

Character/who

The following performance piece is a herstory -- a series of real stories about real women. We raise our voices as women of the world breaking the silence surrounding our oppression and celebrate our resistance.

Every day I open the paper I get sickened by stories like the massacre of 14 Canadian women by a misogynist survivalist, or Charles Stuart, who shot his 7-months pregnant wife and tried to blame it on a Black man, or the man who killed his wife in front of his kids and then, when he got out of jail a few years later, got custody of his kids! Acts like these terrorize and repress women. They are designed to frighten us into giving up our power. ...But we will not give it up. Power is ours! As the South Africans say, AMANDLA! Power is ours!

♀ w/
newspaper
(Imani?)

I'm sick of it! Walking down the street one day, a gallon of milk was thrown on me from a third story window as men yelled, "Fuckin dyke! Man-hating bitch!" The next day a beer bottle came through our car window as my lover and I watched the sunset. Soon after I was assaulted on BART by three men who had seen me leave a lesbian bar. When I got home that night my lover told me that a Black gay man had been lynched in Concord. Let me tell ya -- I won't be satisfied until gay bashing, poverty, racist violence and isolation are ended, and lesbians are recognized as leaders, healers, mothers and teachers!

Lesbian Mothers Win Victory! A lesbian couple who had a child through donor insemination went to court to establish the non-biological mother's right to custody. For the first time ever, the non-biological mother was allowed to adopt the child, thereby establishing joint custody by both mothers!

♀s TV

When the S.F. gay press printed a particularly nasty letter denouncing fat lesbians as ugly and obnoxious, hundreds of fat lesbians responded by coming to Let It All Hang Out Day on Castro Street, celebrating the strength, beauty and contributions of fat lesbians in the women's lesbian, and gay liberation movements. And we'll do it again this year! I am so tired of all the ads pushing women to diet, girdle, primp, and display ourselves to meet a patriarchal standard of beauty. The next time I see an ad like Nutrisystem's asking if I have a hard time losing weight, I'm going to scream -- I don't want to lose weight!

Monique

Women at U.C. Berkeley organized a "Smash the Scales" rally to fight self-hatred and the obsession to diet. Dozens of women who stumbled by the rally lined up to take a turn with the sledge hammer to obliterate this hated symbol of women's oppression and smash the scales!

♀s TV

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Joan suffered from post-partum depression after the birth of her last child, and turned to the Massachusetts State system for help. After voluntarily committing herself to what she later learned was the worst mental institution in the country, her three youngest children were taken and adopted away without her consent. When she got out of the hospital, her children had disappeared forever! Years later she committed suicide. One of her children is a friend of mine, who consequently grew up in abusive homes.

43% of drug abusers and 85% of women in psychiatric institutions are survivors of child sexual assault and/or incest. But Governor Deukmejian's budget cuts will gut child sexual assault prevention programs.

♀ w/news
paper
(I man?)

I'm 32 years old, Black, and homeless. Last September I marched from New York City to Washington, DC to demand "Housing Now!" Being homeless, you stay in institutions where you feel like you're in jail, or you stay in different people's apartments, who are all crackheads, and that just makes you start again. My kids are 14, 10, and 4. I've been away from them almost 4 years. It's an awful long time. But I don't want to go back to New York with no place to stay. I might end up on drugs again, and I'm scared of that. Homeless people need not only affordable housing but jobs that enable us to live. For once in my life I'd like to be able to work and see a future."

Poverty and racism exacerbate women's health problems. Of the 52,000 women diagnosed with cervical cancer in 1986, over half were Black women, who die at three times the rate of white women with cervical cancer.

♀ w/news
paper
(I man?)

42,000 women die of breast cancer alone every year. Like AIDS, this is an epidemic.

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90% of all cancers in the U.S. are environmentally related. Chemical companies sit on the Boards of the largest cancer organizations and direct their research. Are they going to stop the use of pesticides, the emission of chemical wastes or the tobacco industry? They DON'T support resources for women, like the Women's Cancer Resource Center and the Charlotte Maxwell Complementary Clinic -- the women's community creates these or they would not exist at all. And they are only a bare beginning. Until we stop the poisoning of all of us, our children, and our world -- WE STILL AIN'T SATISFIED!

