

# ZINE AND TASTED: YUM

by M.L. Fraser

Each of the publications reviewed in this column is delicious, and each is remarkable in its own way: which one pleases your palate most will just depend on what you're looking for in a zine. There's not a baddie in the bunch, so pick and choose, knowing you're on the right track.

## *Before the Mortgage* (no.4, no.5, both undated)

Christina Amini and Rachel Hutton produce this little morsel out of Ross, California. Intellectual without being pompous, it verges on social satire. It is pointed, yet "everygirl" funny. A few of the excerpts made me laugh—in particular, Rachel's description of terrible fashion sense ("Getting Dressed") and Christina's account, in "Soon, I'll Succeed in Business," of pretending to know a gender-unspecified acquaintance of someone she's having a job interview with (she later discovers that the mystery acquaintance (male) is the interviewer's best friend). I also loved the remarks on "fake-dating" by Tim Gihring (of Minnesota Monthly fame). So that's what I've been doing all this time; it's nice to know others are in my boat and have my sensibilities. I laughed very hard at the social gaffe committed by Dave when he exclaimed "San Francisco!" in response to a social nicety from his boss's boss's boss ("B<sup>3</sup>") (only realizing later that B<sup>3</sup> had said, "How you doing today?," not "Foggy day today"). What I like best about this zine is that it is feminist-friendly without being overtly political. It speaks to the everyday feminist in us, despite the gender of the reader or the writer. Yet it still retains the "just trying to get my voice out there" feel of a true zine.

*Before the Mortgage* is a great example of the thirties grrrl or guy who has not chosen the "spouse, kids, and home in the suburbs" route. (Hence, its title.) There are three sections in every issue—"Part of the Problem," "Part of the Solution," and "On the Fence" (could be good, could be bad)—a great idea that examines the politics of the alternate lifestyle. I am amused at some of the material that goes into the "problem" section of the zine—everything from post-it notes found around the office to overheard commentary at a poetry reading, to a piece about bus

schedules ("Ahhhh, Ski Week"), and then a bit about living with parents, which many in this generation find themselves doing ("My Roommates, My Parents"). This kind of writing could get bitter and snarky, but instead it pokes gentle fun at the absurdities of life—a tricky line to ride, but the authors seem to do it, in both issues of the zine. Some stuff is a little incongruous, like the odd home photos combined with the slick writing. A list of emails that the authors thought were silly (but aren't really, just unimaginative) falls into the "Hmmmm" category. If you ignore that and concentrate on the voices and the writing, *Before the Mortgage* is a must-get.

Christina Amini, P.O. Box 68, Ross, CA, 94957; website: [www.beforethemortgage.com](http://www.beforethemortgage.com). PayPal, credit cards, and checks accepted: \$3.95 per issue; one-year subscription (three issues) for \$10.00.

## *Chloe Likes Olivia* (unnumbered & undated, but with buried reference to January 2004)

A true riot grrrl, Lizzie lets loose about bands and feminism. I love her opening paragraph: "I am one of those annoying people who refuses to believe that the radical potential of the zine became obsolete in 1994." (We don't believe it either, Liz!! And given the number of zine fests popping up all over the country, many others don't either; so buck up, Little Camper.) She then goes on, a sentence or two later, to say that "the cut-and-paste revolution will only die if we let it. so keep reading." (Rock ON, sister-friend.) I also like the title, which comes from Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*. But then she mostly talks about music, not literature, which I found a little ironic.

So, for the content of the zine: I would have liked more variety. This is mostly band reviews, which I always like, providing that I have a chance to see the bands discussed. But it's hard to wade through write-ups on band after local (for Lizzie) band before coming to reviews of such amazing headliners as Le Tigre or Maple (always worth the wait). The reviews are well written and have some insightful, though sarcastic, commentary on the cool scene at Oberlin. The

opening interview with photographer Megan Holmes in Chicago is accompanied by grainy reproductions that look like they could be interesting if I could just see them better. I did get some good scoop on little-known foreign bands that are really good. I am glad for that, because I might have missed some cool tunes. Finally, there is a diatribe by Josh Goodman about “emo” music and feminism, which in my opinion is the best thing about the zine. This issue of *Chloe Likes Olivia* would be good to have, yet okay to miss. I’ll bet Liz comes up with better stuff next time.

