

REACHING SIDeways

An Exchange of Ideas & Views
of
The UU Women and Men of
This Continent

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MUST READING

TRANSFORMING THOUGHT ... VOLUME I

Papers on Feminist Theology

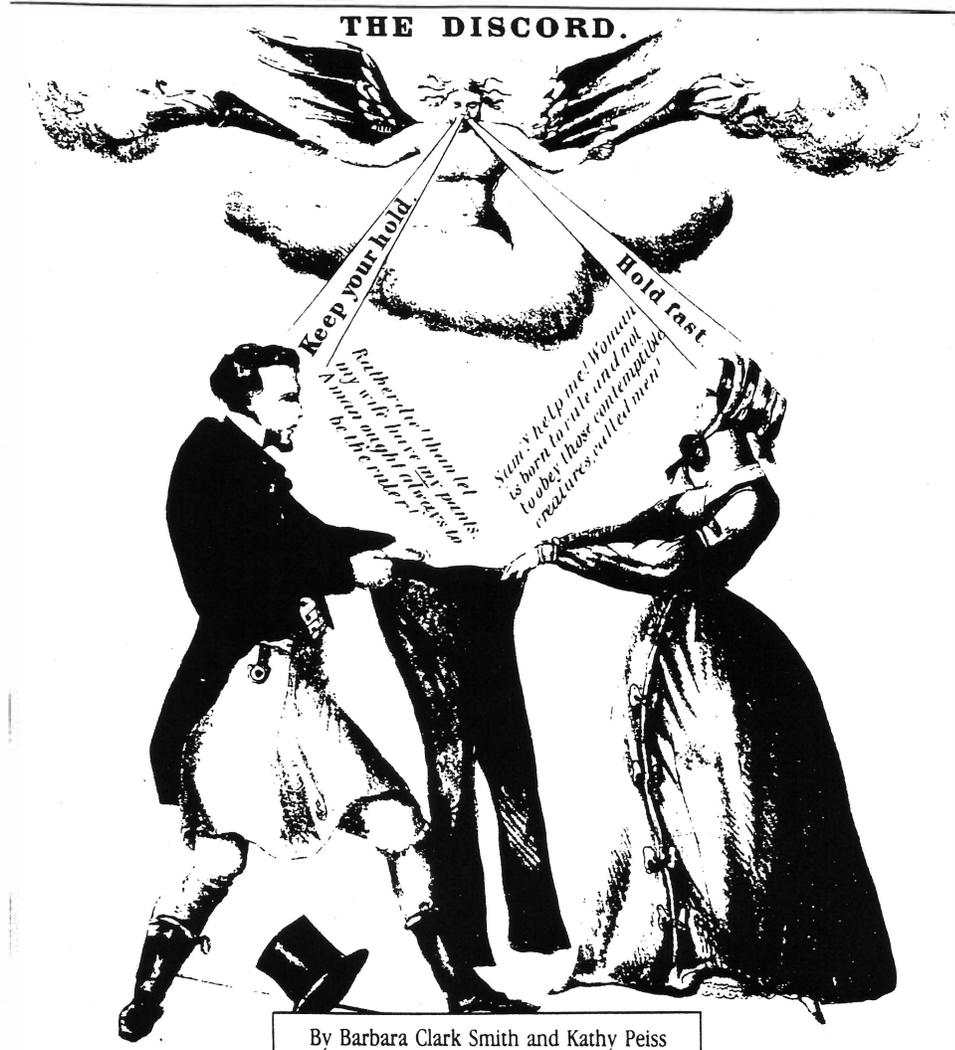
TRANSFORMING THOUGHT VOLUME 11

**Feminist Theology in the Context
of Unitarian Universalist Women**

**For further information, write or call the Unitarian
Universalist Women's Federation, 25 Beacon Street,
Boston, MA 02108, (617) 742-2100**

Men and Women

A History of Costume, Gender, and Power



By Barbara Clark Smith and Kathy Peiss

"Rather die than have my wife have my pants. A man ought always to be the ruler!"
"Women is born to rule and not to obey those contemptible creatures called men."
"The Discord," a print published in 1855, offered a satiric comment on the controversy over women wearing bloomers, a form of pants. (N. Y. Historical Society)

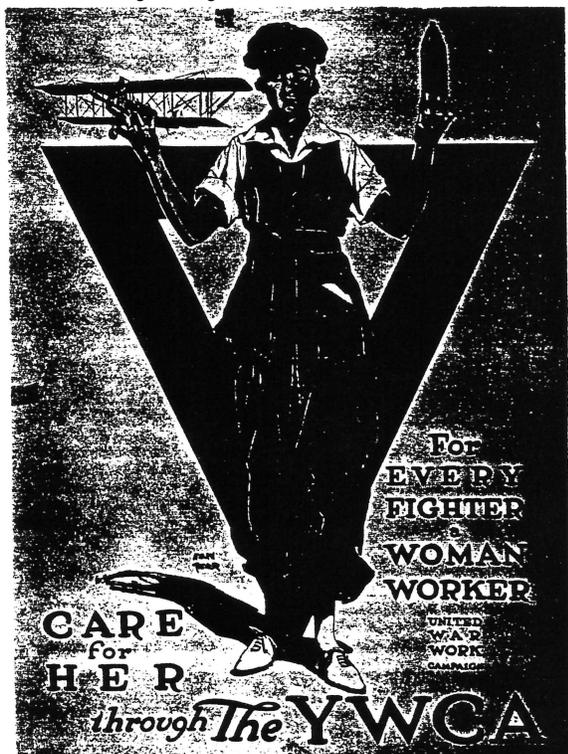
In the introduction to their book, which grew out of the "script," or wall text for the exhibition, Barbara C. Smith and Kathy Peiss, make a careful distinction between sex - - meaning the biological natures we are born with - - and gender - meaning the characteristics that we take on as we learn to be "masculine" or "femine" as our society defines these ideas.' As you can see from the above picture, our society has used pants as a distinguishing feature of masculinity, and the question of "*Who Wears the Pants*" is really asking "Who Rules." Obviously the symbolism of pants in Western history, and its association with men, is somewhat laughable. In many other cultures, women have worn pants and men have worn what we might consider to be long skirts. Certainly the long dress is still worn by some members of the clergy at certain times, by judges, and by academics. Nevertheless, in our Western society, wearing skirts has been a symbol of the inferiority of women. By maintaining restrictions against women wearing pants, our society also successfully

managed to restrict both the physical movements of women, and their view of themselves.

