

19 and Bi

By A. J. Walkley

Looking back on my life from my current vantage point of 28 years old, it amazes me that I did not realize my bisexuality much earlier than I did. By the time I came to terms with being bi and readily identified with the term, I had had multiple attractions to individuals from across both the gender and sexual spectrums. My first attractions to a boy and a girl happened at the wee age of six. Regardless, I identified as straight until I was 19.

Despite my self-proclaimed "heterosexual" status, the first club I became involved in when I started college was the gay-straight alliance on my campus, Spectrum. At the time, I wanted to be the best ally the LGBT+ community could ask for. By the end of my freshman year, I had become a board member for the group and was known to provide a nonjudgmental ear for anyone dealing with sexuality issues. However, even though I had spent the better part of the year nursing a massive crush for another female who lived in my hall – along with a simultaneous crush for a guy on my dorm floor – I was still in immense denial of my own sexuality.



A. J., continues on page 12

After a Lifetime of Searching

By Suzanne Lauer

I was a hippie in the 60's; I wasn't the kind of flower child who danced, stoned and half-naked in the park that you see in film footage. I was the bookish kind who grew long hair as an act of defiance, who insisted on a self-determined set of values and an unconventional course for my life. I was an idealist committed to making the world better to the full extent of my power.

When I was 16, my best friend was my sunshine and I was hers. I experienced my first "best day of my life" with her, and then another, followed by more and more. It was an exuberant time for us, full of discovery and newly found shared realities. More than "best friends," each day was a delight because we had each other.

We were in an extra-curricular book club at school, where we read *Steppenwolf* by Hermann Hesse. A character in the book made love to both men and women. I read that and thought, "That's how I want to live, it makes no sense to do it only with men." I expected to wait until we were somewhat older and more mature to broach the subject with her, as I had no name for what I felt and no idea if she felt the same. Tragically, she was killed the following year, before we ever had a chance to see what might have been.

Several years passed painfully, but after the grieving eased, I looked to connect with other women. In college, afterward in Europe and

then when I returned to the US and was active in feminist politics, I gravitated to situations where I knew I was likely to meet lesbians. Despite always being alert for possibilities, I never had another friendship with the kind of connection I had experienced in high school. I didn't even know where to begin. As I aged, my fantasies finally turned to hopes of someday meeting a widow willing to experiment in a community for seniors... I wasn't at the end, but it felt like I was approaching it.

Then, last year my husband started sharing porn videos with me. I kept asking about women and their experiences, then the questions gravitated to those of women with other women. When we had first met, close to 40 years ago, my husband was the first one to suggest I had been in love with my friend. He had seen the side of me that needed to connect deeply and intimately with women go unfulfilled our whole lives. He searched and one day found a grainy video a young woman had made using her laptop, showing her making love with her girlfriend. Suddenly, I felt an arousal unlike anything before. It was immediate and life-changing.

Suzanne, continues on page 9

HONOR ROLL

Caylene Pillsbug
Ellyn Ruthstrom
Gail Zacharias
Julie M.
Justin Adkins
Kate Estrop
Katrina Chaves
Laurie R.
Laurie Wolfe
Linda Burnett
Rawley Chaves
Robyn Ochs

Bi Women is published quarterly.

Editor:
Robyn Ochs

Assistant Editor:
Catherine Rock

News Editor:
Robyn Ochs

Calendar Editor:
Kate Estrop

Proofreaders:
Katelynn Bishop
Lynne Levine
Neelima Prabhala
Vanessa Fabbre

All articles and art appearing in *Bi Women* are copyrighted by the authors and artists.

Boston-area women:
Sign up for our new email list!
Send an email to:
biwomenboston-subscribe@yahoogroups.

From Your Editor

We received so many submissions to our last issue that we decided to continue with the same theme. So this new issue is "What Happens Next, part 2."

Readers were asked: "What did you do next? Did you look for supportive community? Read books? Try to meet other women loving women? Seek out experience? See a counselor? Look for information on the Internet? Ask friends for advice? Tell us your story. Or give advice to other women who might be in this situation now."

This issue includes essays by A. J. Walkley, Suzanne Lauer, Denise Garrow-Pruitt, Jane Barnes, Amber Turner, Michelle Snyder and Zuzi, as well as a poem by Jane Barnes.

The Around the World column is back, with a piece by Surya Monroe (Switzerland & the United Kingdom). You'll also find two book reviews, an article about a recent Dear Abby column, the Ask Tiggy column, News Briefs and – of course – our Calendar of Events for June, July and August.

Speaking of the calendar, there has been a staffing change here at *Bi Women*: after several years of faithful service as Calendar Editor, Ellyn Ruthstrom has stepped down from this position and Kate Estrop is our new Calendar Editor. Thank you, Ellyn, for all of the time that you put into this project, and welcome, Kate.

Robyn

Alison reads *Bi Women*. Send us a picture of YOU reading *Bi Women*.

Be creative!



Next in *Bi Women*

The theme for the Fall '13 issue:

Bisexual Enough?

Have you ever wondered – perhaps because you do not fall dead center on the Kinsey Scale or because you've not had actual sexual and/or relationship experience with people of a particular gender (or even perhaps with anyone at all) – whether you are bisexual enough to call yourself bisexual? Has your legitimacy as a "true bisexual" ever been challenged by others? Tell us about your experiences, your interior dialogue, your conversations, your process. We want to hear from you. Essays, poems, artwork and short stories are welcome.

Submissions for the next issue must be received by August 1st.

Submission guidelines are at:

<http://biwomenboston.org/newsletter/submission-guidelines/>

Send your submissions and suggestions for future topics to
biwomeneditor@gmail.com

If you do not want your full name published, or wish to use a pseudonym, just let us know.

***Bi Women* is online at biwomenboston.org.**

BBWN is an all-volunteer organization. Want to host one of our monthly brunches, be the woman who coordinates the brunches, help out with our website (we use WordPress)? Or, if you're a student, consider an internship. If you are interested in helping out, please contact Robyn (biwomeneditor@gmail.com).

The Boston Bisexual Women's Network is a feminist, not-for-profit collective organization whose purpose is to bring women together for support and validation. It is meant to be a safe environment in which women of all sexual self-identities, class backgrounds, racial, ethnic and religious groups, ages, abilities and disabilities are welcome. Through the vehicles of discussion, support, education, outreach, political action and social groups related to bisexuality, we are committed to the goals of full acceptance as bisexuals within the gay and lesbian community, and to full acceptance of bisexuality and the liberation of all gay and transgender people within the larger society.