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My name is Alma Muniz. I come from Ciudad Cristiano in Puerto Rico. A few years ago we discovered our town was being contaminated with mercury from the pharmaceutical plants. I had been having miscarriages. Nobody knew why. The doctor said they were "natural," but since I had never had them before I asked him to do an autopsy on one. The test was positive for mercury poisoning. The rest of my family has also suffered from a host of illnesses: memory and hair loss, swelling, nervous conditions, asthma and allergies. Now we know who's to blame!

My name is Marianna. I used to work for a U.S. company in the Philippines peering through a microscope working on micro computer chips. Like many other women, my eyesight began to fail. I joined the organizing against the factory's working conditions, but my husband didn't want me to go to meetings. Then I joined GABRIELA, the militant feminist national women's coalition, and I realized I was neither inferior nor stupider than men. I was able to convince my husband that I was fighting for both feminism and a truly democratic Philippines.

I walked into the office of the Institute for the Promotion and Development of Women in San Salvador on a typical, busy day. Blanquita, rushing to get to the post office, Nora training some women on the computer, Rosita cleaning the office and cooking for everyone, Patti answering the phone. I met with Norma, who briefed me on their wonderful plans and dreams for the 1990s. I was amazed that this group of women, so full of life, positive energy and hope, could function so well in a country with all this repression. One week later, Norma was dead -- killed with U.S. bullets for assisting her wounded brothers and sisters. But life goes on. The women draw strength from remembering Norma while they go on changing their lives and organizing.

Constant demonstrations and occupations finally took their toll on the S.F. Army Exploita- I mean, Recruiting Station on Market St. After a group of women trashed it recently protesting U.S. intervention in El Salvador, army officials decided to close it down!

I want to say to congresswoman Pat Schroeder -- women don't want to fight in U.S. wars. We want to dismantle the U.S. military, and create jobs that don't require oppressing women in Nicaragua, Panama, El Salvador, and everywhere else the U.S. is acting out its macho imperialism.

At the border I could see the Israeli soldiers' eyes read my features. He glanced at the paper with my name on it, and told me to step aside. "But I'm with this group you've just let walk through -- all of us are U.S. citizens." "It's security, for security purposes," he stated. Stripped naked in a booth, I watched the Israeli soldier as she searched me. Security, I ask? How is it

Rachel

Salvador
♀

♀ TV

Hudak

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that the Anglo woman right behind me walked through without having her bag checked? She could've carried a bomb. Security? No. Racism. Being a Palestinian, no matter where in the world you are forced to go, you are still seen as a terrorist. Racism.

South Africa

Carmen Valentin, Puerto Rican Prisoner of War, reaches over the walls of the Pleasanton Federal Prison to send these words: "Nelson Mandela's release was a great international victory for me. Like Winnie Mandela said, "Part of my soul went with him when he went." Now I turn it around and say -- part of my soul goes out with him as he goes out into freedom. I told the guards that Nelson Mandela was charged with the exact crimes that we have been charged with and that he was called a terrorist, and now he has been vindicated. And one day soon we'll be vindicated too!

In the U.S. there are over 150 political prisoners and prisoners of war. Like Carmen, they are in prison for fighting for freedom and justice, and like Nelson Mandela, they will be freed only when all of us raise our voices to demand their release!

The U.S. government has subpoenaed me for information about the Pledge of Resistance, a national Central America Anti-Intervention organization with which I work. They say they will put me in jail if I do not testify and turn over documents. They are fishing for information on the movement, and I'm not about to bite. Going to jail means I'll be separated from my four kids. Since I'm a single mother, their lives will be uprooted as well as mine. I've been in jail before, and as a disabled woman I know it's going to be difficult--they don't make jails accessible. So I try not to think about that. Instead I think about the community that supports and encourages me, the women who will make sure my kids are fine, the anger this unjust repression will engender, and all the organizing there is to be done. Just standing firmly on my principles has given me such a tremendous amount of strength--I highly recommend it!