If my statement above seems a little extreme, let me give you some basis for my thinking. During the years I taught public speaking and acting, I always used preliminary exercises to demonstrate to the students that the position of the physical body determines your feelings or emotions. Try, for example, sitting in an attitude of extreme dejection and feeling or speaking about how happy you are. Or, in a moment of great joy, take a brief second to notice the stance of your body. Another way of saying the same thing is that our minds, bodies and spirit work together, and we cannot separate them.

Now, if we consider wearing the voluminous, heavy skirts, the laced corsets, and the rest of the paraphanelia worn by women for so many years, we can easily understand that the physical restrictions caused by the costume would also affect their thinking. Who could be daring or innovative if their skirts forced them to take tiny timid steps? Who could enjoy the physical sensations of movement dressed in this way?

Posters supporting the war effort made women workers in pants a common image during World War I.



Scattered through this journal are some of the pictures shown in the exhibition at the Smithsonian. They provide a documentation of the growing freedom of women during the past two hundred and fifty years. "Who wears the pants" is no longer as important a question as it once was. Still, how many women politicians, or managers wear pants to the office? Successful women still must demonstrate that they have retained their femininity by wearing skirts. As the authors of this booklet conclude, ". . . although some designers have tried to introduce high-style skirts for men, few men would consider being associated with this symbol of inferiority. 'Who wears the skirts' continues to be a self-evident question to most of us."

Sara Best
Chevy Chase, Md.



The ideal of "true womanhood"—embracing piety, purity and domesticity—was conveyed by the clothing and stance of this 1840s lady. Dress, bonnet, collar, brooch, and parasol, 1840-1844

BACK TO THE FUTURE

The following material is edited from a service prepared by members of the Alliance and given at Cedar Lane Unitarian Church on November 12, 1989.

OPENING WORDS

With the last decade of the 20th century fast approaching, we are receiving the usual large number of prophecies about our future in the 21st century. We are told in gloomy terms of the effects of today's actions on our environment, and in glowing terms of the future effects of advances in our technology. We are again warned that the American family is decaying and might breathe its last gasp in the 21st century. All of these prophecies are supposed to warn us to prepare for a new world in which our lives will be different from anything we have known in the past.

Fortunately for all of us, what is predicted for the future isn't always so new or different. Sometimes the predictions sound like a return to what has always existed in the past. For example, Alvin Toffler, writing in his book **THE THIRD WAVE** a few years ago, predicted that, in the future, work for pay will be done in the home instead of in a different workplace. I must say I am somewhat amused by such a prediction. Working in the home for pay is not something new that will happen in

the future- - - this is something that women have done in the past over and over again. Whether the economists and historians recognize the fact, women, except for a privileged few, have, throughout history, earned pay by working from their homes - - along with doing the usual housework and rearing children without pay. Admittedly, the historians and economists may excuse themselves because the work of women was often not public. The income they earned certainly was not included in the gross national product. Nevertheless, cash income from women working from their homes has helped the family budget for as far back as we know.

At least, this is what many members of our Alliance believe. To test our theory, we have asked three Alliance members to tell us about the lives of their mothers. Certainly their lives represent the past - - just in case you don't think that members of the Alliance themselves go back far enough, the mother of one of our speakers was born in 1868.

We are presenting these stories to you and ask you to be the judge of whether or not we seem to be going back to the future predicted by Alvin Toffler in **THE THIRD WAVE**.

As delivered by Marjorie Melton, President, Cedar Lane Unitarian Church Alliance.

STORY I

My mother was, and is, like many other women who live on farms, a first class manager. Of course she doesn't think of herself that way. Still I maintain that she has continually demonstrated management skills during all the time I have known her - - and still does.

In 1941, my father and mother bought a 28 acre farm in Northeastern Ohio. Both of them had come from farm families and had been working as tennant farmers, so they were familiar with farm work, but my father had gone to work at the local steel mill and could only farm in the morning.

The farm work, along with the house-work, during the rest of the day was my Mother's responsibility - along with the help she could get from the children. There were six of us, four boys and two girls. I am the oldest so I remember exactly how much help she got.

Take milking, for example. I had proven unsuccessful in learning how to milk at the one lesson my father gave me, so my mother did the evening milking. This particular cow had an exasperating habit of straining for more feed and hay while she was being milked which made the job almost impossible. It was my job to use a broom to push her food within easy reach while my mother milked her.

It was also my mother's job to feed the chickens and the hogs along with maintaining a kitchen garden large enough so that our family raised everything we ate with the exception of the staples, salt sugar, flour, yeast and cereal. Mother's job for the general farming we did was operating the tractor because it was less heavy physical labor than Dad performed in order to keep the farm in good operating condition. My Dad also did the bee-keeping, an important source of cash income along with the sale of extra grains and potatoes.

In addition to the outside work, there was a good deal to be done inside of the house just to keep things going. For the first few years on the farm, we had only wood-stoves to use both for heating and cooking. I can remember doing our "living" in the dining room and kitchen during the winter time because the rest of the house was too cold to use. When I had to practice my piano lesson in the front room of the house, I put on my winter coat and hat. There was also no water plumbed into the house for several years so all water was pumped and carried. The water pail was filled as full as the child who was doing the pumping could manage to carry without too much strain. It seemed to all the children that an ungodly amount of water was required in that house, especially on washday.

There was no refrigeirator so

that all food from the garden had to be canned unless we were going to use it immediately. I can remember enormous quantities of food being canned - - all with the use of that wood stove which heated the kitchen so well in both winter and summer. If there was a surplus of eggs or strawberries, we sold them to the neighbors for Mother's "pin money." That meant she could provide a few extras for all of us.