Around the World: Surya Monroe (Switzerland & the United Kingdom)

By Surya Monroe

I am the daughter of mixed European and American parents. Growing up in England and Switzerland in the 1970s and '80s, I was pretty unaware of sexual diversity and sexual choice. But when I was just turning 15, I got a scholarship to a progressive international school in Switzerland. There I took part in an "Emancipation Studies" course, where we studied feminist theory and read lesbian novels; about that time, I realized I was bi. Luckily for me this identity was unproblematic in the alternative circles that I moved in during my later teens, until I had a fallout with my college's Lesbian and Gay Officer who was determined that I should not be allowed access to the college LGB night because I had a boyfriend. My bisexual activist self was born! I remember designing a badge titled "off pink" at a conference when I was about 18. I still have that badge and it is now more than 20 years old.

Have things moved forward? For me personally, I had a lesbian phase for around six years in my twenties before coming out again as bi and getting involved in what's now my "home" in many ways, the UK bisexual community. Starting in 1998, I regularly attended BiCons but often felt like an outsider, but eventually I got to know so many people that I fear I have become one of the dreaded 'clique.'

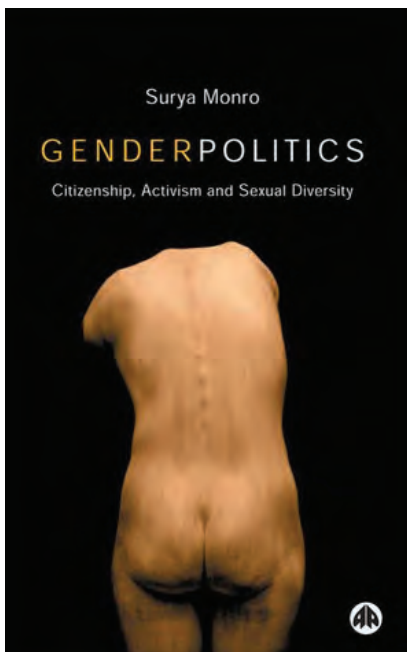
I was one of those people whose intellectual capacities outdid my social capacities. I was in a monogamous relationship



with a bloke and having a baby whilst interviewing poly people and exploring and critiquing queer theory. When the monogamous relationship with the bloke broke down (for many reasons, but I don't think me being queer and bi helped), I struggled to combine respectable pseudo-heterosexual parenting and alternative relationship frameworks. I learned that like many other minorities with complex and intersecting identities to balance, my bi identity was not always the most important one. Being a good parent and contributing to the world via my work are more important. Sometimes these things all combine beautifully and other times they do not.

At the moment I am lucky enough to be in South Africa on a study trip where I am using material for my forthcoming book, *Bisexual Identities*, to be published by Palgrave in late 2014 or in 2015, to give a talk on the usefulness (or not) of sexual and gender categories for the Human and Social Research Council in Pretoria. It's great to be part of the movement to bring bisexual voices more into mainstream society. I look forward to the day when gender and sexually diverse people can live happily and free from discrimination and abuse, in all the different countries of the world.

Dr. Surya Monroe is a Reader in Sociology and Social Policy at the Centre for Research in the Social Sciences of the University of Huddersfield in West Yorkshire, UK.



When My Life Changed

By Denise Garrow-Pruitt

My life changed, completely and forever, the day I realized I had fallen in love with a woman. Up until that day I had been happily married to a man. I was overwhelmed with guilt. I searched for an answer to my inner turmoil. I looked for books, but none seem to fit my situation. I then turned to the Internet. I looked up “Massachusetts bisexual.” The search returned the Bisexual Resource Center. I called the number listed and spoke to a nice man who told me about a group they had for married people who were attracted to people of their same gender. The meeting was that very night. With lots of fear and nervousness, I attended the meeting and although everyone in the group was male, I really felt I understood and connected to them. We each talked about what we were going through. At the end of the meeting, one of the group members told me I might find additional support at the Women’s Center in Cambridge. As soon as I got home, I called and listened to their recording of group offerings. There were two that fit my needs: a “Coming Out Group” on Saturday mornings and a women’s “Bi Rap” group on Tuesday evenings. I attended both meetings and found amazing groups of women who gave me unconditional support.

The bisexual community was very supportive of me. I am still friends with that great group of people who helped me so long ago. I will be forever grateful to the bisexual community (especially the Bisexual Resource Center) who told me I was going to be all right. They were correct. I am more than all right. I am a proud bisexual and very happy to be part of this great community of bisexual people.

After getting my own life together, I wanted to give back to the bi community that had helped me. I started a women’s support group, “Married But Not Straight (MBNS)[®],” which meets monthly in Northborough, MA, a town west of Boston. I am happy to assist any woman who finds herself married to a man but attracted to a woman. This support network is confidential, free of charge, and helps women to safely come out of isolation. Anything that I can do to make the process easier, I will do. If you have questions about this group or want further information, please email MBNSmetrowest@gmail.com.

Dr. Denise Garrow-Pruitt is a college dean and professor. She believes that the only way to change thinking is through education and has contributed this story in the hope of educating and creating change.

Garden of Eden

By Jane Barnes

I love flowers they know true
Nourishment you are one though
That won’t open you stingy lily

I have taken up swimming at night
Swam as at twelve in an indoors

Tub with a girl very sexy not
(I repeat) not practicing this
the real thing lovers for a year

every day after school we
yanked off our blouses and
leaped into her bed Knock knock

at the door Girls? What’s going
on in there? Go away Mom
we’re so tired if she’d really

understood us she might have died

Jane Barnes has published poetry in Getting Bi: Voices of Bisexuals Around the World, Bi Women, Wormwood Review, River Styx, and Massachusetts Review. Her stories have been published in a dozen magazines and collections and have received three literary prizes. The tribeweaver, a collection of Jane’s poetry over 25 years, is in manuscript.



Dr. Denise Garrow-Pruitt

“Have You Ever Kissed a Girl Before?”

By Amber Turner

Before being asked this question, the idea had literally never crossed my mind, which was pretty unbelievable since my sister had come out as a lesbian about a year earlier. One would think that having a gay sister would have led me, at least once, to entertain the idea of kissing someone of the same sex. However, growing up in a super religious family, we were taught that homosexuality was not only a sin but one of the worst sins we could commit. Because it had been engrained in us, I firmly believed that we never question our parents and certainly never question “God” or what we were taught in church. We were told that having sex with someone of our same sex was an abomination, and additionally, we were taught that sex with someone of the opposite sex was only to be had after marriage. Now, that was problematic because I have always been a super sexual being. I never allowed myself to even daydream about kissing girls and therefore I ended up being extremely boy crazy from a very young age.

