

We pledged to each other our commitment to the walk, and we told the sheriff we would be ready to give our names soon.

*Note: We were in jail sixteen days. Due to efforts of many protesting groups and individuals, all reactors at the Savannah River Plant eventually closed down.<sup>1</sup> The Women's Peacewalk, which took place from December 17, 1983, to January 30, 1984, gave us contact with many people and received abundant media coverage that spread the critique of militarism and the feminist peace ideal throughout Florida.*

<sup>1</sup> Now called the Savannah River Site, the plant for refining nuclear material for weapons shut down and restarted its nuclear reactors several times to correct safety problems to which these and other protestors called attention. Their website provides a history ([www.srs.gov/general/about/history1.htm](http://www.srs.gov/general/about/history1.htm)) that ignores the protests, as does its Wikipedia entry, although Wikipedia chronicles various restarts and shutdowns of the reactors. Googling "Savannah River Plant protests" brings up contemporary newspaper reports showing environmental safety complaints as recently as 2011. An AP story of the 1983 protest leads with the sentence "More than 1000 ban-the-bomb protestors were arrested" at protests around the country that weekend in October 1983, seventy-nine of them at the Savannah River Plant, of whom thirty-two were released the same day ("Anti-Nuclear Protests Continue," *News and Courier*, Charleston, SC, October 25, 1983, 2A (<http://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=2506&dat=19831025&id=FVpJAAAAIBAJ&sjid=HQoNAAAAIBAJ&pg=1075,7800577>).

## INSIDE MIAMI'S LESBIAN CULTURE

Barbara Ester

*In April 2013 Barbara Ester interviewed Mary Sims and Mindy Dyke, and drew on Maryanne Powers' writings for Something Special's newsletter Dyke Notes. All were profoundly influential in creating a rich, lasting Lesbian-feminist culture in Miami, Florida, in the 1970s and 1980s. What follows is a hypothetical conversation among the three of them constructed from the interviews and Maryanne's Dyke Notes writings.*

**Maryanne:** It was 1972. Louise and I had returned to Miami from Texas. Several universities loved the uniqueness of our Black and white selves teaching human relations courses, but when we came out too many times for their liking, we were considered "not of the mainstream" (we call it *men-stream*) and we parted company. Meanwhile, we met other likeminded Lesbians, debated feminist issues, dabbled in NOW (National Organization for Women), and started the Lesbian Task Force of Dade County.

**Mary:** Louise and Maryanne were NOW (National Organization for Women) members. In 1974, I met them in their living room with five other womyn discussing starting a Lesbian Task Force of NOW.

**Mindy:** When I arrived in October 1975, I needed to find Lesbians. I called NOW. They told me about the Lesbian Task Force and Maryanne and Louise. I called and said, "Hi, I'm a New York Dyke looking for Lesbians. Are you the Dykes I'm looking for?" They said, "We are."

**Mary:** I became a NOW member and one of the chairpersons of the Lesbian Task Force who facilitated meetings. We started every meeting stating our purpose: to instill and promote the positive [aspects] of being Lesbian through culture and teaching. The Task Force grew and moved to the YWCA. We started a

newsletter, *Lesbiana Speaks*, and we distributed it in the bars and to other NOW chapters. We promoted a social agenda. We were political. We lived up to our purpose. We had poetry nights, art nights, sold Olivia's albums<sup>1</sup> and Lesbian books. One philosophy of the task force was that womyn's energy was more powerful than money. Womyn gave their time, energy and money, and the sharing became a positive thing. Our newsletter, about five hundred copies every month, didn't cost a penny. If we had a dance, there was a sliding scale.

**Mindy:** Everything I do is a political action, because I'm a Lesbian!

**Mary:** Gay Pride was mostly men.

**Mindy:** We decided to have "Lesbian Pride" week.

**Mary:** Several Lesbians went to city hall to get the river walk for a weekend bazaar. We created a calendar of events for the week. It was successful just to have the dykes on the river walk.

**Mindy:** The two best-attended events were the dance and the art show. We were comfortable with Lesbians, being Dykes, strong Amazons, reading Lesbian literature, discovering womyn's music. Many of the straight feminists were afraid of being labeled Lesbians. The medical crowd I hung out with who were Lesbians knew each other, acknowledged each other, but not with Lesbian-feminist awareness.

**Mary:** As a member of NOW I participated in public workshops on Lesbianism. We dealt with men asking stupid questions, but stayed positive; we put our energy towards womyn. I couldn't be a separatist, but I could respect separate space and not bring my sons to womyn-only events. NOW was good for my boys. My son was twelve and the only male on the bus going to Georgia for a national NOW conference. Womyn approached me and said, "Was that your son on the bus? He talked about Wicca, feminism, and the womyn's movement!" He was hob-nobbing with the womyn.

