

# The Lavender Salon Reader

The newsletter of the Lavender Reading Salon  
A gay & lesbian reading club

Volume 1 Number 7

Michael L. Nitz, editor & publisher

December 1993

## Meeting Highlights

### November's Meeting Capsule

November's meeting was held at Marge's house. We had another great turnout. It was great to see some returning friends; and a warm welcome to Dan, who joined us all the way from Fond du Lac! Our fame has really grown!

As it turned out, *Blue Heaven* was a difficult book for most of us to locate. It seems that none of the bookstores carry it, and only a few of us were able to obtain and read the copies held in local libraries. Four of us found copies of the book to read; we shared our enjoyment of the farce by reading selections from the novel. The readings, especially the Christmas party



scene, brought forth peals of laughter.

### Changes in the Air

In addition to the drop in temperature, some other changes were agreed upon at the November meeting of the Salon. Please make a note of the following changes! The December meeting of the Salon will be held on the 11th at 6p. m. at Barb Polk's apartment at 319 N. Lawe Street, Appleton. (See map on page 3.) Parking is available on Eldorado Lane just west off N. Lawe Street.

The book *Was* by Geoff Ryman, scheduled to be discussed at the December meeting, will be postponed until the January meeting. At Barb's suggestion, the group decided to read aloud Truman Capote's story "Christmas Memories". It is not necessary to have read the story prior to the meeting.

On the same day, Barb extends to us an invitation to participate in her 3rd annual Christmas Carol Sing-a-long at

2p.m.

So, if you're able, Come to the sing-a-long and lift your voice to the gay melodies of the season. If you're not so inclined to delight in Christmas melodies, or singing aloud; then we will see you at 6p.m. for the Salon meeting!

## New Gay and Lesbian books at Appleton Public Library

- 📖 Baker, James Robe. *Tim and Pete : a novel*
- 📖 Browning, Frank. *The culture of desire : paradox and perversity in gay lives today*
- 📖 Busch, Charles. *Whores of lost Atlantis : a novel*
- 📖 Herdt, Gilbert H. *Children of Horizons : how gay and lesbian teens are leading a new way out of the closet*
- 📖 Curry, Hayden. *A legal guide for lesbian and gay couples*
- 📖 Koestenbaum, Wayne *The queen's throat : opera, homosexuality, and the mystery of desire*
- 📖 Kushner, Tony. *Angels in America : a gay fantasia on national themes*
- 📖 Duberman, Martin. *Stonewall*
- 📖 Leavitt, David. *While England sleeps*
- 📖 Martin, April. *The lesbian and gay parenting handbook*

## LESBIAN ATHLETES IN FICTION:



Looking at the world through the drama of sport by Joli Sandoz

*All Out*, by Judith Alguire. Norwich, VT: New Victoria Publishers, 1988.

*Aquamarine*, by Carol Anshaw. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1992.

*The Sea of Light*, by Jenifer Levin. New York: Dutton, 1993.

The tension between who we are and what the world expects us to be pulls at the center of lesbians' lives. Can we succeed in, or change, the world on our own terms? What's the internal cost? And is the effort worth it?

For answers, a trio of novelists turn to the forthright arena of competitive sport. Organized athletics represent a misogynist, homophobic world to many lesbians a world not so different, perhaps, from a city street. But sport is also drama. Watching lesbian athletes reveals us to ourselves. Athletics can be the stage on which we play out tensions and choices.

Kay "The Bishop" Strachan, a marathoner in Judith Alguire's novel *All Out*, will represent Canada in the Montreal Olympics. Kay refuses shoe contracts and money from the Olympic Fund because she is too proud to accept help with strings attached. Even in heavy training, Kay supports herself by working nights and weekends as a pharmacist. She harbors few, if any, doubts about her ability to win the gold.

According to her roommate Tab, Kay is a "striking woman ... She had the startling spectral appearance of a greyhound. The thinness made her face taut, too, accentuated the cheekbones and sometimes made her look sad." The discipline which shaped her body also shapes Kay's personal life. She can't afford to fall in love while training for a big race, she says, because "Love is like a drug. It makes you feel you're on top of the world when your performance is lousy."