My mother also baked all the bread for the family, but we, as children didn't understand how fortunate we were. We always favored a "bread truck" bread the few times we had it.

Somehow or other, my mother found time to teach us girls how to sew, and she made most of our clothes. She herself had had two years of Business College before leaving school to marry the boy down the road - - her high school classmate, and she used to advise us girls to wait a little before we got married, to get our education and see something of the world before we settled down.

That advice sounded just right to me. I had always wanted to teach, and, with assistance from my family, went to Western Reserve University in Cleveland. On one of the scholarship applications, I saw what a massive share of my family's income would have been taken by my tuition and boarding without my scholarship and summer job. I didn't understand at the time, but I now am very much aware of the kind of managing my mother did so that I could go to school

When I have looked at the tasks required by a manager in business, I know that Mother has long performed all the functions they name. She plans, organizes, supervises and exercises close financial control. When there are problems, she takes remedial action.

Did you notice I am using the present tense? My mother, at eighty, still lives in the same house, with electricity, running water, and heat, of course, and is still hard at the job of managing that farm. She now leases most of the land instead of trying to do it herself, but she still has a large garden, and freezes, or cans what she grows - - - for the benefit of her children and grandchildren when they come to visit. I know she would be surprised to hear me use the word "manage" instead of what she would say - - that she "runs" the farm. But no matter what word we use, my mother is still performing!

*Ellen Thompson
Alliance of Cedar Lane Unitarian
Church*



STORY II

I should preface this by stating that I would have liked to have met my mother when I was at least 40 years old.

My mother, Ellen Marie Hoban was born in 1868. She married Wm Patrick Foley in 1888 and the two of them lived all their lives in Western Md. I was born in her 45th year and was not exactly considered a blessed event. I arrived in a family of grown children, ranging in age from 10 years to 20 years old. There had been a loss of two children under age 5. All the grandparents were deceased at this time also.

I don't recall my mother ever being seated without being engaged in hand work. Embroidery---crochet---quilting. She and my sister made beautiful table clothes embroidered and edged in hand made lace. They were successful in selling these items to friends and others, especially as wedding gifts.

Hand work, however, was not my mother's main interest. As a small child, when I made frequent visits with her to a Real Estate office, I learned another side to her character. Somewhere in the conversation, the agent would always manage to say to her, "Mrs. Foley, it's too bad you're not a man."

Those were words too confusing for a 5 to 6 year old to comprehend. Why was it too bad that my mother was not a man? What was she doing in an office chatting with a man other than my father who treated her with great respect?

Much later I discovered that my mother was engaged in buying rental property. I'm sure I can't even imagine what a venture that was for her at that time. The financial details also

remain a mystery. Can it be that she was able to accumulate enough money from selling embroidery to buy rental houses? What would \$100 have bought in small town America in 1918 to 1920?

The history of that period also fascinates me. Tracy Kiddeic's Book, *HOUSE*, relates that Virginia and Maryland always had a higher percentage of tenant class than New England. The census of 1920 revealed that only 46% of American families owned homes. The farm homestead comprised the largest group of home owners.

Insecurity was obviously a determining factor in my mother's undertaking. Having gone through a lengthy period when my father was hospitalized following an accident, (prior to my birth), she well understood the danger of relying only on the employment of her husband to provide food and shelter for the family. During that period, when there was a serious question of whether my father could ever return to full employment, her father had provided food and shelter for her and the children. Apparently she had firmly resolved never to allow herself to be in such a dependent position again.

My father eventually did recover from his lengthy illness, and went to work for the B&O Railroad. His death, however, occurred suddenly in 1924. As his widow, my mother's benefits consisted of two passes for train travel once a year. Due to her buying of rental property, however, at the time of his death, she owned three pieces of property, including the house we occupied.

My mother's dreams, pushed her still further. She became obsessed with the idea of

building a house exactly as she wanted it . There certainly wasn't any support in the family for this undertaking, but nothing could discourage her dream. She sold some of her property and bought land. A builder was contracted and large books, like wall paper books, filled with diagrams and plans invaded our lives. Hours of planning followed. Her vision of what she wanted was very clear. She wanted a double house, a house divided into separate residences that would provide both shelter for her family and income. She insisted that one side would have 7 rooms and the other side, 5 rooms, but would appear to be perfectly balanced by windows in the center so that anyone viewing the house from the outside would not be able to tell which side was big and which side was small. Her long range plan was to occupy the larger side initially, and, as her family shrank, to move to the smaller side. Meanwhile, as the plans developed, there was conflict with the builder. He felt, indeed was very certain, that a double house should have the same number of rooms on both sides, and that all houses should definitely have attics. My mother said no, and meant it. She wanted no attic, and she wanted her house designed as she wished. The house was to be a fine place, with built in bookcases and long door mirrors, the first floor was to be brick and the second floor wood shingles.

I regret that I could not share those days with my mother on a mature level - - those days when her house was being built. I would have loved having conversations with her about her feelings and her excitement on her frequent trips to the site of her house. She was deeply involved throughout the whole process.

Our family moved into the larger side of the house when we were a family of 5. When I was the only child left at home, my mother and I moved into the smaller side.

The house is now serving the 3rd generation of our family in exactly the way my mother planned. Each generation has occupied the large side while raising a family, and eventually moved into the smaller side as empty nesters. Just as my mother planned, the house has always provided both shelter and income to the owners.

My mother died in 1933 while waiting in a bus terminal. People thought she was dozing - she never whimpered or called out. Her wish that she never be a burden to her children or have a prolonged illness came true.

*"We are such stuff as dreams are made on
And our little life is rounded with a sleep."*

My mother sleeps, but her dream goes on and serves her family well.

THE TRUTH ABOUT THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

The movement:	True	Not true
Has helped women become more independent	94%	4%
Has given women more control over their lives	86%	10%
Is still improving the lives of women	82%	12%
Accurately reflects the views of most women	53%	40%
Looks down on women who do not have jobs	35%	57%
Is antifamily	24%	64%
Is out of date in its goals	23%	61%

*Betty Leibovici,
Alliance of Cedar Lane Unitarian
Church*

STORY III

I was born in Monastreadan, County Sligo, Ireland, in 1911, the oldest child of Jane Mahon and Pat McHugh. When I entered college at eighteen, my lifetime had been divided almost equally between two families: first, with my parents in Ireland, and later with my father's sister, Aunt May, in Worcester, Massachusetts. Both families were two career families.

