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NOTES FOR A MAGAZINE

I am thrilled to present you with this second installment of work from the Southern Lesbian Feminist Activist Herstory Project. In *Sinister Wisdom 98: Landykes of the South*, the Southern Lesbian Feminist Activist Herstory Project presents interviews, stories, memories, poems, and reports about lesbian land communities in the South from 1969 until the present.

In the pages of *Sinister Wisdom 98: Landykes of the South*, some of my favorite lesbian feminists make marquee appearances: Barbara Deming, Andrea Dworkin, Merril Mushroom, Amoja Three Rivers, and others. The stories of *Landykes of the South* ultimately are not about outsized, charismatic individuals. They are stories about communities where individuals gather to create something greater and more meaningful than any one person.

*Sinister Wisdom 98: Landykes of the South* is narrated skillfully and organized to evoke Southern lesbian land communities. This is an issue that simultaneously educates and delights. If you are like me, you will be riveted reading these stories about lesbian landykes and learn an extraordinary amount of new information about lesbian-feminism, land communities, and the visions that womyn brought to community building. Perhaps equally important to the inspiration that these stories offer are the clear-eyed assessments of challenges and frustrations in building land communities. These are powerfully human stories that help us all understand more about lesbian-feminism and where—and how—we live our lives.

From this issue of *Sinister Wisdom*, the complexities of lesbian identities and lesbian-feminist political actions emerge. The stories in these pages capture many people’s lives and modes of finding ways to live in the world with integrity, conviction, passion, and pleasure. *Sinister Wisdom 98: Landykes of the South* also contributes to the important work of documenting the history of lesbian-feminism—and lesbian separatism. Discussing, debating, analyzing, and arguing about lesbian separatism has been
an important topic for *Sinister Wisdom* since the journal began. I am pleased to see the conversation continuing with this issue.

I want to praise all of the women working on the Southern Lesbian Feminist Activist Herstory Project and Womonwrites, the Southern gathering of women writers that nurtures and supports this project. These great writers, activists, and *bon vivants* preserve lesbian lives through storytelling, oral herstory interviews, and archival preservation. I salute them for their work.

I also want to thank Rose Norman who has been my primary contact and liaison through the process of these two special issues. Rose is an extraordinarily smart, funny, hard-working, compassionate, thoughtful, and committed lesbian; it is a pleasure to work with her. Thank you, Rose, for the work you are doing on *Sinister Wisdom*—and a myriad of other projects that benefit lesbians.

If you love this issue of *Sinister Wisdom* (and I hope you will!) please consider making a generous gift to *Sinister Wisdom*. I have four fabulous issues of *Sinister Wisdom* planned for 2016, but we can only publish and distribute these issues with your support. *Sinister Wisdom* will have a special fall fundraising campaign in October and November with an ambitious fundraising goal, but you can give to support *Sinister Wisdom* at any time online at www.SinisterWisdom.org/donate or by mailing a check payable to *Sinister Wisdom* to *Sinister Wisdom*, PO Box 3252, Berkeley, CA 94703.

Please note the subscription rates for *Sinister Wisdom* increase slightly in January of 2016. You can lock in a two-year subscription for only $50 (in the United States) or a one-year subscription for only $34 (in the United States) before the end of December. Take action now and save money in the future! You’ll be glad you did.

In sisterhood,

Julie R. Enszer, PhD
Fall 2015
NOTES FOR A SPECIAL ISSUE
LANDYKES OF THE SOUTH:
WOMEN’S LAND GROUPS AND LESBIAN COMMUNITIES IN THE SOUTH

“Lesbian
It became my country,
a space where I belonged,
a territory beyond borders
made up of islands
linked to each other
by love, ideas and political affinities.”


It was the 1970s. Lesbians owning land together was a new concept. Second-wave feminism was new. National feminist organizations were new, and were not welcoming out Lesbians. It was only a few years after Stonewall. Every woman was finding her own path.