We first meet Kay as Bill, her long-time coach, asks her to convince a teammate not to wear a "Mother Nature is a Lesbian" button to an important fund-raising dinner. Caught between her affection for Bill and her own sense of Debbie's rights, Kay faces an all-too-familiar dilemma. And feminist Tab has a familiar reaction, "He's asking her to pretend she's something she isn't ... Why must women always compromise themselves that way?"

Having posed the question, Alguire unfortunately doesn't give us an answer. We don't know what happened at the dinner, and as the book unfolds, Alguire reveals Kay as a world-class female athlete who looks much like the stereotype of an

emotionless, calculating male jock, a "vicious competitor" whose fierce pride does not preclude an ego-stroking female wife. Kay is so tough (read: macho) that the fourth sentence out of her mouth after a grueling marathon is "She folded like a cheap suitcase."

The sneer behind these words represents everything Tab, a former hurdler, hates about competitive sport. According to Tab and her feminist friends, athletic aggression and competition are "a male way of dealing with problems;" sports benefit only the elite, the women who pose for tennis calendars and swimsuit issues of sport magazines; and sports "foster competition rather than cooperation. Cooperation is the key to advancement." Sports simply aren't relevant, because they do nothing to "advance women."

But Tab and Kay don't find a middle way. Having rejected sport for herself, Tab now plays the wife role, picking up Kay's dirty clothes, cooking, cleaning, shopping and doing the emotional nurturing all the while teaching and finishing her doctorate in anthropology. We are left with two readily recognizable characters: the hard-hearted achiever who knows what she (more usually, he) wants and does what she needs to get it,

and the help meet who juggles her own career and principles to accommodate another.

Carol Anshaw's new book picks up where *All Out* leaves off. Alguire's solution to the puzzle of being both lesbian and athlete, female and achiever, took on jockstrap overtones. In *Aquamarine*, Anshaw offers us three interconnected narratives, three lives a swimmer could have lived in the wake of her one big race. We can compare Jesse, conventional and heterosexual, to Jesse in a lesbian life.

As a young swimmer growing up in Missouri, Jesse Austin took charge of her own training. "An infinity of endurance laps and sprint work" later, she wangles her way into Sea Breze, a swimming academy where they turned out "winners like Buicks off the line."

She races the 100 freestyle at the Mexico Olympics, which her mother refuses to attend. Like Kay, Jesse is "the lone craps shooter," who, through talent and drive, makes it on her own. But there the similarity ends.

In the first of her possible lives, Jesse is married and pregnant; in the second,

### Uncle Len's Plain Livin' High-Thinkin' Vegetarian Casserole

This delicious casserole is easy to prepare and it makes a very nutritious meal. Serve it with steamed carrots and a salad.

4 cups low-fat cottage cheese, whipped  
6 egg whites  
1 10-ounce frozen corn kernels, thawed and drained  
2 teaspoons onion powder  
¼ cup chopped fresh pimiento, or 1 2-ounce jar pimiento  
¼ cup chopped green onions  
2 tablespoons whole wheat pastry flour  
2 cups cooked brown rice

Mix all ingredients together in a large mixing bowl. Spread evenly in a 9x9 inch non-stick or glass oven-proof baking dish and bake in a 350° oven for 30 to 40 minutes or until set and light brown on top. Allow to set for 10 minutes and spoon to serve. Serves 4.

CALL FOR PAPERS  
 --for a book about--  
 LESBIAN FOLKLORE / CULTURES

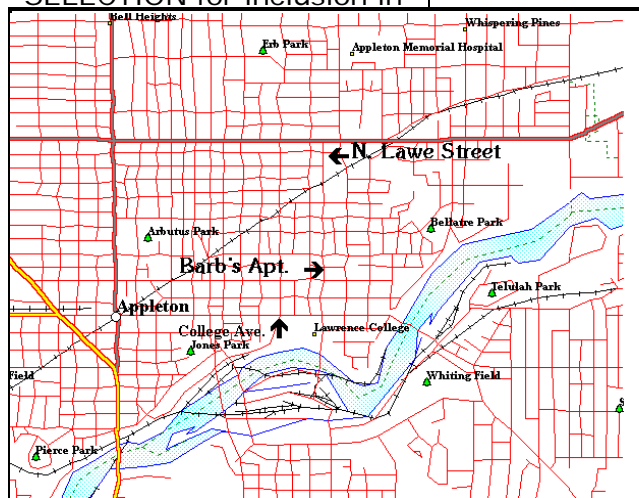
Tentative Title: *It Takes One to Know One? Lesbian Folklore / Lesbian Cultures*

