

Something Special. Documentation of local artists and events kept everyone engaged in the creative process.

The following articles provide a brief look at these branches. These are the memories that stand strong in my mind and established my roots, my home in South Florida for twenty years.

THE FRIDAY NIGHT WOMYN'S GROUP AND THE WOMEN'S PRESERVATION SOCIETY

*From an interview with Charlotte Brewer
by Barbara Ester, November 2015*

I was born in Miami in 1935. I lived all over Miami, from Hialeah to Coconut Grove, to Coral Gables. I had found out about Lesbianism after reading *The Well of Loneliness* in the late 1940s. I spent some time in Oregon, where I got married and had two children. I lived in an ashram before returning to Miami. I was fresh from a yoga retreat and into that pure living, basic stuff, vegetarian food, and walking everywhere.

I had always been attracted to women, but never really realized what the exact attraction was. At a college workshop, I discovered the Lesbian Task Force of NOW and began to attend meetings downtown. That was it! I had found my home. I had found my sisters.

That's when I met Mindy from the Bronx.¹ What a fascinating character she was – AND IS! Almost overwhelming! Mindy introduced me to all the gay places. At that time, we had fun with the Anita Bryant campaign. We took part in the phone banks, made posters and banners, which we took out in the middle of the night. It was exciting and scary at the same time to hang them up everywhere: on utility poles, walls, over the Palmetto expressway, wherever we could. I loved doing it.

The Lesbian Task Force evolved into the Friday Night Womyn's Group (FNWG) in 1981. Rexine had the FNWG meet at her house. Later I provided a space to meet, and we called that the Women's Preservation Society.

My partner Eli had a restaurant downtown in a historic old house. It had a space upstairs where women could meet on

¹ For an interview with Mindy Dyke, Mary Sims, and Maryanne Powers, see Barbara Ester, "Inside Miami's Lesbian Culture," *Sinister Wisdom* 93 (2014): 27-31.

Sundays. We had celebrations, dances, birthdays, and the Winter Solstice Dance. It was a great, fun place, and quite successful. Then the talking got to be "We would like our Friday Night Group to meet here on Friday," but the space was only available Sundays. They were saying: "We should organize, have a club, etc." So we held a contest to pick a name, and Women's Preservation Society won. That's when it started, in 1988.

At that time, there were no Women Only places in Miami, particularly down South. At the Women's Preservation Society they could bring beer, sodas, food, or anything they wanted to meetings, events, dances, without having to worry about paying a fee. It was a cross between a bar, and our beloved Something Special.² It was wholesome, safe, and comfortable, like you're in your own living room. Women donated tables, chairs, couches, etc. It was the perfect place to socialize without pressure.

Since I didn't work at that time, I was able to open up daily and enjoy time in a women-only space, read, relax, meet and greet. I always made a point to introduce everyone who entered and make them feel at ease.

The Women's Preservation Society was a good thing, but it was never self-sufficient. I returned to work to keep our space open. Each month I had to pay at least \$400 out of pocket. We didn't charge – just accepted donations. I kept a list of donors and sent thank you notes. We organized concerts and events to try to make ends meet, but eventually had to close the doors because I was going too deep into debt paying the rent and other expenses. The Friday Night Womyn's Group met there into the 90s. They had a different subject or speaker every week. Whatever anyone wanted to do at the space, we would help organize and publicize.

One highlight from that era happened when I came back from the last Michigan Womyn's Music Festival and was waiting at the airport. A woman leaned over and said: "I know you. Didn't you

have the warehouse, the WPS in Miami? That's where I met my friend here." She introduced herself and said, "and you are the one who told me about Michigan. It changed my life! I went there and met my lover."

It warms my heart that they are now a lovely, happily married couple. Eli and I had the honor of being a part of their perfect wedding at the Coral Gables Country Club.

I was really for the Lesbian separatists at that time, and still am. I think back on how wonderful it was, and delightful to have new women come in. It was such a safe space, a cozy environment. There were never any fights. There may have been arguments, definitely disagreements, who knows, but no one was ever violent there. It was simply a wonderful, peaceful place to go. Those were the days.

² See "Outside the Box," this issue.