her, it was Sunday mornings,
In the house of God
Defiled by the devil himself,
Approved by the highest universal authority,
Protected by the pact of silence,
'This will be our little secret,
No one will believe you anyway.'
A little girl uneducated in the language of emancipation,
Still incarcerated in her adulthood she cries;
'Mama, was I bad, mama?'

Everyday for her, it was,
Her father,
Who took her as a wife

At age 11,
Becoming a mother of three.
At age 11,
A mother to her own siblings
Before the blood and pubic hair of her womanhood
Had touched the fabric of her panties
As she lay in the big bed
And got to drive a big car,
at age 11.

Breaking this silence
Shattering this non-reality
In order to see the scars inflicted,
Those which cannot be seen when we silence the voices,
In lies that we feed ourselves,
To see that which does not always bear visible marks
As women walk alone in the dark



Till death do us part, in sickness and in health

A body.

This body that you have loved and adored, making it come alive making yours come alive, for years.

In death, you have no say over it.

You won't even have the luxury to define yourself legally as 'The Grieving Partner'.

You may be lucky to have understanding 'in-laws'. You may have complicated wills and testaments, watertight powers of attorney. But any lawyer will tell you that you will not automatically be entitled to the same exemptions, protection, respect and privilege married couples have.

You may even be excluded from funeral arrangements, from burying the body you loved and cared for all those years.

South African lesbians have already won a range of legislative reforms.

Immigrant partners of lesbian and gay people can now apply for permanent residence based on a same-sex relationship with a South African partner. There are domestic partner benefits; same-sex couple adoption is no longer unusual; and lesbian women have for quite a few years been able to turn to artificial insemination and have their partner registered as a parent of that child.

Great leaps indeed – if one takes into account what those not so long ago had to contend with.

Still, only one kind of love is ultimately defined as love, by the law.

As this anthology is being published, South African lesbians and homosexual men are sitting with fingers crossed, counting the days until they can legally marry. Let's hope the law will be on our side and that more countries will follow.

Let's all say something please, and oppose any legislation that is against love.

Will you say something please?

Mercia Schoeman

It grew without a sound in her breast, this silent thing, white and fat and curled up just a few centimetres from her heart. Nothing warned her. She could feel no lump, there were no changes in her body, and no pain kept her awake late at night. It all happened quietly, like white clouds and lavender leaves, like not saying anything when you are angry.

Of course Lisa and Marianna hoped that it was nothing, something harmless, something silly. All it would take was a quick biopsy – not even a full morning in hospital – and then they could go on with their lives. They even went ahead with their dinner party in celebration of their tenth anniversary. ‘The first time I saw you, you were dancing, remember?’ After everybody left, they went to bed without dreaming the dreams that would haunt them later. Besides, there was no history of breast cancer in the family, and she was still in her early forties.

When you stare into the sun for long enough and then look away, your eyes might find it difficult to focus. You might even feel a bit off balance, as if you had stumbled into an overturned world.

That is how it felt when they told me.

‘A mastectomy is not a big operation,’ the doctor explained. ‘And it is not very painful either. We will take out some of the lymph nodes under her arm, which will leave the area here feeling numb. Moving her arm after the operation will probably be the most painful part of the procedure.’ Two days after the diagnosis Lisa was submitted to hospital for a mastectomy.

For a moment I almost panicked, but suddenly I knew that everything would be fine. Immediately I trusted medical science completely, and this person in white became my super hero. I could hardly believe that it could be so simple. Of course, they just cut off the part of a body that went bad, like you do with a bruised peach. I became quite silly with optimism, reassuring her, reassuring everyone, but most of all reassuring myself, that all it would take was a one-hour long, small operation.

Lisa decided against breast reconstruction, as it would prolong the procedure considerably, and might have led to follow-up operations. She came out of surgery with a tube growing like a livid red stem out of her body, heaving its contents into an accordion shaped drain – like feeding an angry flower. On her bedside table was a book, *Breast Cancer: What you should know*. Later someone put a glass of water on it and it left a ring on the book's cover, right across the C of Cancer.

