

Crosscurrents

by Wickie Stamps

Do you remember the part of "*Alice in Wonderland*" where Alice came across a big, old, crazy looking caterpillar who was sitting on a mushroom smoking a hooka? The caterpillar looked at Alice, took a hit off the pipe, and using the smoke it blew from its mouth, spelled out "WHO ARE YOU?"

Weird? Yes. Unheard of? Well, no, not if you do drugs. The point is the question. Who are You?

Specifically, Who Are You as a Lesbian? Okay, okay, let's do the language thing right here. Call yourself whatever you want. (Or, if you want, I will.) Dyke, queer, gay, woman identified, bulldagger, perhaps you're even a non-labelist lesbian, you know the girls who refuse to label themselves. Take any one of the above titles. Personally I'm prone to hang around the word lesbian. But, whatever you label yourself, what does it mean to you to be one of the above labels? Who Are You?

For clarity's sake, let's just stick to the title "lesbian." Let me tell you my thinking on the subject. First, I thought being a lesbian means having sex with other women. Right? Love is irrelevant, there this notion of womyn-loving-womyn is kaput. Right? But think about it. Are you a lesbian just because

you have sex with another woman? What about straight girls in the sex industry who have sex with other women for the pleasure of straight men? Are they lesbians? They are having sex with another woman, right? Who Are They? What about when we are not having sex with another woman, but have a history of having sex with women? Does that mean that, if we aren't having sex, then we are a non-lesbian, or on vacation from our identity? What about long term relationship with our lovers when there is no sex? Do we disqualify girls in these partnerships? (Hope not, or I'd've been kicked out of Lesbianville a long time ago.)

This notion of sex defining our identity doesn't seem to be going anywhere. So, let's try another tack. Lesbians are women who love women. Now, don't stick your finger down your throat and pretend to be gagging. This is a valid question. Do you have to love women to be a lesbian? I don't think so. Christ, I have gone through periods when I couldn't *stand* other women - hated them actually. Was I, then, a non-lesbian? What about when we just have sex with another woman - no love - just good hot sex, but no love.

What is that? Is it not lesbianism because there is no love? What do you think?

Okay, let's back up and try this route. A lesbian is a woman who gets most of her "support" (whatever in god's name that is) from other women and is a part of our "community." (Ditto on "what the fuck is community".) Well, okay, sounds good. But, what about lesbians who do not spend time at women's events, don't attend gay prides and live mostly in the straight world? Are they not lesbians because they are not active in the recognized lesbian community? What about lesbians - as I have been at points in my life - who move mostly in the world of gay men? Should we disqualify these women who are not in our "community" and who get their support from men?

Like the caterpillar (who I personally think had marijuana, aka herb in that pipe) said, "Who are you?"

I'll tell you what I've come up with for a common starting point on our lesbian identity. A lesbian is someone who is willing to give up something for another woman. Sound weird? Let me explain. Sometimes I am willing to give up my time for a woman, like talk on the phone, or better yet, I some-

times interrupt very important conversation with my pal while we are out at a diner to cruise a cute girl who walks by. I just gave up some of my time to look at that sweet thing, right? At other times, being a lesbian means giving up your TOTALLY COOL I-don't-give-a-fuck-about-you-or-anyone attitude and just smiling at another woman. Sometimes being a lesbian means giving up your self-sufficiency, sexually speaking, and letting someone else have sex with you. Or sometimes, when your friend or lover is hurt and crying, being a lesbian means giving up some compassion, maybe giving up some cash and buying them a stuffed animal, or taking them out for coffee.

Being a lesbian means we are willing to let another woman — or a community of them — into your life. The hows, the whys and the ways will be what this column is all about.

So, next time you're wandering around in the forest of your choice, check out that caterpillar who is polluting your air space. He (yes, ladies, I think it's a he) is a pretty cool creature! And who knows he may turn to you and very nastily blow the letters: "WHO ARE YOU" in your face.