Looking back, I was always drawn to butch women and gender queer individuals. They were my people, but I thought I was drawn to them because they were outsiders and I wanted to be near them in order to be their ally and make them feel normal and loved in a strictly platonic way. But, once my lips touched a woman’s, a whole new world opened up for me. That exact moment was the first time in my life that I felt balanced. I could not believe that I enjoyed it so much. I did not understand why even after everything that I had been taught, this did not feel wrong in any way. I instantly understood that all the times in my past when I had been “jealous” of another woman’s body that I had been simply attracted to her. Those times that I “just wanted to be friends” with a baby-faced butch, I actually wanted to ask her on a date. Those instances of feeling intrigue after meeting a very effeminate man were actually sexual attraction. The world seemed so much bigger and brighter, and I felt like I had been given a gift, the opportunity to find sexual balance in my life. I no longer felt so boy crazy that I couldn’t finish my homework, or so sexually frustrated that I couldn’t sleep at night. I felt “normal” and not overrun by my sexual drive toward men.

Over the next year, I dealt with a lot of internalized homophobia and received very little support from my sister, who did not understand my dramatic shift from hyper boy crazy to balanced sexual peace in my bisexuality. However,

I had a wonderful counselor and the support of allied groups, where I was able to be perceived as an ally until I was brave enough to come out. I stopped going to the church that told me I was going to hell and found a more personal spirituality that worked for me. I began to make connections with other like-minded queer people through the Internet. The more LGBT people I met, the more normalized my sexuality became. When I was finally ready to come out, I began to see and understand that bisexuality was not the easiest identity to label myself. People often responded that I was choosing that label because it was safer, that I was just trying to straddle the gay/straight fence, which was frustrating because I did not find full support from either side because I was bi. It was especially difficult, and still is, to continually correct people when they assume, because I am automatically a lesbian because I am married to a woman. When I meet new people, the last thing I see is their sex. I do not care what anatomy is between their legs. I see their essence, their energy, and their heart. That is what I am attracted to. Like I told my mother (who did not understand that if I was attracted to both sexes, why I would not choose to be with a man as God wanted), I cannot choose who I fall in love with. The person I fell in love with just happened to be a female-bodied being. That does not mean that I am not still deeply attracted to men. Lucky for me, I have an open marriage, and I will continue to be able to express that love and sexual attraction that I find for others through our negotiated boundaries. There are so many beautiful people in this world and I feel blessed to be someone whose ability to love extends beyond anatomy and sex and gender.

Amber was recently married and just celebrated her fourth year with her husbutch. She is thankful for the success of her open marriage, which allows her to continue to engage in relationships with others, including men.

A Piece of Me

By Michelle Snyder

Rebecca was unique, mysterious, and beautiful. She was unlike any other girl I had ever known, and I considered myself lucky to have become her friend. Around her, I felt I could express myself freely, away from the strictness of my parents. I was 17. My feelings started to change when one day we were hanging out with some friends and we kissed for the first time. I was sitting between her and this guy I liked, kissing her while she had her hands in my pockets; he was kissing me on the neck. A surge of sexual energy passed through me like nothing I had ever felt before. This was the beginning of my first crush on a girl. Infatuation, desire, wanting to touch her, kiss her, experiment with her; oh, the rush I felt. It was two years of endless desire for her skin to be naked with mine, our breasts touching, our legs intertwined with each other, making out and kissing. I wanted her to be my girlfriend. In the end, my heart was broken when we found ourselves in the same bed and I lay there while she had sex with her boyfriend instead of me, but that feeling and desire to be with a woman never left.

I met Matt at a house party purely by accident; I was 19. He was sitting alone, and I went over to him and said hi. He was quiet, shy, and sweet. We spent the rest of the evening together, and even though I was drunk, he never once took advantage of me. We were each other's first serious relationship. We dated for a year and a half and had so much fun together. His family and friends welcomed me with open arms. He brought out the best in me. When I told him about Rebecca, he never judged me or treated me differently; he was very supportive. He was willing to let me explore this other side of me while we were still dating, and I wish I could have, but I felt like I would have been cheating on him, and I just couldn't get past that. I guess I shouldn't have been surprised that he noticed my evolving crush on my roommate Renee even before I did! I had no evidence that she had any attraction to me or that she even liked women. How could it be that I loved Matt and still had the desire to be with Renee? Was I a closet lesbian and just afraid to admit it? I was still physically attracted to Matt, but at the same time, tangled up inside, was an insatiable urge to make love to Renee. I didn't know what to do or where to turn. I felt fear, confusion, and guilt. As time went on, I found that Matt wasn't willing to communicate with me in the way I needed in order to keep a long-term relationship moving forward, so with deep sadness, I broke it off.

I looked up a coming out support group at the nearby college. Once I started talking and sharing, I realized that I wasn't crazy, sick, or confused. It gave me a refuge where I could be okay for an hour or two. I searched out books on the subject of bisexuality, but never found anything that

spoke to me. I came across a lot of stories about threesomes, and as erotic as they were, that wasn't what I was interested in. There wasn't much out there that sounded like me that I could relate to. I cried a lot. I thought a lot. I was scared a lot. The Kinsey scale came up in most books, but it didn't make much sense to me. I felt lost, lonely, and confused. I can't describe the disgust I had with myself. Would I ever be able to lead a normal life? What kind of relationships could I have? How could someone ever love me?

Renee was just an acquaintance when I moved in with her. It was a convenient living situation: she needed a roommate, I needed a place to live, and the rent was cheap. I thought she was adorable right away; she was intriguing, and she was creative like me. She even got me a job at the bakery where she worked. For the first few months we did our own thing, we mostly kept to ourselves but did enjoy the same tastes in decorating and shared our smoke breaks together on the steps outside. After eight months, we moved into the downstairs apartment. I quit the bakery job and when I returned from a weekend trip. Renee started treating me differently: I didn't see it coming. I couldn't believe that she liked me. After all those feelings I had been hiding, I found that she had been feeling the same way. Little by little, we started dating and sleeping together. This was our first lesbian relationship. It was new and exciting. All I wanted was to make her happy; I would have done anything for her. It was too bad that I didn't know how to make myself happy. I didn't miss men; I was devoted to her and only her, but I still didn't feel that the label of 'lesbian' fit me. After two years, our relationship had grown stagnant; we hadn't grown as a couple or as individuals, and I broke up with her. A year later our paths crossed again. We seemed to have grown and were willing to give the relationship another try. We really wanted it to work; it was a fresh start for both of us. For the next two years, we dated, but codependency took hold and we fell into the same unhealthy patterns as before, so with heavy hearts, we once again broke up. Over the course of the last ten years, we have remained in contact and have created a lasting friendship.