I am editing a book of essays on the roles of both perceived and actual traditions in lesbian culture (s). I'm especially interested in receiving essays that address the diversity OF lesbian groups as well as the diversity WITHIN lesbian groups. A major press has expressed interest in this project.

SCHEDULE FOR SUBMISSION OF ESSAYS:

DEADLINE for consideration of completed papers:... December 31, 1993.

SELECTION for inclusion in



Appleton  
 319 N. Lawe

submitted book manuscript:... July 1, 1994.

EDITING AND REVISING PERIOD ENDS; the completed book manuscript submitted for consideration:..... December 30, 1994.

Papers must state explicit cultural and historical contexts. They should demonstrate an awareness of current work in folklore as well as lesbian history and theory. And they must be written in an accessible cross-disciplinary English.

Submissions may be based on analysis and/or fieldwork. Again, I emphasize my interest in essays which represent DIVERSE lesbian groups. You are encouraged to submit essays which cross the borders of current academic disciplines.

Essays may examine issues related to: class, race, ethnicity, religion, politics, physical ability, age, and so forth.

Member Listing

- Barb
- Dan
- Dick
- Gregory
- Jeff
- Jennifer
- Len & Ken
- Marge
- Michael
- Sandy & Debbie
- Sheila
- Tim & Pete
- Tom & Andy
- Tom & Fred

Submissions can treat such subjects as: lesbian rites of passage and rituals (e.g. coming out, court-ship, commitment/ partnering, growing old), lesbian "gaydar," lesbian festivals (e.g. music), lesbian socializing (places and/or "etiquette"), lesbian sexuality, lesbian folklore about/of popular and "high" culture(s), outsiders' views of lesbian culture(s), lesbian readings of performance arts, lesbian folklore as an expression of lesbian identity (positive and/or negative), and more--as contributor's expertise and interests dictate.

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*Lesbians in Fiction (Continued from page 2)*

partnered with a woman; in the third, the divorced mother of two. Always, a specter haunts her in the memory of Marty Finch, a tall, long-armed, well-muscled blonde Australian who out-touched Jesse in the Olympic final, all those years ago. They even looked alike: although her hair is red, Jesse stretched six feet tall; at age 17, her shoulders, too, were wide with muscle. Now, though, she rarely talks about the Olympics, and never about Marty. But Jesse may never forget what happened in Mexico. How can she? The junior high in her home town bears her name, in honor of it.

Jesse's experience of herself as a lesbian-in-love, twenty years later, brings her fully alive in a way she's almost forgotten.

"Loving Kit strips all the coating off her nerves. . . . It's a lot like the Olympics. It's the first time since those hundred meters in Mexico City that she hasn't felt any buffer between her and the sequence of events she walks through which make up her life."

Lesbian Jesse went on after Mexico City, bartering Olympic participation into a scholarship at Columbia and winning a tenured teaching position. And now she lives with and loves Kit. Accomplished, in charge of her choices, Jesse nevertheless worries. Nothing, least of all her relationship, is secure. Yet there are compensations. Jesse and Kit are happy together, and she likes how she feels: "Lighter, aerated with something like thrill."

The Jesse who came home from Mexico City to marry a local boy and manage one concession in his family's business (traveling carnivals and "stationary attractions") feels, twenty years later, that she exists behind a liquid wall which hides rejected possibilities.