Lizzie Ehrenhalt, 215 W. Lorain St., Oberlin, OH 44074; email:

**Elizabeth.Ehrenhalt@oberlin.edu.** Free.

**Emma Goldman** (no.1, undated)

Written by a first-year graduate student at Temple University, this zine is titled as a tribute to (obviously) Emma Goldman. Rebekah offers little snippets of information about the legend and promises more next time. Interspersed throughout are photographs of Mount Moriah, a 150-year-old Philadelphia cemetery that has fallen into ruin. The photos of fallen headstones remark upon how easily we lose our history. (Rebekah was a humanities scholar for a community group working on documenting the mess and cleaning it up. More photographs appear in a smaller—and lovely and inspirational—zine called *Mount Moriah Cemetery*, also by Rebekah.)

Already I groove on Rebekah—she hates Bush’s policies on education and gives the ten top reasons they are stupid. Her biggest fear is four more years of “W,” and she rants quite the feminist rant about his idiocy. We like her. I also love the inner-city version of what earning a Ph.D. means (having the “Players Haters Degree”). Having one myself, I grinned, because yeah, I know some people who would fall into that category, too.

Overall this is a good first zine, and I’m looking forward to what Rebekah puts out next. You should support this one just to keep her writing. (And get *Mount Moriah Cemetery* too, because we should recognize the beauty of our fallen ancestors in their finality. I like that Rebekah realizes this.)

For *Emma Goldman*: \$1.50, or \$1.00 + two stamps. For *Mount Moriah*: \$.50, or \$.25 + one stamp. Rebekah Buchanan, 428 N. 13<sup>th</sup> street 5I,

Philadelphia, PA 19123; email:

**rebekah@temple.edu**; informational website (not an e-zine): **www.emmagoldmanzine.com**;

Rebekah’s livejournal: **www.livejournal.com/users/emmagoldman**

**Leap** (no.1, no.2, undated)

What a charming little perzine. The first issue seems to have been done a year or so ago, while the second seems to be from the summer of 2004. This woman suffers, albeit intelligently, from many things we all go through, like the fear that we are not “doing it right” even though from all outward appearances we are. She also endures bipolar disorder, and writes with wit, irony, and familiarity about this strange and haphazard illness. I think Louise named her zine *Leap* because she feels like she has to leap into the light—that is, from the crazy world she could so easily stay in, to the world of pizza every Friday and clean laundry.

In Issue 2 there’s an inspirational journal of Louise’s first triathlon, as well as a touching commentary by a stepdad (Louise’s husband?) about seeing movies with an awesome 15-year-old girl. I thought both issues could have been better without the recipes or “Kibbles and Bits” (which should have stuck to the really good stuff like the link to her husband’s politically astute webzine and info about a military grrrl’s zine).

*Leap*’s covers are great: Issue 1’s is tissue paper with a glued-on, rubber-stamped image of a hand; Issue 2’s cover has purple handmade paper and a beaded (!) spine (both issues have hand-sewn bindings). The vote: A good little perzine that shows the age range of the Third Wave feminist. Even if this effort doesn’t directly further the field of women’s studies, it offers another eloquent voice in the wilderness. Go Louise.

\$2.00 per issue. Louise Pohle-Bjolin, 605 Greenfield Ave., Pittsburgh, PA 15207; email: **loupbj@yahoo.com**

**My Mother’s Fashion: Not Just for the Ladies** (undated)

This is a great set of writings based on the author’s relationship with her mother. Tara starts with a voyeuristic trip into her mother’s closet and returns occasionally to the concept of clothes and identity. I wish she’d stuck with this idea all

the way through, as I think a small girl exploring and remembering her mother through the clothes she wore is a fascinating image. I would like to have seen more pieces around this idea, but those might be a different set of writings for another time. Fashion does get mentioned often, and in interesting ways, but it is not always in keeping with the title.