In each case, the mother in the home took most of the responsibility for housekeeping, child rearing, and food preparation. In addition, each mother was a business person, doing work that was separate and apart from that done by her husband.

These two women, through their earnings and energy, were responsible for the rearing and education of their own children and some nieces and nephews. Thirteen persons in all were assisted and encouraged in education up to and including career level training.

Let my story start in Ireland. There we lived in a two story house with space for a store on the first level. My mother operated this store and kept the books. My father spent most of his time and energy in farming, though he regularly carted supplies for the store from Ballagharden, County Roscommon, a market town five miles away.

When my mother married at 28 years of age, she was well trained to run a business. She was the oldest of 13 children in a family with successful businesses in Ballagharden, including a large store in the center of town and a wholesale butcher business. My grandmother Mahon was as active as my grandfather in these enterprises.

Grandmother and Grandfather Mahone

had established the Monastreadan store for my mother, providing the house and the store equipment rent free during her lifetime, a dowry of sorts. The entire property was reclaimed by her family when she died in childbirth at age 40. This left my father and the seven children then at home in severe financial straits.

My mother's work contributed to the family's welfare long after her death. Account books she kept showed what each customer owed for goods bought on credit. These records enabled the family to collect old debts years later when the customers were able to pay, and this money enabled my brother Frank to expand a business he had started.

When I was 9 years old, Aunt May suggested I come live with her in Worcester, MA. She wanted a brother for her only son, a few years older than I. I agreed to leave home, but only if I got a pocket watch. My mother arranged that. The watch had only one hand - a minute hand, but I was happy enough with it.

People have asked why my parents let me leave home at such an early age. Still ruled by England, Ireland was then full of troubles; America promised far more opportunity; both my parents had many family members living in the United States; there was coming and going. And going was not necessarily forever.

I came to a large house in Worcester, MA., to live with Aunt May, her husband, Dr. Fred Bryant, and their son, Frank. Uncle Fred was a highly regarded cancer specialist, working with radium and x-rays. The doctor's office suite was right in the house. My aunt, who organized household tasks with the same zeal and efficiency that she directed her own business

activities, trained me to do a variety of chores: dusting stairs connecting four floors, washing dishes, scrubbing gas ranges, running errands, answering the telephone, chopping wood, and seasonal jobs such as mowing and changing storm windows, and so on. I performed my most satisfying chore in my early high school years: my Aunt and Uncle were vacationing in Europe and I could tell all the doctors and patients who telephoned Uncle Fred that he had gone to Paris to talk with Madame Curie - - as indeed he had. Saying it that way enabled me to come close to someone making history.

When my Uncle started to practice, my Aunt did his bookkeeping and office management. During my Worcester years, she traded houses twice for bigger and better office space as his practice grew, and she made money doing so. In the backyard of one Worcester house, we had a large building earlier used for stables and storing carriages. She remodeled the place for parking cars and an auto repair shop.

My Aunt also remodeled an old mansion on Commonwealth Ave., Boston, to hold eight suites for Doctors. In doing this, she provided a job for a sister, who agreed to come from Chicago to supervise the remodeling and stay on to manage the property. She placed that sister's children in boarding schools so that her sister would be free to work.

In 1923, one year after my mother's death, Aunt May sent another sister to Ireland to bring my three oldest siblings, ages 10, 9 and 8 for schooling in Wellesley Hills, MA.

In addition to helping her own relatives, she made substantial contributions to Catholic priests devoted to helping children in the southern parts of the United States get adequate food, clothing and schooling.

She supported her son through Harvard College and Harvard Business School, and later helped him establish his own brokerage firm on Wall Street. My schooling followed his pattern, but I know she let me choose to enter Harvard College reluctantly. She feared the effects that institution could have on my Catholic Faith. Her fears proved to be well founded.

Being raised by these women made it easy for me to become a partner in a two career household when I married.

Tom McHugh
*Alliance of Cedar Lane Unitarian
Church*

A FUTURE FOR THE AMERICAN FAMILY?

"For over three centuries, Americans have worried about the future of the family. Within decades of the Puritans arrival in Massachusetts Bay Colony, Puritan jeremiads were already decrying the increasing fragility of marriage, the growing selfishness and irresponsibility of parents, and the increasing rebelliousness of children. Despite nearly four centuries of fears that the family is decaying, the institution has, of course, survived (from *DOMESTIC REVOLUTIONS* by Steven Mintz & Sussan Kelley, *The Free Press, NYC, 1988*)

REINVENTING WOMANHOOD

by Carolyn G. Heilbrun

W. W. Norton & Company, 1979

For centuries, woman's role as defined by patriarchy has served man's needs exceedingly well. Patriarchal rule has done little, however, to help women gain selfhood. In fact, it has actually hindered women from developing since their energies have been devoted to the causes of "others." In addition, the adherence to patriarchal values has led the world into an ever-widening spiral of environmental/militaristic madness.

Today, the so-called dependent nature of women, as defined by patriarchy, is so taken for granted that it is not even questioned. In her excellent book, Heilbrun details how both sexes are socialized to accept male aggression and female passivity. She raises some extremely provocative points for both sexes to consider:

Can only women nurture?

Why have women learned to hunger for dependency and to fear autonomy?

Why have there always been social penalties for women who do not marry?

What does a woman give up when she becomes a wife and mother; what does she get in exchange? Does a man fare differently?

Do men have fragile egos that require dependent women? Can men survive without women's excessive devotion?

Heilbrun's revolutionary thesis challenges but also offers hope for the future. Women must overcome their fear and anxiety about being aggressive, says Heilbrun. They can learn to appropriate the male model without giving up the female person. Men can learn to nurture and by their presence during the childbearing years provide realistic models to both boy and girl children.

Dorothy Satir
San Francisco, CA.