A woman at my job has been waitressing for seven years. She recently developed carpal tunnel syndrome, a disease many clerical and factory workers develop because of bad working conditions. She lost her job, has no health insurance, and can't get on SSI because they won't recognize this disease, even though it has left her hands paralyzed.

Darla

(4)

I am not one of the physically challenged--
I'm a sock in the eye with gnarled fist
I'm a French kiss with cleft tongue
I'm orthopedic shoes sewn on a last of your fears
I am not one of the differently abled--
I'm an epitaph for a million imperfect babies left untreated
I'm an ikon carved from bones in a mass grave in Tiergarten, Germany
I'm withered legs hidden with a blanket
I am not one of the able-disabled--
I'm a black panther with green eyes and scars like a picket fence
I'm pink lace panties teasing a stub of milk-white thigh
I'm the Evil Eye
I'm the first cell divided
I'm mud that talks
I'm Eve I'm Kali
I'm The Mountain That Never Moves
I've been here forever I'll be here forever
I'm The Gimp
I'm The Cripple
I'm The Crazy Lady
I'm The Woman With Juice

Cheryl

I'm 62 years old. When the youngest women in my collective were confronted with the prospect of aging, they said things like "Oh, I'm not going to get old," or "I'll be dead by then," or "I'll commit suicide before I get old." I sat there thinking "Wow! They believe they would rather commit suicide than be like me!"

In 1968 I joined the anti-war movement. The men never let me go to any of the important meetings. Someone suggested that I get into women's liberation. I gave what was then a standard answer -- "yes, but men and women are both oppressed." Then I went to my first women's meeting. I never said that again! We went around the circle, each talking a little, each listening alot. We realized that what we thought were our own personal problems were really things we all shared because we were women. That first meeting went late into the night. We became feminists, we joined women's organizations, we left our boyfriends, some of us came out. One thing was for certain, our lives would never EVER be the same again!

Nink

Women have 40 times more bunions than men do -- says right here! It's because of high heels. And on that topic, listen to this -- they quote a mugger saying "We would wait under a stairwell in the subway station and, when we heard the click of the wobbly spiked heel, we knew we had one."

Newspaper
(Imani?)

I was walking toward my neighborhood abortion clinic. I could see from blocks away that the anti-abortion fanatics were about. I hesitated, knowing I could not trust the police or the courts to protect me. But I'd rather brave the Christian right than give up control of my own body. Upon arriving at the clinic I realized that there were pro-choice women and men escorting clients into the clinic. I entered the clinic feeling empowered and supported. In fact, I joined the clinic defenders outside that same clinic two weeks after my abortion.

Operation Rescue's National Headquarters were shut down due to a financial crisis brought on by over \$450,000 in fines associated with violent blockading and harrassment of abortion clinics and clients.

93 TV

Sojourner Truth:

Now, women do not ask half of a kingdom, but their rights. And they don't get them. When she comes to demand them, don't you hear how sons hiss their mothers like snakes because they ask for their rights. And can they ask for anything less? ...But we'll have our rights, see if we don't. And you can't stop us from them, see if you can. You can hiss us as much as you like, but it's coming.

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We dedicate this International Women's Day to our foremothers around the world and throughout history who have struggled for women's freedom and human freedom, for a better world. They faced great hardship, but held onto a vision of justice and liberation:

Sojourner Truth...Ida B. Wells...Emma Goldman...Anna Mae Aquash...Febe Valasquez...Nora Astorga...Pat Parker...Dona Consuela...Mabel Hampton...Rosa Luxemborg...Larena Barrows, Harriet Tubman, Christobel Pankhurst, Mary Wollstencraft, Christine de Pizan, Simone de Beauvoir, and all the anonymous women, our mothers and grandmothers, who gave us life, whose every act, no matter how small, paved the way for us today. We carry their spirits with us as we join women marching in Chicago, New York, Eugene, the Philippines, South Africa, El Salvador, and throughout the world to celebrate women's strength, beauty and resistance! With women everywhere, we demand:
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