

## A TRAIL OF DYKES: MIAMI DAZE

Barbara Ester

*A trail of dykes: in movement*

*San Diego, womyn's coffeehouse, Las Hermanas*

*Martha and Lucy, reading from their book, the Ripening Fig, lure us on*

*They write, we write and ride in Joan's VW van*

*To a new place, Miami, and a large circle of Lesbians*

Joan and I arrive in May 1976. Dyke presence, separate from gay pride, meets the politics we brought with us, a womyn-only politic. We are welcomed to the Lesbian Task Force of NOW with open arms and helpful tips on surviving and settling into this South Florida landscape.

*Warmth of ocean breeze, surf and swims, mangos and coconuts,*

*Dyke nights and Lesbian Pride week, river walk art, dance and*

*music nights*

*Embraced by community, a trail of dykes*

*Disco dancing, softball games, the groovy grove*

*Music making holds me*

Maryanne introduces us to Helise. Helise finds us a place to stay. Sandra knows when a coconut is ready to harvest. She says, "No one will bother you white womyn if you knock them out of the trees." Mary Sims tells us to gather bottles and cans at Crandon Park so we have a little money. Music sharing begins at monthly gatherings at Louise and Maryanne's on 43<sup>rd</sup> street. The familiar aroma of marijuana, sounds of guitars, drums, flutes, pots and pans bring spark to my new home and a backdrop for my own music to emerge. Saturdays we bike into a Black neighborhood, Mary's, on 69<sup>th</sup>, for craft sharing. Creativity is alive and supported.

*Easy living and fancy free for a time in this Lesbian loving world  
I imagine*

*Trees full of fruit, nourishment and pleasure*

*I long for touch and tenderness in relationship and politics*

*Seeking trust and dream connection inhaling a toke ~ of freedom*

*This journey of my life, reaching to my thirties*

The mattress on the curbside is perfect, easy to carry and fits well into my new home, my tent in Joyce's yard beneath the lychee tree. Louise shares seeds and her knowledge of Southern gardening. Joan and I join Maryanne and Louise and ride our bicycles to Homestead for weekly harvests of okra, tomatoes, limes, and crowder peas, which we sell to Task Force members. Nurturing and building a community that supports and creates Lesbian culture is the heart of this community, basic survival skills, fun and connection mixed with rousing discussions of patriarchy's impact on womyn and empowering each other to self-love and enriching.

*I shift to an 8 to 5 moneymaking job and boredom*

*Another trail of dykes and making time for*

*Apartment living and a car to move in this culture*

*Rich ~ names etched in my memory*

*Pagoda dykes, music makers and movers by ocean waves*

I settle into a routine of working, continue my study of womyn's spirituality and how it blends with my Lesbian sensibility, the importance of womyn-only space. Mindy invites me to St. Augustine for the opening of the Pagoda.<sup>1</sup> Gail and I dance weekly at Blackie's, where womyn's music plays on the jukebox. She shares her Southern experience, grits, and stories of ALFA in

<sup>1</sup> The Pagoda is a lesbian community, once known as a "lesbian paradise."

Atlanta supporting her coming out! My job at the factory, cutting wires for minimum wage, is unsatisfactory. My creative spirit restless. I welcome the invite from Addie to stay in her cabin on a lake in Melrose. I leave Miami in May '78.

*Serene and cozy even in the pouring rain,  
Time is mine  
I dream in the moonlight glistening over waters  
Enticing, this trail of dykes, we sit  
On porches drinking in song and story*

I meet a new community of Lesbians in north Florida. Some are hippies down to earth, growing gardens and relaxed in this country setting. Addie finds us work weeding watermelon fields and painting houses. Donna hires me to stake her tomato plants until the cross is burned in her front yard. Fear rises inside me. I am alert, aware of this display of Southern bigotry. Is this the *real* South? I move to Jessica's house in Gainesville and work at another factory, soldering circuit boards. I accept an invitation back to Melrose, to the Red House, a gathering place for Lesbians. The Red House has a life of its own glowing with the effervescence and spark grounded in Corky's presence.

*Minds greet in rapture, blend notes in song  
Lovers hands share pleasure  
But disappointment reigns, I return  
To Miami and another tale, another 'trail of dykes'  
Inter-weaving stories in time*

## SPEAKING TRUTH TO POWER: THE FLORIDA [LESBIAN AND GAY CIVIL RIGHTS] TASK FORCE (FTF)

Ronni Sanlo

It seems like a lifetime ago when I was hired by the Florida [Lesbian and Gay Civil Rights] Task Force (FTF). I had lost custody of my children in 1979 in Florida shortly after I came out. I lost the most precious things in my life, my children: there was nothing more to lose and I vowed never to return to the isolation of the closet. The fear was gone. The pain, however, coupled with an intensely burning anger, often overpowered me. I found my voice and started speaking truth to power. From the various NOW chapters with which I was involved (I cofounded the Sanford and Daytona chapters) to the Orlando Gay and Lesbian Community Services to the Florida Task Force, I became a loud, proud lesbian activist, a "militant homosexual." I was the first woman to direct (as a volunteer) the Orlando Gay Community Services, circa 1980. My first action was to add the word lesbian to their name: Orlando Gay and Lesbian Community Services. I spoke on radio and at other public venues about the discrimination lesbian and gay people faced in Florida. As a result, I lost various jobs between 1979 and 1981.

The FTF was founded in 1979, the only statewide gay-related lobbying group in the country with a full-time paid lobbyist. It was the voice of the lesbian and gay community in Florida government, and gave me a job and a target on which to focus my anger. Perfect! The work included organizing, fundraising, public relations, voter education, and, of course, lobbying the Florida legislature. The presence of the FTF was huge! It was the first time lesbian and gay people anywhere in the United States had a lobbyist at the state level; the first time we in Florida endorsed candidates; the first time Florida lesbians and gays received a foundation grant; and the first time anywhere in the South that a college intern was given course credit to work for a gay and lesbian organization.