Rebel Song: Feminist Zines from the (Southern) Third Wave

by M. L. Fraser

On a visit home last summer, I went in search of, and found, lots of other Southern women writing, writing, writing. I found enough to dedicate a whole column to these rebel grrrls, who range from a thirteen-year-old to a woman in her fifties. Their voices are clear and true, and they read well. In California, when I speak of the South, I notice that feminism is not expected from the Southerner. *I* knew it was there, but then, I am a Rebel with a yell. So I'd like to raise up the songs of my sisters, the daughters of the South, in this review. Listen.

Brazen Hussy: no.7 (October 2002)

Ahhh. The misspent youth of punk girls everywhere — cigarettes, booze, and trips to landfills in Fargo. This zine is diary-like in its reprints of letters and photos of friends in bars. One of its best lines is the statement made in regard to the writer's confrontation of her rapist: "Sometimes men do not completely understand that it is rape until we tell them." Caroline makes no excuses, nor does she validate the rapist's position; she just explains to him and to us what happened for her and how she handled it. It is quite the grownup thing to do and quite the communication; she includes the actual email that she sent to her "acquaintance" about it. Of course, there is some "residual icky" (how could there not be?), but the explanation and the piece are handled well. Also worth checking out are the strong pen cartoons, which resemble woodcuts in their primitiveness. Very cool. But otherwise, it's O.K. to miss this one, as the angst-filled diary is what we all wrote "back then." If you want to reminisce, then get this.

Caroline Paquita, P.O. Box 13105, Gainesville, FL 32604. \$1 plus 2 stamps.

Doris: no.21 (Summer 2003)

In Asheville I asked around at indie bookstores for cool zines, and the title *Doris* kept popping up.

"Hmm," I thought, and I left my name and address for Cindy, the woman who writes Doris. She was kind enough to send me a copy of the twenty-first issue, also called the "G, H, I" issue.

The bookstore people were right. This is one of the smartest, most unfettered, unpretentious zines I have ever read. It pulls at your inner grrrl with remarks that are the essence of true. Some examples: "Girl gangs redefined rape and suddenly everything counted. All the shit that happened to me counted." and "I can't remember most of the stories I have been told, because if I remembered I would have to kill myself, but the knowledge and terror is in me." I half fell in love with this girl with her powerful, honest pain, and then I realized, "But I know her; I am her." As are we all. *Doris* is a personal zine that speaks to the political condition of being female. It is a wonderful set of writings and observations that will allow you to re-examine your own world. I especially loved the observations of "growing up girl," hating other girls for buying into the devalued feminine, and eventually embracing the woman. Must get.

Doris (c/o Cindy), P.O. Box 1734, Asheville, NC 28802. \$1.50 or \$1.00 plus two stamps. Some issues of Number 20 are still left as well.

Escape Philosophy: no.3, no.5 (Summer 2003)

Stefania Shea writes with the voice and vision and heartbreak that we all remember from our thirteen-year-old selves. Her heart is anguished in the way that only the hearts of early teens can be. She is still new to the idea of her voice being good enough, so she falls into the trap of asking for others' submissions, and she uses poems from dead writers to bolster her zine. The parts that are her own work are charming and very much something we want to see more of. This girl and her vision of

this world excite me. A new feminism shining through the adolescence is apparent here and should be watched. Get this zine, if only to encourage her to keep going.

Stefania Shea, P.O. Box 2135, Leicaster, NC 28748. Email: **XxTigsyxX@aol.com**. No price.

Flat Tire: no.5, November 2002 (The Feel Good Issue)

Nothing much here, in this personal zine filled with well-written, if uninteresting, accounts of how this thirty-one-year-old military brat grew up. There's one interesting story about Brad and Ryan, her punk cronies from way back, but other than that, it's kind of a snore. I am not sure why this is called the "Feel Good" issue, unless it was therapeutic for the author — in which case, power to her. She is still broke and punk and has "working class teeth." I hope she finds her way. Ignore this one.

Flat Tire, c/o End of the Line, 610 E. Wright St., Pensacola, FL 32501. Email:

Paulamayberry@hotmail.com. \$1 per issue.

The Language of No: Taking Back Our Bodies: no date

As with so many zines of this type, this one by Kim and Michelle (Webster? University of South Florida?) was originally done as a school project. They turned their little book into a primer about women's bodies. Menstruation, pregnancy, herbal forms of contraception and wound applications, as well as rape statistics, etc., are here. It is informative, and it's a good way to get the word out if resources are limited or education inaccessible. It is true feminism at the grassroots level (although the point gets made in the beginning pages that grassroots feminism should not be confused with anything else grassroots, and that patriarchy does exist in the underground/alternative scene. This may be an arguable point and I am not sure where they wanted to go with it, but I think the idea may have teeth). The zine's hope is to spread female knowledge and wisdom. Always a good idea. This is a good zine to get for handy referrals if this type of information is still new or you need to get it to someone quickly. Otherwise, don't. Most of the

info is available in lots of other places. A good guidebook, but not necessary.

La Femme Collective, 5700 N. Tammy Tr., #722, Sarasota FL 34243. \$1.

Negrita: nos.2 (no date) & 3 (Summer 2003)

Number 2: Gloria is a punk zinetress living in Florida and writing about color (not race, although she calls it this) and competition between girls. She also draws a great cartoon about gender in which she had to cut off her head to avoid the "dudesters" who say nothing but "dude" and cannot seem to allow Gloria to say anything. It's funny stuff if you're a girl; it may cause a bit of chagrin if you're not. Also included are the dangers of hitchhiking as a female (duh), and a few remarks about resistance in the punk world. I am not sure how old this thing is, and although it has nothing truly new to say, it is not a bad little book and should be picked up by any who may not have heard the message before now, or given to someone who hasn't. The cartoon stories are the best part (all the boys are drawn the same way - hmm...).