Women in long, flowing bathing costumes posed seductively on the beach in turn-of-the-century popular illustrations, like this one on a Schrafft's Chocolates Box.



SURVIVAL IN THE NINETIES

A handbook for women: Connecting with other women

Editor's Note: The following material was not labeled part of our HANDBOOK FOR SURVIVAL, but was part of a letter to the editors. It does, however, offer some very specific advice on the importance of women connecting, one to another.

You are right, the only way to write is to write. Nothing else will do. You are also correct in saying that many of us are exhausted, worn out. We cannot go back; cannot forget what feminism has shown us. Yet we are sometimes overwhelmed by the needs.

There have been changes. It encourages me that at my place of work sexist jokes are no longer tolerated, at least in my hearing. Language at my church is most often inclusive these days, more and more we hear the words of women read from the pulpit, and we are blessed with a woman minister. Some of the young women I counsel have broadened their outlook about what is possible in terms of career choices. Some couples are working hard to be co-parents and co-equals in their relationships. Lesbians and gays are more comfortably visible in the groups I attend.

At the same time, I am told by a member of my congregation that Women and Religion does nothing for the church, that we only work for women. When I remind the complainer of the all church activities sponsored by the group over the past eight years, the reply is, oh, yes, but you only do things that serve your purpose.

My husband jokingly comments as he steps out our front door, "Some of us have to work around here." I am a nine month employee of a school district so have summers off. A former full-time housewife, I respond, "I have worked all my life. It's not my fault I live in a world that chooses to consider my work unworthy of pay." Thus I prove once again that feminists have no sense of humor.

Talking with a friend who just completed her first year in seminary, I hear about a second year student, drawn into the ministry by her feminism, who has decided she must set feminism aside because she wants very much to be a good parish minister. Somehow, in her mind, one cannot be an effective and well liked parish minister if one is a feminist.

In last Saturday's local newspaper there was an Associated Press story saying that most major Protestant denominations which once widely condoned abortion now either oppose it or specify limitations to it. Only the United Church of Christ maintains a clearly pro-choice position. According to the Rev. J. Robert Nelson, Director of the Institute of Religion of the Texas Medical Center in Houston, the cause of this backpedaling is the staggering statistics and the new therapeutic embryology on distinctive characteristics of the **fetus as not part of the woman's body** (my emphasis.)

In order to read the out-pouring of women's writing currently being published, I

Women who wore the bloomer costume were subjected to ridicule and caricature in the 1850s. This print depicts dress reformers in male stances, and with cigars, riding crops and other symbols of masculinity. (Harry T. Peters 'American Stone' Lithography Coll.)



BLOOMER COSTUMES OR WOMAN'S EMANCIPATION.

must go to the local feminist book store. Few of the titles are on the shelves of the chain stores, and, since our local library has only a smattering of women's works (due at least in part to an extremely limited budget,) I am developing quite a personal library - - one I can not really afford.

Is it any wonder that feminists become discouraged? Yet I know that I am privileged. If it were not for my conscience and my grandchildren, who certainly deserve better than they are likely to get from this oppressive system, I could say to hell with it and settle into a life of middle-class oblivion. I am a white woman, married to a man who respects me and tolerates, even if he does not always approve of, my feminism.

In two weeks I will be gathering with women of the northwest to share our stories and teach one another. Carolyn McDade will facilitate our "**CHANGING PROCESS**

AS WE CHANGE THE WORLD." It is from the other women attending, whose experience illuminates mine, that I learn to live and to love myself. It is those women who give me the courage to make a difference, to continue even when I am exhausted and discouraged. I expect to come back renewed. If there is any single act that may help us "**Survive the Nineties,**" it is this, our connection as women, one with another.

Kathleen Dillon
Eugene, OR.

SURVIVAL IN THE NINETIES

A HANDBOOK FOR WOMEN: FINDING SUPPORT

Ed's Note: Another Important Commentary

One thing we have going for us as we approach the 'nineties, which was not available in the 'sixties, is the support of like-minded people. (Yes, even men are beginning to understand about the paradigm shift from patriarchy and dominance to sharing and partnership.) Support groups of like-minded women are an invaluable asset. The group doesn't even need to be very big - - just enough women so that when one woman is down or can't see beyond the end of her nose, there is another who has her momentum and spirit up and who has her perspective intact, at the moment.

I know from personal experience that to be able to talk to like-minded people, or even one person, when you have had a dreadful encounter in which someone has said something benighted to you, is an incredible asset.

The "hot lines" which put desperate people in touch with knowledgeable and understanding other

people also are an invaluable asset. To my knowledge, these were not available in the 'sixties - - at least not in such number.

The other day I read that someone felt every one she knew was in a twelve-step program. That is so exciting to me! Just think that "programs" are available for such an astounding variety of needs.

When disaster strikes in the 'nineties - - in whatever guise - - let us keep in mind that there are alternatives to our despair. We have others out there available to us who understand and can help us to continue, help us to regain our perspectives and see other possibilities which may have escaped our notice or which we have undervalued or forgotten. There are people who care and understand and who can help! There are alternatives! We are not alone and now we know it!

**FRANCES CHASE COURTSAL
PITTSBURG, PA.**

HAVING IT ALL

Would you describe yourself as someone who has a marriage, family and a successful career?

Yes	No
43%	54%

When women try to have it all, which do you think suffers most?

Marriage	Children	Career
28%	42%	12%

DO YOU CONSIDER YOURSELF A FEMINIST?

Yes	No
33%	58%

HAVE FEMINISTS BEEN HELPFUL OR HARMFUL TO WOMEN?

Helpful	Harmful
62%	18%

ontological journeying

**they speak to me in song
these women
with voices like the north wind
brooks bubbling in agate beds
meandering against
the fragile cliffs
tentatively feeling their way
down raw nerve paths
sparking and spinning
they weave new patterns
of connection
and healing**

**walls there are
but trembling now
what beauty we shall uncover
when they fall!**

*kathleen dillon
Eugene, Oregon*

VISIBILITY, VOICE AND VALUE: CONFLICTS BETWEEN MOTHERHOOD AND THE MINISTRY

By the Reverend Susan Manker-Seale

Editor's Note: The following is a portion of the 1989 annual sermon award presented by MSUU (Ministerial Sisterhood Unitarian Universalist) on the subject of Unitarian Unitarian Women.