I leaned over her and softly spoke to her. I told her that she looked good, a bit pale perhaps, with bright yellow antiseptic stains up to her ear lobes, but otherwise she seemed to have the same colours of sun and sleep that she had as she woke up next to me every morning, I told her. She smiled, and said she was thirsty. I knew what the scar looked like – a single cut as if drawn with a ruler, but I still could not get the image of a breast lobbed off with a sharp sleek panga out of my head. Swish-swash-swoosh! Or whizzed off with a chain saw or a steel claw, a blowtorch or an ice pick. I thought about how sensitive her breasts were – I only had to lick them, softly suck them, and she was so close, so close.

'Quiet, please,' the nurse said.

The lights in the hospital corridors were viciously bright, and my eyes hurt.

At exactly eleven o'clock every morning Lisa's parents visited her in hospital. The Bible on her bedside table was from them, and usually they also brought fresh orange juice and magazines. Lisa's mother told her daughter all the domestic news and gossip in long breathless sentences, while her father silently stared, excusing himself from time to time for a smoke break. When her parents were there, I did not hold Lisa's hand and the conversation was self-conscious and courteous.

Lisa recovered quickly. Within a day she could walk unassisted, putting the drain in her dressing gown's pocket. She immediately started with physical therapy to mobilize her arm. Before the week was over, she could empty her own drain and were discharged. Thereafter, Sundays

after church became her parent's self-imposed visiting time, as if a judge allocated it to them in a divorce hearing. I usually made them tea, which was acknowledged with a nod.

We had to wait five working days for the test results.

'The nodes are involved,' the doctor seemed as if he was trying to avoid using certain words. 'Aggressive chemotherapy is required.'

More tests, more tests – Lisa became a body – a heart, liver, lungs and bones, and the medical aid informed them that the amount designated for X-rays was exceeded. Our lives became punctuated by medical appointments and a brand new vocabulary - *Lymphangitis carcinomatosa, level III*. Knowing words like cytology, intra-ductal, adjuvant and metastases – singing sinister words – made us feel better at times, more in control, but never safe again.

Eight sessions, one every three weeks.

After the second chemo-session we went shopping for wigs. All the wigs that did not look like battered brooms were out of our price class. Every morning Lisa had to change her pillowslip to get rid of the loose hair. Later, after our cats Oscar and Alice B. Toklas pounced – probably in self-defence – and destroyed the wig in combat during a nightly prowl, Lisa shaved her hair.

I read everything I could find, every book and article on breast cancer claiming to have unlocked the secrets of those shrewd cancer cells. I looked at alternative treatments, especially after I read that one of the chemicals used in chemo was used in some or other war as mustard gas. A killing cure.

I become confused and considered flying to China where various kinds of alternative therapies were used. I wanted to consult a Bushveld *sangoma*, a faith healer, and a woman who said on the Internet that she was cured by carrot juice. I read up about one diet-monger after

the other, contemplated positive thinking, crystals, coffee enemas and mistletoe. I woke up and went to bed hoping.

I started fancying myself as a bit of an expert, in fact. I heard that childbearing and breast-feeding lowered the risk of breast cancer. It followed that women who chose not to have children, were more at risk, therefore also lesbians. I even got philosophical one evening, and reached the somewhat tipsy conclusion that evolution had lost pace with the role of modern empowered women, as it seemed that women's bodies turned against them if they chose not to find ultimate fulfilment in childbearing. A long silence between one's body and one's head.

Lisa could control the nausea by taking medication that subdued it to a slight queasiness. She did not mind that everything she ate had a septic tang to it, that her mouth constantly tasted of chemicals. She did not flinch when the doctor could no longer find a vein immediately. But the tiredness. The tiredness quietly became her life. It never left her, no matter how much she rested or slept. Later she hardly had the strength to walk to her bedroom.

'Put your arms around my neck, love, that's right. Now we are going to lift you up from the chair...'

There were check-ups, radiotherapy, and more check-ups. But her body was quiet like cat paws and owl wings. She almost did not feel the back pain. Almost. Quiet like a sharp knife slicing through bloody meat. Perhaps she did too much gardening, or spent too many hours in front of the computer, Lisa thought, and it was easy to believe. Quiet like the fugitive cells cajoling and hitching undetected rides to any part of her body, going off on their own road trip until they found a hiding place between the vertebrae of her back. And one morning she could hardly get out of bed. An X-ray showed a fracture in Lisa's neck that could snap any time, and she was hospitalised. Higher and higher dosages of chemotherapy were pumped through her body. And I knew; I knew it was going to demolish her from then on, starting with her eyes, moving into her thin fingers with the overgrown and clumsy joints, and down

to her legs that became white and weightless. I saw how day and night disappeared from her life, how everything became chemical and flat, her breath a thin reed as her body and brain lost each other.