At some point in my mid-twenties, I came to the conclusion that I didn't want the burden of other people's opinions controlling my thoughts or poisoning my beliefs. I wanted control over my own life and happiness. I wasn't a bad person. I wasn't a delinquent. I was ready to be who I was, label or no label. I let people know that I was in a relationship with a woman, hoping that others could see that gay people are not scary, dirty, or shameful. I didn't preach to them; I just talked about my girlfriend just as a straight woman might talk about her boyfriend. Why should I be left out of the conversations?

For me, identifying as bisexual is more about attraction to people, not what is underneath the clothes. It is a matter

Michelle, continued on next page

Now I Know

By Zuzi

“OK. And now what?” This was the first question on my mind after I came to a bi identity. Identifying as bisexual did not come with an amazing “Oh, la la,” nor with the fireworks seen in films, but rather with a deep, deep breath. “OK, I am bisexual and now I know.”

My life would continue the same as before. I was an old bisexual woman in a heterosexual marriage who for a long time had known she was different and tried to figure out why. I continued on the same path as before, reading the same books, doing the same work, listening to the same type of music, talking with the same type of people. The only difference was that I was no longer driven to search and research and explore who I was, because now I knew. I could potentially be attracted to someone of my own gender – or not – at some point.

My new identity came with peacefulness but also a sense of danger, because I knew that I could be rejected, hated and perceived as a threat to both heterosexuals and gays. However, I was confident that it would not happen to me, because I knew that I was a good person, and if people had accepted me before, they would accept me now.

But the real truth was that as soon as I identified myself openly as bisexual, I found a very tiny path of acceptance and support. It was suggested to me directly or indirectly that I should choose a side. Since coming out, it has been hard, with screwed up reactions from one side or another, leaving me caught between. If you don't have the confidence that your identity is OK as is, coming out can be a potentially dangerous place. At least for me it was and remains so. And it seems the majority of people that I meet are bisexual, living a straight or gay life, but bisexual.

Acknowledging my bisexuality was for me not a transition to something else. Open bisexual identity – at least for me – came with peace and relief and also with a sense of scariness and danger and a need to watch my back lest I get screwed by both parts of the spectrum in a way that I had never experienced before. It is a really tough place to be, but at least you know who you are and know that there is nothing wrong with it! To be bisexual is beautiful.

Zuzi is a middle-aged registered nurse in a heterosexual marriage who has lived in Europe, the US and Canada.

Michelle, continued from previous page

of what clicks with our personalities, our views on life and our interests, and a human connection. Love is love, and it is colorful and bountiful. It could be a girl with long red curls, or a guy in nicely-fitting blue jeans. Sometimes I find that I lean more towards one sex than another, but I never tire of either. I am not attracted to every woman I see, just as I am not attracted to every guy I see. A girl can be attractive to me, but that doesn't mean I would take her to bed or desire to have a relationship with her. I like what I like. There has to be a more personal connection in order for there to be a sexual connection. We are comprised of both female and male chromosomes, and to be attracted to both, for me, means balance.

Michelle, 39, recently married Bill. They have an open relationship, one dog and four cats. Bill works as an engineer during the week, and runs a skydive operation on the weekends, Michelle runs manifest, and occasionally jumps out of airplanes. She recently started a dog-walking business and manages Bill's storage facility. She enjoys yoga, knitting and kayaking.



How I feel about 90% of the time when I write about bi stuff.

Note: This graphic was created by Shiri Eisner, author of the forthcoming book, Bi: Notes for a Bisexual Revolution. It is reprinted with her permission.

Bi the Way

By Jane Barnes

When I came out as lesbian to my father he said, “To me it’s like two left shoes.” If heterosexuality was a regular pair of shoes, bisexuality must be a third shoe positioned between the regular pair, in my case an exact three on the Kinsey scale—equally heterosexual and homosexual. Colette had such erotic and beautiful things to say about women; I simply felt the same way. I didn’t think of it as going over some invisible line. Women and men both were attractive to me—their sameness and their difference. Are these evil thoughts? Not to me. I said to myself, I have an open mind, I’m willing to live on the edge, sometimes teeter on the edge, sometimes fall off. I’ve had crushes on both sexes all my life. I did fall off, and it was thrilling. And terrifying.

Sappho talked me through it (I prefer the Mary Barnard translation). I came out through my own literary magazine *Dark Horse* in 1976 with “Look, Passion.” I had a short liaison with an honest, generous woman, a complete and sweet surprise which I preserved in “Swinging,” a story published in the Boston lesbian magazine, *Focus*. Two of my poems “How to Dress Like a Scary Dyke,” and “How to Dress Like a Femmy Dyke” were published and anthologized. Google lists me as lesbian as did other anthologies except *Getting Bi*, edited by Robyn Ochs and Sarah E. Rowley and published in 2005. A few more were published right here in *Bi Women*.

In the beginning, at about six, I was in love with Pixie; we played “marriage,” switching roles from “wife” to “husband.” At twelve, I had fallen for a girl, and we made love protected by the ignorance of her Catholic relatives; then someone threw a girl-boy party where I lost at spin the bottle and had to kiss Tommy, icky kisser. Abused by my intelligent father, I got crushes only on simple boys, and was stalked daily all one summer through the redwoods by the older brother of a girl pal. I tried to escape by staying home and doing endless laundry. A few years later I fell in love with Donny, but grew restless, dumped him and then pined for him anew when he found someone else. He came back to me, then left me. I took a handful of aspirins, telling no one; my ears rang for a week, but that was all.

I went off to college in Oregon, where I joined a poetry group, and marched for equal rights. I published a poem in the student newspaper edited by my English professors, the well-respected poets, Vern Rutsala and William Stafford. Marla, my first lesbian friend, introduced me to books on sexuality. Bored again, I traveled to Peru for half a year before returning to Francisco State as a transfer student. After a year, I ran away with an older, red-headed man, who took me to Atlanta, where I got my BA. We moved to Boston, and I studied the viola da gamba. Thanks to the

women’s movement, I left Red, and worked my way out of my Stockholm Syndrome.