Some of us stepped onto the utopian, arduous, and, in some ways, ethereal path of the women’s (womyn’s, wimmin’s) land movement, a world evoked in the lines quoted above from Myriam Fougère’s documentary about that time, a time when *Lesbian* was spelled with a capital “L” because it meant a member of a nation, a tribe. Small groups of Lesbians began to find ways of acquiring land where they could live the ideals of the movement. How they achieved this vision has varied as much as the women themselves varied. Some had inherited lands or had the resources to simply buy land, while others worked collectively to borrow money or raise funds through a charitable group. In 1994, when Shewolf published her first *Shewolf’s Directory of Wimmin’s Lands and Lesbian Communities*, now in its sixth edition (2013–2016, see story, p. 113), fifty land groups were included. Eighteen of these were in the South. By 1996, Landyke Gatherings (*Landyke* capitalized
for the same reason as Lesbian) started at In Touch in Virginia and have continued to meet every two or three years.\(^1\) The first seven gatherings were in Southern states.\(^2\)

*Sinister Wisdom* 98: *Landykes of the South* is the second special issue of *Sinister Wisdom* featuring memoirs, interviews, essays, and artifacts from the Southern Lesbian Feminist Activist Herstory Project, a project of Womonwrites, the Southeast Lesbian Writers' Conference (womonwrites.wordpress.com). While our focus here is on land groups in Southern states (Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia), we have also attempted to provide broader context for this nationwide movement. The main goal of our Herstory Project is to fill a gap left in the history of the second-wave women’s movement by collecting the stories of the many Lesbian-feminist activists living in Southern states. Stories and histories of many Southern Lesbians-feminists are missing from the burgeoning oral history projects documenting histories of feminism in the 1970s and the 1980s or in LGBT oral history projects.\(^3\) While excellent scholarly

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1. Landyke Gatherings are just what they sound like, gatherings of Lesbians who live on womyn’s lands all over the United States, including people who don’t live in a Lesbian land community but identify as Landykes. That term may have first appeared in print when Jae Haggard, now editor of *Maize*, used it in 1995. Sociologist Landyke Sine Anahita (formerly of Bold Moon womyn’s land in North Carolina) used the term in a 2004 scholarly article, “Rivers of Ideas, Participants, and Praxis: The Benefits and Challenges of Confluence in the Landdyke Movement,” *Research in Political Sociology* 13 (2004): 13–46; and again in 2009, “Nestled into Niches: Prefigurative Communities on Lesbian Land,” *Journal of Homosexuality* 56.6 (2009): 719–737. Dr. Anahita spells it with two d’s, as does the Landdykes online discussion group. After a discussion on the Landdykes e-list, we have used Jae Haggard’s spelling, with one d, on the grounds that, as Shewolf wrote, “it makes it hard to separate the land from the dykes.”


work has been done on the South as an important site of activism, many stories of Lesbian-feminist activism remain to be told.

For some early women’s liberationists in the first consciousness-raising groups, forming a women’s land group was an outcome of the process, putting theory into action (see p. 19 for Corky Culver’s story). Some Lesbians came out in the counterculture’s back-to-the-land movement, some waking up to feminism after moving to the country with a mixed group or male partner (see “Arkansas Land,” p. 36). Our collection of Landyke stories begins in 1969 when Corky Culver’s consciousness-raising group in Florida, possibly the first Lesbian land group in the country, began to look for land. We chose to end the storytelling at the end of the twentieth century in 1998 with Maat Dompim (see “A Great Big Women of Color Tent,” p. 150), but the Landyke movement continues in some form to this day. Reflecting this, our timeline includes communities started up to 2012 (see “Women’s Land in Southern States,” p. 177).

At heart, Lesbian-feminism is part of every woman’s land story in this issue, and for some, Lesbian separatism was a theme, if not a bone of contention. The topic of Lesbian separatism could be an entire chapter in and of itself. In brief, some land groups professed to be separatist from inception, while others became separatist to varying degrees over time. Some groups mandated no men on the land at all, which could be difficult when it came to certain jobs or equipment. They believed they could figure it out, and do it better, safer, or more respectfully than men. Some allowed limited male presence; some allowed men only at specific times and in specific places, to stay connected with sons, brothers, or fathers. Others

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