I tried to make a day out of it, but she could not remember what I said a few minutes ago. I tried to make a day out of it, but she told the same story over and over again. She fell asleep halfway through a sentence. A confused angel so emaciated that she looked genderless.

Once she thought that one of the cleaners was her father and had a long conversation with him. It was the first and only time that she and her father had anything much to say to each other. She felt happy and relieved about it.

The pain got less.

We decided together to stop chemotherapy. Lisa's parents did not approve. The two old people believed right up to the end that the doctors and dear God would save their child.

Ten o'clock in the morning the hospital phoned me. And I knew. Her eyes were already closed. I felt her light breathing as I leaned forward to kiss her on the forehead. I am here, I am here, I said and I was certain that she could hear me.

When dying, your hearing is the last sense to leave.

Her parents insisted on a church funeral.

I did not say anything.

During the service my name was not mentioned once. It was neither in the speech after the funeral, nor on the funeral programme.

I did not say anything.

The man next to me started sobbing as he told me that he had lost fifteen friends during the past year. Mostly to AIDS. The rest of them to breast cancer. I still did not say anything.

A week later Lisa's parents came to collect the last of her belongings. Her clothes, her computer, a few pieces of furniture, her car.

I just kept quiet.

3.

Diversity

There is no single definition of a lesbian, the noun -- or lesbian, the adjective. Reference dictionaries would come up with something academic-sounding: 'Lesbians, like any straight or homosexual male couples, can be promiscuous or monogamous, ashamed or proud. These generalizations form a spectrum in which most lesbians fall somewhere between.'

It's indeed very difficult to describe in words the many hues of lesbian love. Each experience is an individual journey of consciousness-building that sojourns through a lot of agony and anger, identity politics, and injustice.

Sometimes this journey holds a lot of heavy sorrow and sometimes it's filled with euphoric joy.

Every so often, it's simply, sexy.

Through joy

Cooking juices

Cam du Plessis

There is something about a woman that is busy preparing food at a scrubbed table.

It's something I saw last night, in the vision.

It's the way the neck arches to avoid the tears and onions.

From behind, the serpentine line of the spine sways sensually, one hip shifting higher than the other, to the chop-chop-chop making sweet pepper music. Her busy arse is succulent and loves chop chop music to jam to.

I molest women with their hands busy.

I taste the salt and cooking juices off their skin.

I'm good at stealing kisses and slivers off the chopping board.

She looks at me with a slow smile mixing the dough and I know I am being teased, watching her hands doing things to flour and dough.

I misjudge a kiss stealing raid and am caught against the table. I end up getting covered with flour too, all over my back and breasts.

I like a kitchen table's height and strength. They're redolent with the laughter of shared meals and know how to groan with more than plenty.

It is good to be fecund on a fucking kitchen table.

Like with all good food, one should start like a whisper slipping into an earshell, past spiraling tendrils of hair, through the fragrant steam of the pot.

And so desire and consciousness are awakened. It is a line of fire that follows the finger tracing the line of the spine, an annunciation of desire.

The sauce is spicy enough when she whips around and reaches for me.

I cup my hands around her arse, we slowly dance from stove to table. All that is needed is a slight lift to place that succulent ripe arse on the table. Her eyes steam layers off my skin.

I love rucking a skirt up past the thighs - you meet the best skin in the world.

Good cooking should be drenched with aromatic juices.

The luscious hints in skin and eyes, those blossoms of desire, they lend savour.

It's the recognition of timing - in itself a necessary component to any satisfaction - that really gets my rockery warbling.

Holding your knees in the crooks of my arms I could fuck you on the table, your head thrown back in abandon, till the kitchen table turns to matchsticks.

And no, there are no splinters in fantasies. The process needn't be a marathon either.

Especially when the fantasy is utterly fantastic.

That's how I get to stew in your juices, every night, even when you're not here cooking up a scented storm.