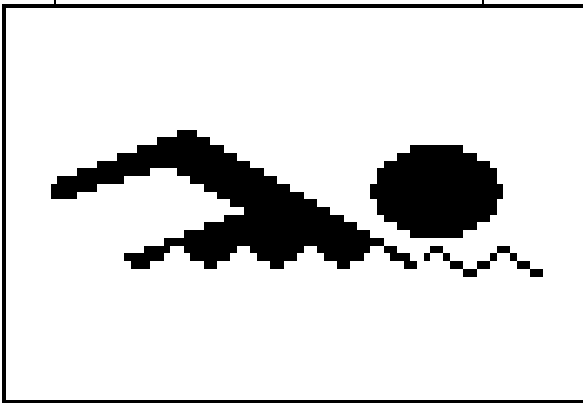
This Jesse sells real estate to supplement the family income and has never told anyone the truth of her Olympic experience, until she finds herself talking to Alice Avery, a relative stranger to whom she sells a house. Marty Finch haunts her, Jesse tells Alice, "So I can keep pulling a charge off her. Touch the wire. Keep feeling the current twitch through my fingers . . ." What she can't figure out how to say is that she fell in love with Marty, and came home and married Neal.

Near the end of the book, Jesse-the-third-incarnation sits on the hood of her Boss Hog (an ancient, silver-blue Cadillac Eldorado), looking out on "a dying sea. She's pushing forty, with a failing business, two Visas maxed to the gills, a truly stupid marriage behind her, two kids already cruising into their own disappointed adulthoods." What she doesn't understand is why her Olympic experience still matters so much to her, since "getting worked up about it does no good at all. Just leaves her sitting here all turned around, looking forward to the past."

Jesse's straight lives resound with the thud of falling from the Olympic peak. Her problem is not that she swam, not that she reached for glory, but the fact that she didn't find the imagination or courage to keep taking risks. Losing the big race sent her into conventionality, marrying the home town boy or the salesman for her signature swim suits. Only in her lesbian self does Jesse find that the aftermath of defeat requires, not lowering her aspirations, but "a substantial reconstruction of her notion of herself."

Through Jesse's three lives, Anshaw gives us the chance to observe what happens when a strong woman denies her strength, or follows her heart. Jesse's lesbian life isn't easy. Even in New York City, she lives in a world sometimes hostile to lesbians. Her mother continues to resent her success. Jesse worries about losing Kit. But she has tenure, she's in love, and she still swims in a Jesse Austin signature suit. She is, despite all, herself.

Love centers Jenifer Levin's new novel



*The Sea of Light*, love of sport and of women. But love suffused by pain from joints damaged by heavy training, from disappointment and loss, and from the stripping down, the giving up, required to succeed. Levin assumes that lesbians can and do make their own choices in the world; she focuses here on what is lost and what is gained.

Star swimmer Babe Delgado arrives at Northern Massachusetts State after a plane crash that killed almost everyone on her national-class team. Once best in the country in sprint breaststroke, Babe is weary from a lifetime of competing and broken with disillusionment and grief. Big-framed, tall, her body covered with scars from injuries, old and new, Babe represents the points coach Brenda Allen needs to win an divisional championship.

Kept from the elite world of bigger colleges and private clubs because she is female, Bren nevertheless takes her program very, very seriously. She drives herself and her athletes through long days of double

practices, warm ups, repeats, and swim downs. Bren's lover, who recently died, once called her a "big cold beautiful WASP;" Babe sees Bren as ". . . In her mid-thirties but she keeps herself in pretty good shape, must do weights a lot, the skin almost youthful, lined with something sad around the eyes."

These women, all lesbian, form the nucleus of a book unique in its rich and realistic portrayal of women's collegiate sport

Team captain Ellie Marks learned to swim in a twenty yard public pool in New York City. Not physically talented for swimming, Ellie bears the nickname "Hammerhead," acknowledging her ability to endure tough workouts. Her swimming scholarship pays for her education.

These women, all lesbian, form the nucleus of a book unique in its rich and realistic portrayal of women's collegiate sport, and of the choices each of us must face. The world Levin draws is tense with the effort of being strong but poised always poised on the brink of discovery.