Last summer I walked into a pizza parlor looking for my husband. My two children, Benjamin at two years and Katie at seven months, were tired and hungry. I needed to ask Curtiss something, but now I have forgotten what it was. It was important enough, though, to track him down where he was having lunch next door to the Walgreen Drug store he manages. It was important enough that I didn't care about the fact that I was dressed in old shorts and a T-shirt, rather than the decent clothes I usually wear when I look him up at work. His employees had told me where I could find him, but I don't remember their telling me he was having a meeting with someone.

I walked up to the table, feeling somewhat embarrassed. Curtiss and the other man assured me I wasn't interrupting anything. I was introduced: "This is my wife, Susan, and these are my kids, Benjamin and Katie." By this time, Benjamin was running madly around the restaurant, looking at and touching everything and totally ignoring my appeals that he stay close to me. Katie, meanwhile, was whimpering with hunger and trying to get out of my arms, throwing her little body towards the floor so that I had to grab her with both hands to keep her from falling. I felt this chaos of motherhood and children hit me full swing. The man laughed slightly in dismissal of it as he stood up, in his establishment suit, to shake my hand.

He looked at me, and it was then that I saw myself reflected in His eyes, in the eyes of our patriarchal society. Suddenly I realized that, to him (and to me at that moment), I was the image of the mother in our culture: the mother in the commercials (sans make-up); the mother in the comedies of Hollywood. I felt invisible, I felt voiceless, I felt valueless.

It was a terrible feeling.

Visibility, voice and value: that is what Susan Griffin is talking about in her poems which we we have shared today. The woman striving to write, the woman examining herself, the woman writing poems about other women who cannot be with us to hear or to speak. These are women trying to reclaim their voices, to become visible again, not only to others, but to themselves. Susan Griffin shares with us some of the obstacles women have to overcome in that struggle for voice and visibility, a struggle which is essential for the survival of our self-determination. And only through increasing our visibility, and using the voice that has been stifled, will women's value in society be realized and recognized, and eventually lifted out of the quagmire of that trilogy of ignorance, sex, and household dust.

In our Judeo-Christian heritage, we women have relied on men to give us a voice in the world. They failed us overwhelmingly, but it was not just their fault; it was women's as well to allow it. Thank goodness for those few women and men who were strong enough to trust each other and to help us to break out of the pattern of silence and degradation.

In the eyes of our working, moving, creating society, Motherhood as a profession rates near zero on the spectrum of visibility, meaning "capable of being seen," voice, meaning "the opportunity to express a choice or opinion," and value, meaning "worth in usefulness or importance, merit." My experience in the pizza parlor was especially devastating for me because I was a minister first, a profession which rates almost opposite to mothers on the above spectrum. Ministry is a very visible profession in society, its voice is frequent and much respected, and ministry is highly valued in our culture.

Naturally, my ego is well-developed. So to feel suddenly that ego being totally deflated was frightening and very disconcerting. Now that I have chosen to be a full-time mother I find it essential for my sense of self-value to write and to preach. I need to be out in the world, participating and creating, keeping my voice alive, keeping my body visible in this respected role of minister. This is important for any person - - - woman or man - - to feel heard and seen and valued, whatever the profession. This is perhaps an understanding which motherhood can bring to the ministry.

Ministry itself comes out of a tradition that is in many ways antithetical to motherhood. The Judeo-Christian heritage, out of which our particular religion stems, has a long history of devaluation of women and motherhood, and ministers have necessarily been the carriers and teachers of that particular view. We think we have turned the tables, but we haven't yet, not completely. I have overheard a few male Unitarian Universalists ministers make derogatory remarks about women in general, but I still think we're making great progress

Motherhood is going to change the

the ministry. It's already happening. Now that we have reclaimed our voices we have an incredible amount of teaching to do. The entire world seems to be structured in an anti-mother way: We rape the "Mother Earth" with our bull-dozers and power saws; we posture toward others with little or no compassion, threatening to blow up some other mother's son or daughter; the physical world is devalued next to the 'spiritual' world, which has become the domain of patriarchy and masculinity.

The learning of the mother is possibly what may turn out to be the salvation of the earth, if we can hold on to the voice and visibility and value we are gaining. We may not all be mothers, but we all had mothers. If we can see beyond the prejudices society instilled in us toward our mothers, maybe we can hear and appreciate some wisdom they might have given us through their own struggles to be mothers and to be themselves.

Let me share with you some of my own learnings in motherhood:

In pregnancy I learned what it feels like to be more than just myself, to be me and another interwoven in one body, and to be completely responsible for that other, an other for which I could feel love only in an abstract way. Is not the earth interwoven in such a way, a way that demands our love, even though we do not know much of it in an intimately concrete way? Are we not now completely responsible for each other and for the earth?

In childbirth I learned what it feels like to be tortured, to be in such terrible pain that the only escape is to pass out into a short wo minutes of eternity. How could anyone who has experienced that condone torture of another being?

In motherhood I learned what it means to subdue my needs for that of another, to compromise and to deprive myself for another's good. This teaching comes from getting out of bed at one, two, three, and four in the morning to pour my exhausted and barely healed body's nourishment into another. Might not that kind of giving be what it takes to bring about the betterment of all the world's societies? Might not that be the kind of deprivation and compromise needed to bring about the healing of our earth- -to teach ourselves laboriously to separate our garbage into one, two and three bags for recycling; to not buy too much meat, etc.?

In motherhood I learned that my values are harder to live than I ever thought possible, that children step beyond the bounds of our ordered lives to challenge us to see reality and fantasy, and how closely the two are interconnected. How can I judge another's beliefs, or demand that they see the world only as I see it? How can I not listen to another vision of the world, and find the reality that may be there for me?