Sometimes the complex relationships between mothers and daughters can only be told in vignettes, and Tara does a wonderful job of this with her short pieces. Mothers and daughters will understand and resonate with the intricacies of Tara and her mother. But while this "zine" does remark upon the experience of being female and is a fabulously sophisticated read for the literary-minded of us, it strikes me as slicker and more "McSweeney's" (a very "hip lit mag rag" that was spawned, along with the likes of Zadie Smith and Sarah Vowell, by a glossy circle of writers out of San Francisco) than the fresh cut-and-paste grrrl zines we adore. The verdict: get if you like the more polished voice; don't if you like it a little more raw.

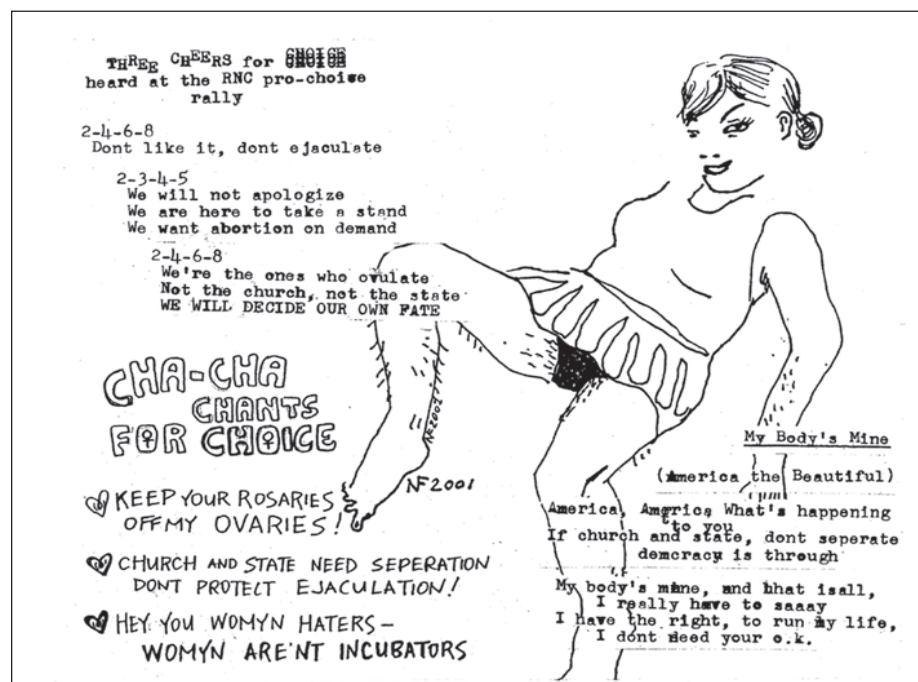
\$2.50. Tara Moyle, P.O. Box 5504, Richmond VA 23220; email: [taramoyle@hotmail.com](mailto:taramoyle@hotmail.com)

### **Radical Cheerleader Handbook** (no.3, undated)

An interesting idea that originated in 1996, this radical movement takes cheerleading to the streets as a form of radical resistance. As the movement has grown, it has produced handbooks (this one is the third) of cheers that have been performed all over North America by chapters of Radical Cheerleaders, who are devoted to harmless but engaging activism. Apparently there are more than thirty squads in the U.S. and Canada. Kinda cool. It's also cool that a convention of pom-pom waving feminists decided inclusiveness was the order of the day in recruiting members and creating cheers. Always a good idea.

These cheers are wonderfully sincere and angry. Some are a bit vulgar, some quite violent, and some charming in their simplicity. All messages are feminist and egalitarian and promote grassroots social activism. One of my faves is a simple count-out cheer performed at the RNC Pro-Choice rally ("2-3-4-5—We will not apologize... We are here to take a stand—we want abortion on demand... 2-4-6-8—We're the ones who ovulate—not the church and not the state..."). I especially like that there are cheers in Spanish and French, showing that activism is not restricted to "mainstream" America. As a former cheerleader and current activist, I find this booklet energizing and a good grin. Even if you're not familiar with cheerleading or the possibilities of this fun and creative form of expression, you can figure it out and have a great time yelling and shaking your pom-poms. Cheers for Cara, Aimee, and Coleen for getting this thing going—Sis Boom Bah, Grrrls!