New shoes

Bernadette Muthien

i see you frolic
in your new boots
watch you tiptoe
- tap -
then jump
- big -
wriggling bones all the while
as you explore
the comfort of our fit
and wipe wolfpoop from my slippers
as i pray for wisdoms to always jazz
without stepping on your toes
and watch you glow
while you polish your new shoes
and with sure fingers
make me wear them
for a walk in your woods.



And through sorrow

The Smell Of Winter

Vanessa Fredanus-van Gelder

A year has passed
and winter is here, again.
I can smell you in the air,
Your Vaseline'd body seeps through
my mattress and finds me dreaming
Of cold, sunny mornings
when you would wrap 3 blankets
around us and I would drink in
your sweet dreadlocked hair, intoxicated.
The smell would stay on me for days
and I, was never happier.

sacrifice – making holy

Bernadette Muthien

i spent too many winters
drowning in sweat
battling demons & blocking angels
to have my bloodied independence shattered
like a clumsily dropped orchid

in bed with only your rainbow jersey
& the carcass of a soul stripped naked
of guards braces sheets
a lumpy mattress on the floor
devoid of springs & stuffing

facedownspreadeagled as novices become nuns & marry jesus
i offer you this husk
to populate with your boundless
passions

thick, and thin

It may be difficult to pin down or tag lesbian behaviour... but we do have one thing in common:

All lesbians are thinkers!

Now you may think that is a wild generalisation. But as a poet here muses : 'Every conversation is analysed by its audience, for psychological evaluation'.

Yes, lesbians think, about everything. About shaving or not shaving, about stereotyping by straights or dishing out a good measure of stereotyping themselves.

Want to find a link between fingernails and freedom of expression?
Fat and feminism?

Ask a lesbian. Nothing is straight down the line. Lesbians have a, no pun intended, more in-depth way of approaching issues.

Not always heavy or bitter, since lesbians, sometimes, have the ability to laugh at themselves – but always political.



Really bad lesbian pottery

ulla kelly

token

she's a breeder, she's a guardian reader
and she wants to be friends with me
i'd up her quota of minority mates
so handy for politically correct dates
when the topic comes up, she'll casually say
'oh my best friend's gay'
she'd probably dress to please me
assume that showing flesh would tease me
[babe, the predatory lesbian's mostly a myth
and i have more experienced lovers to play with]
she'll wonder if i shave my legs
and one day when she's drunk she'll beg
me to shag her, but i won't

some dykes like straight chicks – i don't
it's hard work at times, but in the end
it's a good laugh having a token het friend

how to write a really bad lesbian poem

don't write it when you're happy
write it when you're sad
dip your pen in misery
to make it really bad

for full dramatic effect
write in lilac ink
purple prose and poetry
makes a delightful stink

you must use lots of clichés
you have to make it trite
if it starts looking original
dumb it down to get it right

don't worry about rhythm
ignore the rules of rhyme
just ramble, be expressive
good writing is a crime

do the world a favour
show it to all your friends
it's the gift that keeps on giving
lesbian poetry never ends

lesbian anthem

i'm a lesbian
you know i am
i have trust issues
a big box of tissues
cuz i'm a lez-biiii-an
(it's worse than vietnam)
my haircut is rough
my boots are tough

i wanna be your sister
but f^{ck} me till i blister
it makes no sense
but it's real intense
yeah that's me in your face
demanding space
you can run but you can't hide
dump me and i'll threaten suicide
wham bam thank you ma'am
i do declare i'm a lesbian

you know you are a lesbian
when every conversation
is analysed by its audience
for psychological evaluation
foreplay is a soul search
assumptions are masturbation

fuýr alyce

it's true there's nothing finer
than a lesbian vagina
but don't forget, dear venus
the joys of a strap-on penis ;p

graydar

is this some kind of a joke?
i asked as i lit her smoke
i must confess
my mind's in a mess
i'm right at the end of my rope
your period's never been late
you've never been seen on a date
your hair's really short
you drink beer by the quart
there's no way on earth that you're straight

bent, bewildered, bemused

oh how i suffer for my art
my muse arrived and broke my heart
she has no talent, skills or pills
she doesn't help to pay my bills
she puts my patience to the test
i'd rather have the rinderpest
i haven't got a groupie to shag
i can't afford armani rags
all i have is carpal tunnel
i drink my coffee through a funnel
no-one ever sends me flowers
my muse doesn't keep office hours
i'm at her mercy and she knows it
it's hell being a really bad lesbian poet!