I have learned an intensely deep feeling for the sanctity of life. I have learned that the parts of our bodies and our secretions are not filthy, that their names are not dirty, and do not have to be embarrassing, but that they are as important to a young child as my writing is to me. I have also learned from Benjamin that making analogies is one of the first things we do as children, and, as I have just shown, is an essential process in the understanding of our world.

Women have to keep their voices alive and their bodies visible, and that will entail that we continue to strive for excellent and available childcare; that we dispel the

myths that only the mother, at home, is best for the child. My son adores his nursery school and they provide him with playmates, with socialization, and with experiences which I could never offer, considering my interests. Children are flexible and know when they are loved. I think the best parents are those who are truly being the persons they want to be, doing what they want to do within the confines of family responsibility.

Mother ministers are going to be speaking to these issues as they struggle with them in their own lives. Mother ministers, women ministers and liberated men ministers are going to be speaking about the silenced issues, those of child sexual abuse in our families, those of women's rights, those of making time for family and of sharing responsibilities in the home, those of the degradations of our history of patriarchal religion.

We may very well turn Christianity on its head and reclaim the beauty and goodness and divinity of women. One of these days we won't need a Women's History Month, or a Women and Religion Sunday or an International Women's Day to remind us to speak to women's issues once a year. For they will no longer be "just" women's issues; they will be human issues. We will speak to them every day until they are no longer issues, and motherhood will be praised and respected in the eyes of the world. That is the hope in my heart.

EDITORIAL

Ever since I read Rev. Lucy V. Hitchcock's article in *CRITICAL MASS* primavera, 1989, I have been considering what she had to say. The article, entitled *WOMAN, POWER AND STRUCTURE WITHIN THE UUA.*, written before the Supreme Court's recent ruling on abortions, asks about "the silence of women's collective voice," both on a national political basis, and among Unitarian Universalist women. Rev. Hitchcock writes as follows:

Do we believe all women's church related issues of the '60s and '70s have been resolved? Certainly we've cleaned up lots of sexist language. Gradually, the seminaries and the pulpits are filling with women. There is even a balance of women with men on the faculty of one of our seminaries. 'Cakes for the Queen of Heaven' is circulating broadly, revealing Middle Eastern and European goddess images which have influenced Western culture. Women are researching stories out of women's history. The UUA has women serving as vice-presidents, and women are in the majority on the staff. Beacon Press publishes many feminist authors and has an important series republishing Black women authors whose books had gone out of print.

Democratic process is the rule in the bylaws of our congregation and women have easy access to lay leadership positions including UUA Board positions. In fact, many of the church hierarchies and "old boy networks" we so deplored after our

first taste of Mary Daly have wrapped into spirals with the coming of women into leadership positions and UUA chapter meetings. An exception to the hierarchy into spiral" image is '25' itself, but I'll turn to that later.

Have we discovered, then, no new needs? Or are we just tired? What about the litany of women's agendas in the basement room? Perhaps they have nothing to do with the church. Whatever happened to womanpower?

I do not know whether or not Rev. Hitchcock would have written the above words after the recent ruling of the Supreme Court on abortion. In the past year, NOW has been revitalized, The pro-choice rallies here in Washington last spring and this fall brought out thousands of women, some UUs, some from other denominations, and some, of course, completely unchurched. We can no longer say that women's collective voice is silent.

What is even more encouraging is that women have even begun to vote according to a candidate's stand on feminist issues! Look at the election of the first black governor in Virginia, Douglas Wilder. A recent article stated that the new Governor Wilder of Virginia was not inclined to use his pro-choice stance as a major issue until he was advised of its importance to women and some men by the National Women's Political Caucus. He was wise enough to listen to good advice, And women learned, perhaps for the first time, the power of their vote.

But all of this is not a response to Rev. Hitchcock's comments about UU women. Can we say that UU women have become revitalized. Can we say that they (we) are again raising their (our) voices on women's issues?

This is a very important question for me. In 1981 and 1982, I chaired, or co-chaired with Jewell McHugh, two Women & Religion Conferences both at Cedar Lane and at the First Unitarian Church in Philadelphia. Close to three hundred women attended each of those conferences! As I look back, I am again amazed at the numbers, and at the excitement that each of these conferences generated. Do I think I could do the same today? I know that I could not. By 1983, we attempted three conferences in three different areas in our district. The total number of attendees at all three conferences did not come any where near three hundred.

Now, I do not wish to imply that the true value of a conference depends on the number of attendees. I am here using numbers to indicate the amount of excitement among UU women. Certainly if we look at the conferences quantitatively, we can say that more excitement has been shown if a conference is attended by three hundred people than if that same conference is attended by fifty.

I, therefore, can say that I do not think we have the same amount of excitement among UU women today on women's issues as we did only a few years ago.

Then, what happened? Rev. Lucy Hitchcock offers this possible explanation.

"Carolyn McDade, a lay activist for

justice and a musician whose songs articulate and inspire our movement, has long despaired that so many of our creative and concerned women dedicate their prime energy to the maintenance of the church and end up with nothing left to give for the disadvantaged beyond our doors.

It is ironic and sad that the understanding of the laity, in the early Christian church as empowered to move the words and work of Jesus into the world, being the body of the Christ resurrected, has been reduced in modern Christendom - and I observe in Unitarian Universalism too (with exceptions of course) - to a concern for personal salvation or sanctification and the survival and edification of the home church. Salvation for UUs is translated as wholeness rather than a good afterlife, but has been further adulterated into making sure we've got ours. And our standards for what is justly ours keep going up.

I have a suspicion founded in part on witnessing my own struggle to keep the faith and 'to do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with y(our) God' (Micah 6:8). I repeatedly fall away into self-serving and institutional-serving behaviors, beyond healthy survival. My suspicion is that the UU women's movement has lost its vitality because we relatively affluent, predominantly white, even lesbian, but certainly "straight" women have gotten what we were after: Jobs and therefore income doing what we enjoy; recovered mythology and history; language which includes us; position and therefore say-so in our churches, Districts, and at '25.' Our energy for the struggle beyond ourselves is being consumed in the 'House that (Jill) built' for herself or better, 'the House that Jack built'

which we have infiltrated.