The feminists in our “consciousness-raising” groups sometimes kissed each other, and looked happy. I fell in love with a male (bisexual) music buddy, Lewis, a divine cook, and a great wit. After three years happy, I fell for a woman, straight, who played me. A cancer scare turned me into a writer and I published in little magazines (including my own) and came out in *Dark Horse* with a lesbian poem called “Look, Passion.” I broke up with Lewis to find a “real” lesbian love. Virginia Woolf and Colette were my literary heroes; Woolf also bipolar like me, Colette writing many novels drenched in sensuous, silky language, woman-centric. She lived with a woman for 15 years or so, then married a man.

I got sober and years later I fell in love with my best friend, a lesbian. Step by step we became a couple, found a nice apartment and worked on her music career and my writing career for a decade. Then she fell in love with someone else and we broke up. I went out to Seattle to help nurse my very ill mother and decided there to move to New York City, finding a studio in Brooklyn’s Park Slope, and getting a college teaching gig or two, settling in and hanging out with my best pal, Gordon, a brilliant young gay composer.

“Would you like to write an autobiography?” asked a lesbian editor. I was bi now, I told her; was this a problem? Yes. I read poet/writer Jan Clausen’s *Apples and Oranges*, about coming out bi after identifying as lesbian. I read Marjorie Garber’s brilliant *Vice Versa: Sexuality and the Eroticism of Everyday Life*. Had poems in the anthology *Getting Bi; Voices of Bisexuals Around the World*. More poems in *Bi Any Other Name: Bisexual People Speak Out*, edited by Loraine Hutchins and Lori Kaahumanu.

Do I look bi? Who knows. Would that be having a man on one arm, a woman on the other? Not my thing.

On paper, pronouns and first names help: you can refer to your lover, Jill, and your ex, Jeffrey. I say I’ve had three husbands and two wives. I’m monogamous, and life has brought me a few deep loves, a gift that I appreciate. Women and men: I hope to be available to love. Period.

You will find Jane’s bio and one of her poems on page 4.

Suzanne, continued from page 1

New circuits lit up in me that evening. Since then, I have been growing in all the ways that should have developed years ago. Literally, I have felt like a teenager, only this time I'm out and free; the part of me that was arrested at an earlier stage has been released. I am growing.

My husband found a website for me where I have found the freedom to blossom into my full bi identity. This website is www.shybi.com. At first, I truly was shy, even bashful then, as I read through the forums, I began making posts of my own. I learned about my life and feelings, gained new perspective and saw the experiences and feelings of other women. What had always felt out-of-place, what made me feel awkward in social situations, suddenly was normal and acceptable.

I made a whole new set of friends, and began to follow them through the daily struggles, surprises and excitement of life's ups and downs, and watch as friends found lovers, long distance romances blossomed and trips took place, felt their tears upon parting. There was and is such a wide spectrum of bi experience that plays out in the safe environment of this special online community, one that is supportive, helpful and kind. Through Shy's, I have discovered the erotic side of my need to connect, and learned I can even write erotic fiction.

A reader of one of my stories wrote to me. A friendship developed between us, and eventually, we fell in love.

I believe that bi women, like gay ones, are usually born this way. Some say we are greedy, but I don't see it that way. I think we are built with parts of us that connect to men, and other parts that connect only to women. I often say I'm a living Venn diagram. They both agree, they share the core of me, yet each has a part that belongs to them alone.

Often we go lonely until we find other women who have come out, even if only to themselves. With the anonymity of a safe online community, real identities are not threat-



ened. We have there the opportunity to pick up the parts of ourselves that have been stunted or isolated, and to develop them. We have fun there—sometimes lots of fun. By acknowledging and sharing this side, our lives and the lives of those we touch become that much fuller and richer.

My husband, who has been supportive throughout, feels he is getting a more beautiful, sexier and more interesting me. My girlfriend and I, well, let's say we answer each other's prayers.

Finally, I am complete.

Suzanne is a baby boomer with a Master's in Public and Urban Affairs. Currently, she is enjoying her woodland garden and nature photography as she keeps up with new bi friends from around the world.

Overheard in an Airport Café

By Robyn Ochs

I was sitting at an airport Au Bon Pain, waiting (I do a lot of that). At the table next to me were four female law students. Their animated conversation about law school and Citizens United floated in and out of my consciousness as I worked on my laptop. Two of the women left, and the two remaining began discussing their personal lives. One stated that she had recently begun dating a guy she liked quite a lot. In the three years prior, she mentioned casually, she had dated only women. Of course, this got my attention! After some deliberation, upon leaving I introduced myself and handed her a copy of *Bi Women*, saying that I couldn't help but overhear the last part of her conversation and thought this might interest her. I walked off, leaving her smiling and holding the Spring 2013 issue of *Bi Women*.

REVIEWS

Authentic and Free: A journey from shame to self-acceptance, **by Courtney Long**

Reviewed by Jennifer Taub

As described on her website, Courtney Long is an Inspirational Speaker, Wellness Coach, Social Worker, Transformational Life Coach, Certified Hypnotherapist, Spiritual Coach and Reiki Master. Her self-published *Authentic and Free: A journey from shame to self-acceptance* alternates between memoir, journal entries, and passages of conversations between Courtney and a friend likely responsible for the “creative” part of the “creative non-fiction” category listed on the cover.

A white, middle class, self-described good girl from a nice home, Courtney details her thoughts and feelings from various time points in her life when she faced struggles with compulsive exercise, restrictive eating, attractions to both boys and girls, and the general ups and downs of growing up, such as anger at her mom for setting rules. For those who are struggling with similar issues and feel alone or different, this book may offer some solace and encouragement. Courtney clearly has a passion for using her own history and struggles to help others come to a place of peace and, as the title says, self-acceptance. She desires to be an inspiration for others to be “empowered to be their true selves as they shine their light and stand in their power.”

I asked my girlfriend to read the book also, and she remarked that she understood how Courtney might be very effective as a life coach or speaker, and we might enjoy having a cup of coffee with her. Yet we agreed that the book felt somewhat superficial, and we did not find it particularly inspirational. This book contains no surprises. You know from the start that things will never be too terrible for Courtney, and that her self-acceptance will only lead to good things. Her compulsive exercise and eating issues will not land her in the hospital; her coming out will not result in her being disowned by her family.