"A perfect mental images comes to me of this race. Burning pain in the water, pale gasping, blue foam. At the end of the eighth lap the wall disappears. The pool stretches on and on, shimmering, limitless. There is no other end. And I say, Okay, come on then. Say: You fucker, I dare you. Just come on and be what you are. And do what you do."

What Ellie, whose vision this is, shares most profoundly with Babe and Bren is an attitude, a willingness to act on their chosen stage. Wherever they are at home, attending class, sitting at a table in the Donut Hole the pool awaits, "empty, glinting a clean pastel blue, lanes sharply delineated." For them, for now, it is the dare nearest the heart.

For Bren, part of the dare is creating something new: woman coach. Bren's own male college mentor taught her to sustain intensity of effort through fear. He'd point to his office wall, asking his swimmers which they'd rather be a victory notch on the old leather belt, or the fly smashed into a stain of blood and guts beside it on the wall? He also tied affection to performance, until Bren "dreamed of beating him to death. But wanted, more than anything, to be his friend."

As a coach herself, Bren reminds her Division II athletes that she gave them their scholarships and she can take them away. And she deals them the truth. "Forget all (Continued on page 5)

*Lesbians in Fiction (Continued from page 4)*

your Olympic medal fantasies, I said. Forget your dreams of Pan Am gold. The world's not waiting for a single one of you. Better start thinking about survival."

Bren calls her athletes "women" rather than the ubiquitous "girls," and when Babe, deciding whether to attend Northern Massachusetts, looks at Bren's eyes, she sees "only a hard dark thing that is bitterly difficult but will not be my enemy."

Though her athletes still fear and swim for her, Bren wants to teach them to swim for themselves.

Learning autonomy, accepting the pool's dare to "Be what you are. And do what you do" exacts a price. Even for talented athletes, the truth of aspiration that the first 50 meters are in-born and the rest is guts and work is difficult. Babe most fears the morning, "harsh bright light in which you choose between the struggle and giving up ... in which the truth about what you're made of and how you'll use that cannot be hidden."

Truth can hurt: few athletes actually have what it takes to win races. And when they do, when they are born with the gold-plated combination of genes, opportunity and personality, the win, if done a certain way, can come at the expense of integrity. Those who keep themselves whole, in the temptation and pain of achievement, are rare. "Most notable accomplishment," Bren tells a friend, "is highly abnormal."

In the end, though, for talented and untalented alike, the arduous effort can unlock understanding. True achievement isn't finally a matter of talent, arrogance, or even pride. Hope won't last long enough. What you need, Bren says, is simply "an ability to see things through." Acceptance, of work, and of oneself. What keeps these women in sport? Especially Babe, who has ~~tasted winning, and now, through an~~ unlucky accident and, perhaps, a failure of will, has a mind and body too damaged to swim that fast again. She says it is her "feel for the water."

"I feel it: power of the sweep and pull, undulation, power of the kicking thrust, undulation, the breath, the prayer, the dolphin animal surfing waves, thrust on by the force of its motion so that it does not stop... For a moment, a glimmer, the first one in many, many years, I love it again, and I want it."

The inner aesthetics of effort and motion, a topic rarely discussed in locker rooms or in literature, is almost never discussed in relation to women. Levin is limning the gift, the reward of discipline, effort and commitment, that transcends cost.

Their experiences as women who choose to achieve give Bren, Babe and Ellie something a frame of reference, an inner stability which sets them apart. They are athletes, lesbians, brave and afraid and real in ways that set them apart from the pale

expectations of the accepted norms for females.

Bren a lesbian working with 18-year-old daughters in, as she says, "wet racing suits" especially fears retribution should her sexuality be discovered. But Levin shows us what the price of being different can buy you.

"... not being different in America can lull you, can cripple you even though it seems desirable to everyone, even though everything in the society pressures you into sameness it is a handicap in the end. A handicap to live without knowing the struggle of difference in all of its pain, its fear, its celebration, its compassion."

Macho jock, conventional wife and mother, a lesbian life with all the pain and joy that implies these athletes made their choices, within the limits of their stories. Athlete or not, each of us can do the same.