Is this the answer to the lack of energy on the part of UU women? Is this why we seem to be silent? Are we so satisfied with what our denomination, the UUA has accomplished, that we can discover no more needs? Has our work on women's issues merely been self-serving and institutional-serving so that now we have what we want, we have no more energy?

Or perhaps we are dissatisfied with the results of our work. Perhaps all of the changes mentioned by Rev. Hitchcock, the "cleaning up of sexist language," the "broad circulation" of 'Cakes for the Queen of Heaven,' the employment of women on the UU staff in the position of vice-presidents, the pulpits filling with women, and the publication of feminist authors by Beacon Press, do not seem to be sufficient for the amount of effort we have expended.

I don't know the answer. If you have an opinion on any of these questions, *REACHING SIDeways* would be very glad to publish your thinking.

I, of course, do have some suspicions. Judging both from myself and from several other feminists I know very well, I think we expected more from the UUA than it could possibly do. We are no longer putting our major efforts into a denominational effort because we are convinced that such efforts do not bring forth major results.

What do you think?

Please send your thoughts on this, or on anything you wish, to Sara Best, editor, 5211 Saratoga Ave., Chevy Chase, Md. 20815



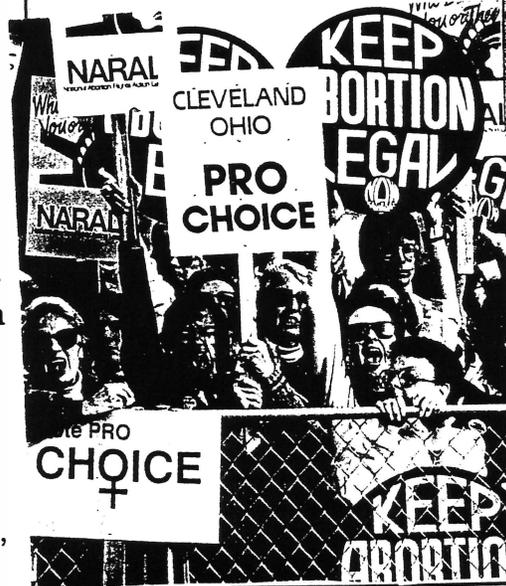
1967

Equal Rights Amendment
proposed

1985

Postcard voices post-
feminist anguish

I CAN'T BELIEVE I
FORGOT TO
HAVE CHILDREN



ABOUT THIS JOURNAL

This journal perseveres through the dedication and energy of a volunteer staff, supported by your contributions both of money and opinion. We began on October 1, 1981 by stating our purpose in the following manner:

"REACHING SIDEWAYS will challenge sexism because we seek, in the words of our UUA Bylaws 'to affirm, defend and promote the supreme worth and dignity of every human personality and the use of the democratic method in human relationships'

Toward this end, REACHING SIDEWAYS welcomes contributions about how the women and men in our societies are helping to implement the Women and Religion Resolution passed unanimously by the 1977 General Assembly of the UUA. For example, contributions that call attention to articles, sermons, discussions, conferences and other materials that explore the relationship between religious myths and sexism between religious and cultural attitudes toward women, and the deleterious effects of sexist language."

Add to the list I have just written that we also welcome stories, fictional or true, about women. I have a strong feeling myself that we need to do a great deal more telling of true stories, of ourselves, perhaps, or of others who are important to us. These stories are not easy to write. If they are about ourselves, we sometimes have a hard time finding a focus. If they are about someone we love, or loved, we sometimes become too emotional to maintain any kind of judgement while we work and we want to include too many details to make a story that others will read. If you would like my help while you are working on your story, I would be glad to work with you. Do give us both as much advance notice as you possible can.

Please send your material to Sara Best, 5211 Saratoga Ave., Chevy Chase, Md., 20815. I am always ready to receive! If you can get your material to me by, say the middle of April, I will be able to use it in the next issue of **REACHING SIDEWAYS**.

IMPORTANT NOTICE!

The 1990 UU Women's Convocation will be held April 20-25, 1990 (Friday evening - Wednesday noon) at Lake Geneva, Wisconsin. Featured speakers will be STARHAWK, ROSEMARY BRAY MCNATT, and HOLLY NEAR.

The 1990 Womanquest Convocation will be a continent-wide gathering of UU Women to plan, by consensus, an agenda for the 21st century. In addition, there will be nightly concerts, lots of workshops, worship services, and an opportunity for each person to concentrate on a spiritual discipline during the conference.

REGISTRATION - \$150
ROOM & BOARD - \$135 - \$195 depending on type of accomodation for further information
Holly Horn - (415) 525-0302
Tracy Robinson Harris
(212) 683-4988
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Mrs. A. S. Guimaraes wore this two-piece swimsuit of black and white wool in 1922. Form-fitting knit suits allowed women to swim in earnest rather than merely "bathe" in the water.

In the late nineteenth century, the movement of women into education, work, and politics challenged the idea that women should be confined to the domestic sphere. As writer Margaret Deland observed, this was "a change in the feminine ideal," from the domestic, self-effacing, and passive True Woman of yesteryear, to the "New Woman."



Holeproof Hosiery

TRIM ankles, demurely alluring. How they fascinate, captivate. And well she knows glove-fitting Holeproof Hosiery makes them so. In this short-skirted era, Holeproof is becoming as famous for its sheerness, shapeliness and lustrous beauty, as it is for wonderful wearing qualities. Leading stores are now showing the newest ideas for Spring in staple and fancy styles in Pure Silk, Silk Faced and Lises for men, women and children. HOLEPROOF HOSIERY COMPANY, MILWAUKEE, WISCONSIN. HOLEPROOF HOSIERY COMPANY OF CANADA, Limited, London, Ont.

The exposure of women's legs in the 1910s and 1920s placed a new emphasis on women's physical activity. Indeed fashion drawings and advertisements frequently depicted women in motion, swinging a golf club or dancing. Short skirts symbolized women's entry into sports, the professions, and public life.

New book by Carole Gilligan
 "Making Connections: The
 Relational World of
 Adolescent Girls at
 Emma Willard School"