There are as many hues of love as there are lesbians.

Celebrating difference, celebrating strangeness, fighting against uniformity, is the only way we can guarantee a tolerant and safe society.

Sometimes the ultimate challenge to stereotypes, or accepted norms or morals of desire – is to publicly engage in sexual behaviour that really puzzles the rest of ‘normal’ society.

Sometimes, you meet a woman, like Mpho in the story below, who feels the need to exercise her right to individuality even stronger and who resorts to completely alternative sexual behaviour.



The Puzzle

Alex Tobias

Mpho lies beside me, the first adult ever to share my new bed.

It’s a Saturday night, too late for her to get transport home to Soweto. Although I engineered this with a skill belying my novice status on the meat market, I’m not expecting anything much: several times in the past few weeks she’s told me frankly that she’s had too much casual sex, and she’s utterly bored with it. This evening she even said that for the first time ever, her libido has died. She also disappeared for half an hour from the party I took her to. I finally found her pacing up and down in the shadowy front garden, giggling flirtatiously while she chatted to her potential lover in Grahamstown.

I’ve known Mpho for a few months. I consider her a friend. She sees the world in a clever and subtle way, and I like that. She’s lovely to look at too, so it’s a pity I’m not particularly attracted to her. This has its advantages though; when I’m with her I feel detached and calm. Tonight I’m absolutely content to chat until we fall asleep. But suddenly she jumps out of bed.

‘Where are your toes?’ she asks me urgently. Before I know it, she’s sucking them voluptuously, one by one and then all together. I’m still trying to work out whether I like this feeling when she breaks off

abruptly to tell me that she has a doubly pierced clit. She shows it to me. It glints silver, looks sublime. Things start to happen.

But this is a strange fit. A misfit, in fact; because Mpho and I are like pieces from different jigsaw puzzles. She comes from a picture of two roaring tigers clawing savagely at each other as they roll together in a cloud of dust. In contrast, my own picture is of a namby pamby couple holding hands as they walk along a golden beach at sunset. How can this possibly work out?

Mpho is fierce and rough. Repeatedly I have to ask her to be gentle. Something about this disturbs her. She looks perplexed, and wonders aloud how her life came to this. She's an S & M girl; she likes to be whipped, tied up, have wax dripped on her pussy. She's only twenty-five, but she's seen it all. When last did she actually feel like making love gently?

I begin to feel doubtful. Is this a good idea? But when I ask her if she's sure she wants to carry on, she seems offended. She is determined to give me a good time. She bends her head and licks my nipple. Well, hell, what can I do? I lie back and enjoy myself.

So it sort of happens, but sort of doesn't. And in a way, my approach wins in the end: when the action fizzles out, she lies tensely in my arms, and grudgingly allows me to stroke her back. I realise that as tame as this may be to her, this is my real desire – I wish to caress another adult's skin.

The next morning, I'm elated. It's taken a long, long time. I'm forty-years-old, and in all my adult life, I've never had sex with anyone that I didn't love. Now, I finally understand. It was so easy, meant so little. This makes me feel great: I've joined the other humans at last. I too can do it, I tell myself. I can scuffle with the best of them. I can have sex that means nothing at all.

It takes several months before I realise quite how bizarre it was that Mpho and I actually spent the night together.

Periodically, we speak on the phone. Now she calls to tell me that she's reconnected with her Master, the man with the whip. He's some guy off the Internet, a Jewish businessman from Sandton with a wife and two kids. They haven't interacted in months, but they've been working up to it. She explains that it takes quite a build up. She sounds very excited.

I realise that I don't understand any of this, but I try. I try to suspend it all – judgement, distaste, incredulity that Mpho needs to be hurt to feel pleasure. I tell myself that this is one of the things that people do. We're strange, but I love us.

We decide that she'll call me after the assignation, and a few days later, she does. But her tone has changed. Her voice is quiet, she sounds low. When I ask how it went, she tells me that it didn't happen.

'There was something he asked me to do,' she says, 'but I couldn't do it.'