\$2.00 per handbook "if you got it, \$0 if you don't." Cara and Aimee, Box 961, Lake Worth, FL 33460. All proceeds go to the R2K Legal Collective (<http://www.r2kphilly.org/r2klegal/>) to help the 400 people who were arrested while protesting the 2000 Republican National Convention defend themselves. (Image below is from page 27 of handbook.)



*Slither* (no.1, June 2003; no.2, March 2004; no.3, July 2004)

Wow. This is a great thing. Kelly Froh's comic is well-written, well-drawn, and funny (not funny in the sense of Archie or Bazooka Joe, but in a smart-in-the-world way). I don't understand her title (although "slither" is fun to say, very "Harry Potter"), and she never really explains it, but she doesn't need to: Issues 1, 2, and 3 could just as easily have been called "Kelly goes to art school," "Kelly at her parents' house for the summer," and "Kelly goes back to art school," respectively. I can relate to the story in Issue 1 of roommates who were always stoned, as well as the one about finally making good friends (Martin and Manfred). Issue two painfully recounts a story of misplaced love (a bit "Gilmore Girls"), yet also has one about Kelly's dad getting drunk and Kelly's humorous response to him. Issue 3 (about Year 2 of art school) has a great drawing of a friend's Halloween costume and describes Kelly's first Canadian date with a real Canadian (who turns out to be a boor to end all boors)—quite comical, as is the wryness directed at a fellow art student who is working out Oedipal issues.

These are grrrl comix at their finest. The "senior" portraits in Issue 1 are hilarious and poignant. Kelly draws young folks, then draws them again when they're older (seniors in the non-high-school sense)—clever, and a good use of her skill. I could have done without such features as "The Looks We Cultivate To Attract Our Soul Mates" in Issue 3; that one is titled well, but the humor does not present easily. The few missteps are small ones, though, and *Slither* is a run-away good time. Support Kelly and get her grrrl comix.

\$1.00 per issue (a bargain). Find ordering info at [http://www.221colab.org/kelly\\_froh/](http://www.221colab.org/kelly_froh/). Issue 4 is out now, too.

*You Are Here* (nos.1–5, 2003–2004)

A self-described sarcastic punk cartoonist, Jen Michaelis lives in Davis, California, creating vignettes based on her life. Some of the cartoon shorts are memoirs, like the one many of us can relate to about the ex-boyfriend who now lives with his wife and kid while we're off being fabulously underground in some cool city. Some are about things that happen in the ridiculousness of right now. My favorite is the piece about the co-worker who advised Jen to have children because "it's just like having little cats you can dress up and everything." Jen's response is the only possible one: "...umm..." I prefer the hand-drawn cartoons to the collages, because I think they more authentically convey Jen's sense of the absurd. I also would like to see more of Jen's underlying feminist philosophy spelled out. The feminism that is exposed is subtle, yet funny, as if we all have sort of been there, and the expectation is that we all sort of understand the journey facing feminists in the world. We are lucky enough to have been sent all five issues of this zine to date. My advice: this one is a "way get."

\$2.00 per issue (there are also stickers promoting the zine). Jen Michaelis, PMB 299, 1411 W. Covell Blvd., Ste. 106, Davis, CA 95616; email: [jenm@fastmail.fm](mailto:jenm@fastmail.fm); website: [www.youareherecomic.com](http://www.youareherecomic.com)

[M.L. Fraser lives in California, where she does not grow tomatoes, order things from L.L. Bean, or miss a chance to see her goddaughter. She is very happy reading zines in the sunlight (even in December) and wearing shorts to work, where she teaches Women's Studies and Psychology.]