

Two woman saw

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Artist Kaucyila Brooke recalls a moment in the feminist movement through fragmented glimpses into her relationships on and with the land. This article is a photo and text narrative of life in lesbian intentional communities in 1970s Oregon and Minnesota.

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It is 1976 and I am producing the *feminist news* at an anarchist radio station, KOPN FM in Columbia, Missouri. I report on women's health, labor, art and literature by reading articles from such journals as *Big Mama Rag*, *Off Our Backs*, *Women's Press*, *Country Women*, *Lesbian Tide*, *Dyke* and *Sinister Wisdom*. After reading about it I decide to move to Eugene, Oregon, where lesbians are actively building a feminist community.

I want to live in the country and eventually I move to the River Cabins. The River Cabins are an old logging camp on the Lorane Highway, in the foothills of the Coast Range in the Siuslaw River Valley. The cabins are owned by Bertha





Fitch, a 60-something widow, who rents only to girls because she thinks they are reliable and clean. We don't really know if she knows that we are all lesbians but she doesn't seem to mind the way we look or live. We are individual renters. We are not a commune and although a woman owns the land that we live on it is not exactly part of the "women's" land movement. Down the highway is Trudy's Farm, where women have built their own shacks, cabins and yurts; they help Trudy bring in the hay and work the farm as part of their contribution to the land. We also have nearby friends who are a lesbian couple, Vickie and Jimae, who have their own land where they raise chickens, goats and vegetables.

At the River Cabins we help each other keep the wood stoves going throughout the winter. We clean stove pipes, chop wood for kindling, we collectively purchase and maintain a McCulloch 10-10 chain saw, which we name Run Ten Ten. When we pull the cord to start the motor we chant "Run Ten Ten" to encourage it to go. I learn how to keep the chain sharp, Eva Beaver gaps the spark plugs and Golden Spring takes care of the gas/oil mixture. We drive Golden's truck over the logging roads looking for downed trees and snags for our winter's wood. I begin making pictures with two of my mother's cameras. Her first camera was a Kodak No. 1 Pocket Camera which unfolds to reveal black cloth bellows for focusing and on the back an "autographic" feature for writing on the film after exposure. Her second camera was a Kodak Rangefinder 35 mm with a split frame focus in the viewfinder.

I live next door to Blue La Toon and Eva Beaver. Eva is studying Communications at the University of Oregon, Blue is part of local improv theatre,



I am a DJ at KLCC FM on *The Morning Ayre*, the morning early music show, and *As The Woman Turns*, a feminist news and music program. Golden Spring lives in the end cabin and she is taking classes at Lane Community College, where Jimae is studying to be an auto mechanic. Jimae teaches us how to tune up and change the oil in our cars.

We drive over bumpy mountain roads to the ocean, stay in cold winter cabins at Crater Lake, walk to the beaver pond in the woods behind the cabins, and swing naked into the Siuslaw River on a rope while we shout our Tarzan calls. We go to Jimae and Vickie's for dress-up tea parties and after tea and cakes, we end up drinking Jack Daniels in the back of their 1940s pick up truck. We have summer picnics in the flowering meadow behind the river cabins and Eva's goat, Beauty, joins the party.

After our first winter at the River Cabins, Blue and I decide to take a road trip and attend the Midwest Women's Festival in Southern Missouri. For \$40.00 we purchase Greyhound bus tickets which take us as far as we want to go. We head out for Missouri stopping along the way to replenish our wardrobes at the Goodwill and Salvation Army Stores that we find near the downtown bus stations. At the Women's Festival we meet some dykes from Minneapolis and rather than head back to Oregon immediately, we accept their invitation to visit. We like Minneapolis but we are country women and want to know about the women who have moved up state to live in the land of ten thousand lakes. Someone takes us to Aiken, Minnesota, and we move into an old farmhouse on a small lake. Selencore lives there with two dogs, two horses, and no visible neighbors. Ruth hires us to work on her





all-lesbian house-painting crew. Although Ruth is married to the chief of police and has a family, she had women lovers when she was in the navy. The lesbians who pass through town give her a chance to live that life again. I walk the country roads, ride the mare Mahayen bareback, get bucked off, adopt the dog Feather for my own, row the boat across the lake, decorate the windows in my room with strips of lace and adopt a beautiful calico kitten that I name Spodel. We groom the horses, rake the hay and dress up and pose for each other in our country fantasies. Blue and I make fun of David Hamilton's best selling soft-core lesbo-porn and she stands nude, with vintage bike, straw hat and big clumpy work boots which disappear in the soft light and long grass. I take multiple lovers and photograph them all together in the morning.

Notes on contributor

Kaucyila Brooke is an artist based in Los Angeles. Her solo exhibitions include Silberkuppe, Berlin; Fake or Feint, Berlin (2009); Alfred Ehrhardt Foundation/ Forum für Photographie, Cologne; Galerie Andreas Huber, Vienna (2008, 2006); Andersen-s Contemporary, Copenhagen (2006); NAK, Aachen, Germany; Kunstverein Springhornhof, Neuenkirchen, Germany (2005); platform, Berlin (2004); Michael Dawson Gallery, Los Angeles (2001, 2005); and Art Resources Transfer, New York (2001, 1999). Recent group exhibitions include Kunsthalle Bergan, Norway; Bucharest Biennale for Contemporary Art, Romania (2010); Centre D'Art Passerelle, Brest, France; Galician Center for Contemporary Art, Santiago de Compostela, Spain; Staatliche Kunsthalle Baden-Baden (2009); Daniel Reich Gallery, New York (2008); Munich Kunstverein, Munich; Wattis Contemporary Art, San Francisco (2007); Museum Ludwig, Cologne; The Generali Foundation, Vienna; MUMOK, Vienna (2006); the Berlin Biennale 3, Berlin (2004). She and Jane Cottis co-produced the feature length videotape *Dry Kisses Only* (1990). She edited the book *Gendered Geographies* (2002), and she produced the artist book *Vitrinen in Arbeit* (2004). The catalogue *Vitrinen in Arbeit* (2008) which accompanied her solo show at the Alfred Ehrhardt Foundation was also published. She is the former Director of the Program in Photography and Media at CalArts, where she has been a regular member of the faculty since 1992.