The Lesbian Task Force made me a leader. I remember being shy and not saying much. If you said anything, you thought about it because Louise would bring you up on it. Maryanne and Louise, between the two of them, kept down negative forces. I've been in quite a few womyn's organizations after the Task Force, but none had that "group dynamic." For example, if you said, "I don't like that," Louise would say, "Well what *would* you like? You got it! You're a leader, you can handle it." The Lesbian Task Force gave us confidence to say the word *Lesbian*. Words are powerful. If you walk down the street and someone calls you a dyke, you turn around and say "I'm a super dyke!" I still see that meeting with the white men at city hall looking at us and saying, "I just wanna talk to your leader," and fifteen womyn stood up and said, "We are!" We were Latina, Spanish, Jamaican, Black, white, and rednecks, and we took up half the hall.

The Lesbian Task Force was diverse and loving. We knew that every woman was capable of being a leader. I'm proud of being one of the womyn who started the Miami Lesbian Task Force.

Lesbian culture was connected to the Southern culture. There was prejudice against color. We hadn't outgrown that. The biggest thing was that meat, men, and money divided us. The NOW chapter decided that every woman in the Lesbian Task Force should be a paying member of NOW. We said no. We had rap groups and consciousness-raising groups about that issue and the "separatist thing." There was a party on Virginia Key Beach. Men harassed us and the womyn banded together and whipped a couple asses, which got back to the Task Force. Separatism and money split the Lesbian Task Force.

My mother was involved in the civil rights movement. I'm involved with the womyn's movement because that's me. The world can kiss my ass; my mother loves me. It was freeing for me to say "I'm a Lesbian!" When the Lesbian Task Force ended, Louise and Maryanne kept that culture going with a restaurant called "Something Special." They started cooking vegetarian food and continued for twenty-five years.

<sup>1</sup> Olivia Records was a collective formed in 1973 in California to record womyn's music.

**Mindy:** In 1977, Anita Bryant became obsessed when Miami-Dade County added an amendment to its human rights ordinance, making it illegal to discriminate in housing, employment, loans, and public accommodations based on “affectional or sexual preference.” Bryant’s central, ludicrous argument was her fear that children would be molested or converted by gay perverts. Lesbians in the Task Force worked on a phone bank explaining the referendum. It was written to confuse gay allies. If you voted no, you were voting yes. I remember following a car. People were putting up posters against gays. They put up a poster; we pulled it down. They started chasing us. We were scared that night. During that time, you could sit in traffic and read bumper stickers that said, “KILL A QUEER FOR CHRIST!” or “THE ONLY GOOD GAY IS A DEAD GAY!” It was insane. It was a hot political climate and all over the news. I was devastated after the vote.<sup>2</sup> I couldn’t understand how people could buy this crock of crap. The wording of the referendum confused people. We womon-cotted Florida orange juice, and Anita Bryant lost her endorsement. You couldn’t get orange juice in a gay bar in Miami for years. Signs were everywhere: an orange with the international “no” sign.

**Maryanne:** I wrote a cookbook called *Dagger and the White Lady*, what Louise and I were affectionately called while biking the streets of Liberty City. It was on one of those bike rides when I discovered our home and Something Special. That old Lesbian activist spirit tugged at us. We wanted something different—*something special*. Womyn sitting around tables of delicious and healthy dishes, and good conversations. Serving fantastic vegetarian meals: no meat, no men, no money. Paid by donation. It was fun and womyn responded. We loved what we

<sup>2</sup> The gay-friendly ordinance was voted down. See chapter 21 of *Rebels, Ruby-fruits, and Rhinestones: Queering Space in the Stonewall South*, by James T. Sears (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001) for the story of the referendum and the gay activism stimulated by Anita Bryant’s antigay campaign.

did at Something Special.<sup>3</sup> It may not have kept us afloat as far as money is concerned, but costs were covered, and we stayed committed to Lesbian culture.

To read more of these interviews, visit <http://www.SinisterWisdom.org/SW93Supplement> or use these QR Codes



Interview with Mary Sims



Interview with Mindy Dyke

<sup>3</sup> Something Special (1987–2011), a lesbian venture, was a unique dining experience for womyn created by Maryanne Powers and F Louise Griffin, serving vegetarian meals in their home and offering “womyn-only” space with an ambiance of Lesbian culture. They were co-authors of a vegetarian cookbook, *Dancing in the Kitchen*, and were partners for over forty years. F Louise died in 2011 and was honored extensively in *Maize: A Lesbian Country Magazine* #99.