Number 3: This is much better, although it still smacks of "girl growing up in her twenties." "Stoopid Things White People Say" seems to be a regular feature; I am not quite sure why, unless it is to provide a forum for the eye-rolling that Glo seems to need to do, but there's nothing very original in this column. This volume has great accounts of road trips and character sketches of people met along the way. An ongoing monologue about why and how Gloria and "Jeb" broke up is a bit bore-me-later. Not so terrible, though. This is a great example of how to start an ongoing zine.

Gloria, P.O. Box 1661, Pensacola, FL 32591. \$1 or donation.

Rocket Queen: nos.1 & 2 (no dates)

An exotic dancer in a small town in North Carolina felt compelled to write this because "most of what is written about sex workers either mystifies or demonizes sex work." Number 1 talks about why dancers dance and the kind of men who watch them. It also has a mini-discourse addressing the "pornography is bad" vs. "this work is noble and sexpositive" debate that often arises in feminist circles.

Janet used the zine not only to inform others but also to get straight on how she as a feminist felt about making this kind of money for this kind of work. She thought one issue would get it all out, and then she found enough to say to create another.

Number 2 is the tale of New Orleans. In the first issue, Janet had speculated that a dancer could make her way anywhere on the globe just by dancing in the clubs. So, her world tour begins in the Big Easy. She thinks and speaks and gives the straight-up about the sex industry. She does not glamorize it, she does not lie, and she argues that exploitation is never pretty, whether it is the unsuspecting woman who is being taken advantage of or the fat drunken guy who has to spend money to get attention from women. It is sometimes harsh, sometimes sad, and mostly honest. I wish I knew Janet and was her friend, although she warns that she marginalizes her friendships with women because it is her trade. Fair enough.

This is a great zine. I hope she keeps writing it. It is very much like the now-defunct *Pastie Face* out of San Francisco, allowing us to see the real women who dance and why they do it. Feminism is about choices, and sometimes the choices of feminists are not expected. Sometimes feminists argue that sex for money is not a choice. But sometimes it is. Janet does a great job of explaining her feminism, and how she struggles every day with her self-awareness, just like all of us do. Read and learn. Get this zine.

Janet, P.O. Box 64, Asheville, NC 28802. \$1.50 per issue.

The Visible Woman: no date

What a jewel this is. Get, get, get, get. A woman in her fifties talks about her life as a slowly receding woman through childbirth, marriage, and even aging. Well-written and poignant, it remarks upon the aging female in our society—not the old woman, but the middle-aged and almost invisible. She writes with conviction and peace about the relationship she has developed with her body, how it is strong and capable and hers. The wonderful sketches and drawings of the female form and self-portraits that dot the zine reinforce this. A section on the walks she takes on a regular basis with two other woman her age is fabulous, especially the ob-

servations on how their life experiences are so varied and yet so similar. It makes me want to go walking with them in their companionable silences. And I know finally what my mother has tried to tell me over the years, that the power of touch is never more absent than when your child moves away from you and into herself. I am so glad this woman is writing, and I want a subscription for myself. You should too.

The Visible Woman, 406 N. Mendenhall St., Greensboro, NC 27401. Email: **Hobbldhoy@aol.com**. \$1.

A Zillion Stories of Near Love: vols. 1 & 2 (no dates)

Sydney Xannn writes of lost and almost love, and does it well, in vignettes ranging from a few lines to two pages. Some are really funny, like the one about the big kiss-off Mary Magdalene gives to Jesus (whom she calls Snowballz). Some are about things we all do, like going by the place where "we" used to live and feeling sad; others, about things we would like to have seen: the emotionally distant husband finally appreciating the wife who left him after the kids were married. And some are finely wrought intricate stories in which we relate to the main character, whether male or female. My only criticism of this volume is that it is primarily heterosexual, with little possibility for deviance, even though stories of love are not this restrictive.

In Volume 2, Sydney begins with a relationship between two women, one gay and one straight — intimates who have never slept together. I knew exactly what she meant when she said that being truly loved is the hardest thing there is. We return to these characters at a couple of points in the zine. They are almost the whole of the zine in their poignancy. And yet, this volume is filled with longer stories, more fleshed out, but somehow sharper in their insights. One story begins with the great line, "When Pandora learned to speak, she said very simply, 'I want a divorce." This zine is a gotta-get if you like fiction and the craft of the short story. This writer is a must-watch for future Pulitzers and the like

Sydney Xannn, P.O. Box 72023, New Orleans, LA 70172-2023. Email: **sxannn@yahoo.com**.

Quick disclaimer: Sometimes the zines I pick up have no dates on them. I try to keep current, but some of the ones I get may not even provide addresses or contact info, and the way zines operate can make it difficult to verify the information I do have. If you get your request back in the mail, the zinestress has probably moved or is no longer writing her zine. Don't let that dissuade you — there are plenty of other grrrl writers who need support!

[M.L. ("Mhaire") Fraser is finishing her first book, originally written as a reader for her students in California. She loves the lifestyle California affords and, while she loves the South, she plans to remain in the land of sunshine collecting freckles and eating fresh fruit. Along with her new home state, academics, grrrls, and knitting are her passions — oh, and this column. Send her zines, lots of them.]

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An entire exhibit table at the **2004 NWSA Conference** has been set side for a special display of homemade, alternative publications — zines — with a feminist edge or outlook. We'll have copies of zines that women and grrrls are still making the old-fashioned way — on paper, with typed or handwritten text, drawings, and cut-and-paste images — as well as information about electronic "webzines." Stop by to get inspired, look at samples, and find out how to subscribe to dozens of periodicals by women who Do It Themselves!