I ask what it was, but she skirts around the details for a while.

'It's just that I live here,' she says. 'I couldn't do it because I live here.'

It takes time, but gradually she reveals more. It's all to do with a collar and leash, she explains. She giggles, grows embarrassed, retreats, then advances again. Suddenly she tells me that actually she can cope with public humiliation.

'What do you mean?' I ask.

'Once I knelt on all fours in front of the British Embassy in Bompas Road, masturbating,' she replies.

'Did people see you?'

'It was about six o'clock in the evening, in summer time. There were cars driving by, so people must have seen me – but it's amazing how far you can push yourself if you try.'

She hesitates, then says sadly, 'This time he told me to do it again. I was meant to kneel outside my block of flats in the street, wearing my collar and leash. But I couldn't do it. This is where I live.'

'I was so disappointed,' says Mpho. 'My body was longing for the beating.'

This conversation makes me feel a tad - I don't quite know – troubled, I finally decide is the word I'm looking for. Yes, I'm troubled. I contemplate my bed often for a few days. I stare fixedly at the place where Mpho lay sleeping by my side. Has my safe, innocent refuge from the ugliness of this world been tainted by her presence there? What dangerous dark energies now lurk invisibly about me in the night-time ether?

I try to force the bed to help me to understand what happened. It must know something! If I stare at it hard enough, maybe I'll suddenly intuit something important...but the bed remains mute, refusing to tell me a thing. It's only a bed after all, my quiet, lonely place of rest, bought on a special at the Sleep Shop at Eastgate. It looks the same, it feels the same...and every night I sleep in it just as before.

Love should be our liberator. Because we love where society tells us we dare not, love becomes a weapon of empowerment helping us break down the walls of colour, class, creed, even religion and gender.

When we love where society tells us we should not, we start fighting against that which trivialises our love. We become revolutionaries.

Not so long ago, we were prevented from loving across colour, class and religion lines. We constantly fought and won against that victimization. Let us now not be prevented from loving across gender lines as well.

What if? What if we can use this love to eradicate all forms of prejudice?

What if we can use as an example the dismantling of laws that made racial discrimination legal under the old system? What if the same can be applied to the dismantling of laws that discriminate against same-sex partnerships? What if gay and lesbian marriages became legal?

Only when laws become binding and attitudes change, we will be able to safely say, 'Yes I am, I love women.'

What if

Zama Zungu

What if loving another woman was celebrated
with songs and dance around rich African flames
where tales of my people are told.

What if following desire
was sang about 'round traditional fires
with Mothers filled with pride
as Africans rose from boys to men.

Would my beads be crafted in colours that signified the love I live
Would the making of isishweshwe be in beautiful patterns of my kind
the kind that lives to love out loud.

What if streets were named after those that lived their lives to its fullest
What if their names were printed on the finest yatch
And lit up bright as everyone watched

Would I join the Durban Pride March
In celebration of these beautiful people
Would I love outside social parameters and
live defined by obvious diameters

If rain fell as melted gold and praises were sent up to God
With grateful hearts – none of them cold
And open hands for us to hold

Would my walk be carved like Art and
would I live with an open heart
Would I smile at the sound of them calling
As they define me a lesbian-light

If a holiday was declared and
much respect was reclaimed
If men marches were conducted and
tall towers were constructed
To commemorate the Gay-Kingdom-come

Would my confusion and muted confessions
be the lyrics to our African anthem
Would my expressions of love and female affection
be the colours of my African Nation

Or would I still find a brand new reason
to hold myself bound from the greatest love I've found.



What's in a broek?

A woman in any other clothes would taste as sweet*

Yvonne Shapiro

Lesbians in Pretoria –

Lesbians in drag.

Women in gold lamé,

In silver mesh,

In wedding veils

and matric-dance satin.

Me in wine velvet:

Someone asks, 'Are you sure you're lesbian? ... I mean,

You look so at home in a dress.'

Of course I'm lesbian –

I love women, see?

(I only see women, love!)

I love women in trousers,

women in dresses,

women in cozzies,

women in nothing (best) –

The curve of a cheek,

the line of a lip,

the trace of a tear,

the turn of a thought ...

Yes. I love women. See?

* Apologies to 'Willem Wikkelspies'