The book is written in a heart-to-heart, “you go girlfriend” style which, unfortunately, is not terribly effective, at times delivering basic Psychology 101 information as though it were wisdom gleaned from years of personal struggle. This was my biggest challenge with the book. For example, in a conversation between Courtney and her friend Sarah, they talk about the influence of religious messages on self-concept. Rather than being explored in depth, it is raised in an overly simplistic manner. Sarah says “Now that I think about it, before Communion we always recited, ‘Lord, I am not worthy to receive you’. Oh my gosh, Courtney, I was taught that I was unworthy!” Sarah’s jaw dropped to

the table. The conversation continues to offer revelations from Courtney that are new and astounding to Sarah, such as the concept that feelings of unworthiness may lead some people to “sabotage themselves, you know, by drinking a ton or neglecting their self-care” and that perhaps “hurt people tend to hurt others,” leading Sarah to remark “Ooh, do you mean that bullies have low self-esteem?” Courtney follows it up by remarking that this is just “my theory,” which does a disservice to decades of research on bullying as well as the reader’s common sense. Does Courtney really mean to take credit for these ideas?

This overly simplistic approach, also, does a disservice to the ideas and concepts themselves. There is plenty of research and information about all of these ideas and concepts, each of which is worthy of examination with depth and intellect. But subtlety, nuance, and acknowledgement of the complexity of factors impacting self-concept are not Courtney’s goal here. Her goal, clear from the outset, is to tell her story in service of “my purpose to empower others to love themselves and celebrate who they are.” The reviews on Amazon show she has clearly inspired some in this regard, but for this reader, she missed the mark.

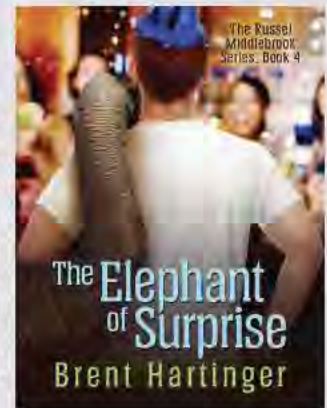
Jennifer is a licensed clinical psychologist who lives in Boston.

The Elephant of Surprise, **by Brett Hartlinger**

Reviewed by Robyn Ochs

The Elephant of Surprise is the fourth book in Brett Hartlinger’s “Russel Middlebrook Series.” Russel, the protagonist, is a gay high school student. The two other major characters are Russel’s best friends Min, who is bi, and Gunnar, who is straight.

Another bi activist recently criticized this series because Min’s bi identity was not central to the plot. It just *is*, just as Gunnar’s straight identity just *is*. Min is dating another girl, and her bisexuality, while clearly stated early in each book as a demographic fact, is never a problem or an issue or central to a plot twist. And that is precisely what I *liked* about the series. If you enjoyed *The Geography Club*, *The Order of the Poison Oak*, or *Split Screen*, or if you just enjoy young adult literature, this new book is worth checking out.



Of Two Minds About a Dear Abby Column

By Robyn Ochs

In a January 2nd “Dear Abby” column titled “Bisexual wife is of two minds about coming out,” Abby printed a letter from a bi woman:

Dear Abby: After years of denial, I have come to realize I am bisexual. I’m happily married to a straight man. He is my soul mate, and we plan to be together for many years to come. I just happen to be attracted to women, too.

Some people say I can’t be bisexual if I’ve never been with a woman. I say they’re wrong. Am I correct?

How do I deal with this in social situations? I’m afraid to put it on my social media profile for fear of a backlash from my family. I’d like my friends to know, but it doesn’t feel proper to just come out and say, “I’m bi.”

How does one “come out” without overdoing it or coming across the wrong way? Is there a right way? Should I continue keeping it a secret?

— Bi in the Deep South

Abby’s reply started off well. She affirmed the writer’s identity, stating: “Bisexuality is having an attraction to people of both sexes, and yes, it is possible to be bisexual without having acted upon it.” But then, she cautioned her reader against disclosing publicly: “However, being married means you are (happily) involved in a monogamous relationship. To announce you are bisexual and/or put it

on the Internet would not only shock your family but it also might seem like you were advertising that you are ‘available.’ Unless you are promiscuous, you are not available. Most married people agree to be committed to their spouses regardless of whether they are straight, gay or bi. If you choose to confide your diverse sexual orientation to your close friends, that is your business. But if you do, please remember that once two people know something, there’s a strong likelihood of the news spreading faster than the flu. And if you do decide to divulge, be sure to tell your husband first.”

Abby apparently received a large number of responses, including mine. In April, Abby followed up on the original column, reprinting four letters, including mine:

Dear Abby: I was silent for five years, and the day I started talking about the fact that I am bisexual, I felt as though a huge weight had been lifted off me.

I hope “Bi in the Deep South” will find the courage to come out and fly her rainbow colors. Although she may have to correct some people’s misconceptions of what it means to identify as bisexual, she will feel much better. — Robyn in Massachusetts

You can find the other three responses online at <http://tinyurl.com/abby1-2-13>.

New E-Book Version of *Getting Bi* Available Now!

Getting Bi: Voices of Bisexuals Around the World is the definitive anthology of international voices about bisexuality. Co-edited by Robyn Ochs and Sarah Rowley, *Getting Bi* includes over 220 different narratives from 42 countries. A compelling look at contemporary bisexual, pansexual and fluid experience, *Getting Bi* shares perspectives of teens, parents, elders and everyone in between.

And now this bi **must-have** is available as an e-book for only \$9.99. Visit Amazon.com today and order yours.



Published by the Bisexual Resource Center, profits from print and e-book sales of *Getting Bi* go towards the BRC’s work raising awareness and providing support to the bi community.
www.biresource.net

A. J., continued from page 1

My sophomore year began and I became even more active with Spectrum, organizing a World AIDS Day drive to raise money for the Elton John AIDS Foundation. It was a roller-coaster of a year for me as I started to date my first girlfriend. This hidden relationship ended up leading to me cutting myself, as I tried to cope with all of the conflicting feelings going on inside me.

It wasn't until my junior year when I was dating the guy I had had a crush on freshman year, that I fell for a gender queer individual in Spectrum and finally mustered up the courage to come out at one of our meetings. Identifying as "bisexual" for the first time verbally was both terrifying and exhilarating. I remember the faces of my friends sitting around the table at our weekly get-together – the eyebrows of every single one of them shot up when I said, "Well, as a bisexual person..."

I can't remember the end of that sentence and I don't think the latter part mattered then nor matters now. I proclaimed who I was and once the meeting was finished, I was engulfed in hugs. I then went back to my boyfriend's dorm room and told him I had just come out as bisexual. He shrugged and went back to his video game – and that was the beginning of the end for us. Within another month, I found out he was cheating on me and I suffered a major breakdown, having to go home for a week to put myself back together.

Upon returning to campus and trying to distance myself from him, I grew closer to some of my fellow Spectrum members, the bisexual and lesbian girls specifically. By November, I was dating my first girlfriend publicly and I was happier than ever.

When I first came out as bisexual to my family, it was my mother who had the most difficult time accepting this reality. I remember being in the kitchen with her the day after Thanksgiving that year and saying, "Mom, I met someone, her name is Sara." Having dated only boys prior to my first girlfriend, as far as she knew, I figured my bisexual identity was implied and, instead of coming out and proclaiming that label, simply telling her the name of the person I was dating would suffice.

My mother's eyes grew wide and, without a word, she turned around and walked out of the kitchen.

I didn't bring up the issue again for several months. When I did, my mom stayed put and instead of being silent, she told me that she thought I was going through a "phase" – a term I would hear countless more times from her over the years.

I went on to date more people – cisgender females, cisgender males, gender queer-identified people, trans* people. I fell in love, hard, for a girl almost three years younger than me during the latter half of my senior year in college. I graduated and went right into the Peace Corps. I left for Malawi, Africa, with a promise to write to her every single day. I kept my

promise – and never got a single reply. Without the support of the girl I loved, along with several other factors, my time in the Peace Corps was cut short and I came back to the U.S.

I was dumped right after I got back to my parents' home, learning that I had been cheated on multiple times over as I wrote those heartfelt letters a world away. After I collapsed on the floor of my childhood bedroom, my mom came to comfort me. "There are plenty of fish in the sea," she told me, rubbing my back as I sobbed. "Both men and women."

Hearing those words coming from her meant more to me than she probably knew. Knowing that my mother was accepting my sexuality was the silver lining of that break-up – of all of the broken hearts I had nursed up to that point.

Since that time, I have gone on to write a book about a high school girl coming to terms with her bisexuality (*Queer Greer*). I have spoken at college campuses, PFLAG meetings and conferences from the East Coast to the West Coast and back. I have told teenagers coming to grips with their own identities that bisexuality is a beautiful thing – having the capacity to love anyone regardless of sex or gender is a gift. I have spoken out against the stereotypes that bisexuals are sex-crazed, greedy and incapable of monogamy. I now write a monthly blog for *The Huffington Post* called "Bi the Bi," tackling topics and myths surrounding bisexuality with my co-writer, Lauren Michelle Kinsey.

I've come a long way since my teen years and I could not be happier with my life and my bisexual identity. I plan to continue my activism in the hopes of making it just a little easier for all of the bisexuals growing up and coming out in the years to come.

A.J. Walkley is the author of such titles as Choice and Queer Greer. Based in Arizona, she currently blogs for The Huffington Post and is working on her third novel, Vuto.



Ask Tiggy

Dear Tiggy,

Just came out today as bisexual to my therapist and one friend. Not sure where to go from here. Business as usual?

–Jenn

People come at bisexuality from all sorts of directions. Some assume they are straight until they feel otherwise; others try identifying as lesbian or gay until they realize that bisexuality is a better fit. There are some who become aware that a partner's gender doesn't matter to them... whereas others realize that a certain gender matters much more to them than they originally thought!



But there's another set of paths to bisexuality that I think is key to deciding how to proceed: whether you entered the bi universe through action or thought. If you find yourself in a relationship with a person whose gender is at odds with

your sexuality label, you've got the action down. Now, you need to come to terms with your label and your loved ones. I'm reminded of a friend who once turned to me and said, "I'm not sure how long I can go on calling myself a lesbian when I keep having sex with men." She was an act-now-think-later kinda gal.

On the other hand, you may have had a bisexual epiphany. You've done the mental work; what's next is discovering who you connect with in this incredible new way. I think George Michael had it right: "It's hard to be proud of your own sexuality when it hasn't brought you any joy. Once it's associated with joy, and love, it's easy to be proud of who you are." Jenn, get out of your head and get into the open arms of the bi community. We're here as part of your journey, and you're now part of ours. Find your joy in us.

–Tiggy

Are you a bi lady in need of some good advice? Write to Tiggy Upland at tiggyupland@gmail.com. This advice column is for entertainment purposes only. The columnist reserves the right to edit the letters for any reason. Find more Ask Tiggy on www.biresource.net.



April brunch at Carla & Megan's home

News Briefs



A Very Good Year for Marriage Equality

What a year it has been for marriage equality!

Here's a quick run down of recent progress, and there will quite likely be even more news by the time this issue arrives at your door (or in your inbox):

In just one year, the number of US states with marriage equality has jumped dramatically. In November, Maine, Maryland and Washington State approved marriage equality at the ballot, and Minnesota successfully defeated an anti-LGBT marriage amendment. In early May, the states of Rhode Island and Delaware both passed marriage equality bills through their legislatures, with their governors signing the laws on May 2 and May 8, respectively. Literally as I was sitting at my desk writing this news brief, the Minnesota House approved marriage equality in that state by a 75 to 59 vote. Passage is likely in the Senate, with the Governor eager to sign! Advocates in Illinois are also working to get a vote.

We are, of course, awaiting the Supreme Court's ruling on Prop 8 and DOMA. Only the Supreme Court knows how they are planning to rule, but it is quite possible that California, the most populous state in the US, could have marriage equality restored before the end of June.

That's just the United States. In other parts of the world, France, New Zealand and Uruguay all approved marriage equality, and the UK is currently considering legislation that would enact marriage equality in England and Wales.

We live in transformational times.

Donna Redd Receives Brenda Howard Award

Long-time bi activist Donna Redd is the recipient of the 2013 Brenda Howard Award, presented at an award ceremony on February 24, 2013. The award was presented to her by Estraven on Sunday February 24, 2013, with the following introduction:

"We are gathered here today to give the Brenda Howard Award to Donna Redd. ... After serving in the Armed Forces for 20 years, where Donna had to hide her bisexuality to avoid being discharged, she started her tireless work on behalf of the most disenfranchised people in New York City. She works with numerous organizations, helping people in need negotiate the city bureaucracies, meaning that she has to put up with people who are not always so kind. But she goes where the need is, year after year, and her warm-hearted, good-natured perseverance has a way of getting people what is necessary.

She got an MA in Counseling & Clinical Psychology from Columbia University in 2001, but it is not fame or fortune that motivates Donna. Rather, she simply does what needs to be done, helping the low-income bisexual population with such issues as health problems and domestic violence. She has an amazing presence, and can light up a room just by walking into it with her joyful spirit. She is also a writer, musician and singer, who has entertained crowds all over the city.

Finally, just as PFLAG was started by a mother out of love for her son, and Brenda Howard is known as the "Mother of Pride" since she organized the first New York City Pride March after Stonewall, Donna is being honored here today for her work "mothering" those who need help, the young and desperate ones with nowhere else to turn. It is truly a great personal honor for me to be asked to present this award to Donna. While we all worry about LGBT homeless people, people with AIDS, etc., Donna is the one who is actually there finding them housing and getting them to the doctor. Thank you from all of us, Donna."



The "Bi Office"

is the Bisexual Resource Center, located at 29 Stanhope Street in Boston, behind Club Cafe. Call 617-424-9595.

Ongoing Events

Come to our monthly bi brunch! All women are welcome! See calendar for dates.

2nd Tuesdays:

Bisexual Resource Center Board Meeting. 7-9pm at the Bi Office. All are welcome.

2nd Mondays:

Straight Marriage, Still Questioning. 7pm. Email kate.e.flynn@gmail.com for more info.

1st Wednesdays, 3rd Thursdays:

BLiSS: Bisexual Social & Support Group.

2nd Thursdays:

Younger Bi Group. For bi folks 20-29. 7pm. Info: Kate at youngblissboston@gmail.com.

3rd Saturdays:

Biversity Bi Brunch. 11:30am at Johnny D's, Davis Square, Somerville.

Boston-area women:

Keep up with local events. Sign up for our email list! Send an email to: biwomenboston-subscribe@yahoo.com.



CALENDAR

June

Sunday, June 2: AIDS Walk Boston. The 6.2-mile Walk starts at the Hatch Shell at 7:30am in Boston's Back Bay and raises money and awareness for essential HIV prevention, advocacy and services. Info: www.aac.org.

Wednesday, June 5, 7-8:45 pm: Bisexual Social & Support Group (BLiSS). Meets 1st Wednesdays. All bi and bi-friendly people of all genders and orientations are welcome to attend. Meetings are peer-facilitated discussion groups, sometimes with a pre-selected topic or presenter.

Friday, June 7, 6pm: Boston's Dyke March. Gather at the Boston Common Gazebos for a night of frolicking and marching with the queerest women in town.

Saturday, June 8: Pride Day in Boston. The theme this year is *Moving Forward... Proud, Strong, United*. Kicking off from Copley Square at noon, the parade route winds through the South End, through the Common, up Beacon Street and down the other side of Beacon Hill into Government

Center. Get your bi pride on and march with the BRC contingent. Info posted on www.biresource.net and the BRC Facebook page the day before.

Sunday, June 9, Noon-7pm: Pride Block Party: JP Edition. Keep on dancing at the hottest women's block party the day after Pride. Info: <http://www.bostonpride.org/jp/>.


Monday, June 10, 7pm: Straight Marriage, Still Questioning. Meets second Mondays. A peer-led support group for women in a straight marriage/relationship struggling with sexual orientation or coming out. Info/RSVP: kate.e.flynn@gmail.com.

Thursday, June 13, 7-9pm: Young Bisexual Social and Support Group (BLiSS). If you are in your 20s or mid-30s (or thereabouts) and identify somewhere along the lines of bisexual/omni/pan/fluid or questioning, please join us for a few hours of socializing and support. Meets 2nd Thursdays at Eastern Bank, Davis Sq., Somerville on the Red Line. All genders welcome! Info/RSVP: Kate at youngblissboston@gmail.com.

Saturday, June 15, 11:30am: Bi Brunch. Mixed gender bi group meets 3rd Saturdays at Johnny D's on Holland St. in Davis Sq., Somerville, near Davis stop on the Red Line.

Calendar, continues next page

Bi Women wants you!!!



SUBSCRIPTION RATE
for Bi Women (sliding scale)

\$0-20: pay what you can
 \$20-39: suggested
 \$30-\$99: Supporter
 \$100 on up: Goddess

Renewal New Subscriber

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

EMAIL _____

Please send my **Bi Women** by email; by postal mail; both ways

BBWN, P.O. BOX 301727, Jamaica Plain,, MA 02130 or online www.biwomenboston.org

Calendar, *continued from previous page*

Saturday, June 15: Rhode Island Pride. Rhode Island has the unique distinction of having their parade at night, after a day-long festival along the river. Info: www.prideri.com.

July

Monday, July 8, 7pm: Straight Marriage, Still Questioning. (See June 10th)

Thursday, July 11, 7-9pm: Young Bisexual Social and Support Group (BLiSS). (See June 13th)

Saturday, July 20, 11:30am, Saturday Bi Brunch. (See June 15th)

Sunday, July 14, noon: BBWN Potluck at Kelley's in Malden. Please bring a potluck dish and/or drinks to share. A great opportunity to meet other bi and bi-friendly women in the Boston area. RSVP/Directions: keld34@yahoo.com.

Sunday, July 28, noon. Special Brunch for Bi Women Married to Men at Hilary's. Are you a bi woman in a committed relationship or marriage to a man? Would you like to connect and socialize with other women who are in a similar situation? This pot luck brunch is a time to get to know other great bi women and honor and support all parts of ourselves. Bring something to drink or eat. RSVP/address: Hilary at htolan@hotmail.com.

August

Wednesday, August 7, 7 pm: Bisexual Social and Support Group (BLiSS). (See June 5th)

Sunday, August 11, noon: BBWN Potluck Brunch at Kate's in Somerville. Please bring a potluck dish and/or drinks to share. A great opportunity to meet other bi and bi-friendly women in the Boston area. RSVP/Directions: thewriterkate@gmail.com.

August 17-23: Carnival Week in Provincetown. A week of festive activities including Drag Bingo, the absolutely fabulous Carnival Parade on Thursday, and much more. Bring your beads, bathing suit, and sunscreen! Info: www.ptown.org/Carnival.asp.

Monday, August 12, 7 pm: Straight Marriage, Still Questioning. (See June 10th)

Saturday, August 17, 11:30am: Saturday Bi Brunch. (See June 15th)



Sunday, August 18, 12noon. Stuff & Stuff Brunch. Come help mail the Fall issue of *Bi Women*. At Robyn's house in JP. RSVP/directions: robyn@robynochs.com.

DATES TO WATCH OUT FOR:

September 23rd is Celebrate Bisexuality Day! Plan an event in your community to celebrate our rich and vibrant

Our brunches are open to all bi/pansexual/queer/fluid women and our women friends. Brunches are hosted in members' homes, and are potluck-style, meaning that we each bring food or a beverage to share. If you're interested in hosting a brunch or would like more information, please contact Kate (thewriterkate@gmail.com).