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CLEVE JONES,
Quilt founder:

'Don't lose
hope – they
have not
died in vain.'

See story p. 12

By
Beverly Fletcher

My first introduction to a Therapy Sisters "session" was in a most unlikely concert arena: the Quaker House in Dallas, where a few walls had been knocked out of the residential building for roomier accommodations and children's drawings were the high end of the interior design.

Attending that less-than-formal concert was like visiting the trio in their own living room. Their rapport with the audience matched the intimacy of that setting. Their original songs were like a chat by the fireside, each chorus revealing new layers, different facets of their very individualized characters. By the end of that show they weren't just some eccentric, nouveau, psycho-analytic band, they were old friends, and they had done all the work to establish that relationship. And I really liked that about them.

Since then I have followed them into a variety of arenas when they've played the Metroplex – the coffee house atmosphere of the Lesbian Resource Center, the Pleiades concert hall stage where they opened for Diane Davidson and, this summer, the charged restaurant fare of Cafe Brazil in Dallas. And I've noticed that no matter the setting – how large or how small, formal stage or not – the Therapy Sisters maintain that same intimate connection with their audience, and that the audience returns that investment. I've seen lone co-eds staring transfixed, nodding their heads in agreement to the lyrics, and I've seen gaggles of giggling, raucous women joining in the group's playful repar-

Maurine:

We're considered a novelty band because we're females. That's irritating. Maybe we are a novelty band because we sing these weird songs. I don't want to be considered a novelty band just because we're three females.

DSM-III Prognosis on *The Therapy Sisters*

The uninitiated might think they're just another nouveau-urban-psycho-swing-folk band from Austin. But to me, they're 'family,' kindred spirits, plugging away at excruciating goals in determined, womanly fashion. To me, they're Sisters...

tee, flirting outrageously on a buoyant high.

At first inspection I thought the audiences' responsiveness hinged on the content of the songs, that folks could relate to the sarcastic approach to social issues, relationship intricacies and search for self-identity.

But when the band toured Berlin this spring, where they played to audiences including Russians who did not understand a word of English, the merry sisters still hit their mark, so visually enchanting that they've been invited back this fall, so warmly captivating that one fan in broken English sang the first verse of "Please Release Me" to them, and another greeted them after their show with "You are my girlfriend."

So as much as I admire their talent, it's not the clever lyrics to their songs nor accomplished musicianship that have cast the spell. It's not their tony billing as therapeutic purveyors of mental health that's done the trick.

The key is in the name of the band – not in "Therapy" which has been more highly emphasized by the critics. Rather, it's the more understated "Sisters" in the moniker that tells the tale.

The Sisters create a family from their audience. In their sharing they establish a permanent bond with their fans that fills each venue with familiar faces. Their concerts are like a holiday meal at the homestead where the ribbing comes easily and good-naturedly, and all human foibles are fair game, yet precious.

This lesbian knows about chosen family, and appreciates the artistry involved in creating them. This lesbian knows a Sister when she meets one. I met up with them this summer at Cafe Brazil where we had an invigorating, family-style chat.



Maurine McLean
'Lyrical Analyst'

When your love affair is with music, you never get the names mixed up

The three women juggle their day careers with practice sessions nightly, booking-arrangements on demand, and weekend gigs that carry them into the far corners of the state, into Oklahoma and what they hope soon will be East and West Coast tours and festivals across the nation.

I asked facetiously, "So, do you have a life?"

Maurine replied matter of factly, "This is our life," no regrets offered, no whining or kvetching. And that's a good sign.

Maurine is completely entwined in the process of being a band. By her intensity and focus I gleaned that this work is an entity, a complex relationship for her, not just action and detail.

This "person" to whom she is partnered holds a multitude of challenging facets: coordinating bookings is flirting with the "person," honing performances is the nurturing of that "person," and the

audience's reactions is like an intimate hug from that "person."

In this relationship she is not given to codependency patterns – she does not unhealthily appease, nor compromise her own needs to gain approval. She explained: "There's a balance every artist has to strike between what the artist wants to play and what the people want to hear. We want both. You have to please the person who's hiring you but if you're not pleasing yourself, why are you doing this?"

And really, why do this? For the stress, for the panic? To work twice as hard as a man with the same aspirations would give to succeed?

For Maurine, the rewards are in the process of doing rather than how the end product is received. It's in the therapeutic revelations of her own inner self. "Writing a song is a purging. I'm not thinking of the audience and what I can do to

Maurine:

Marilyn goes to the shrink. He says,

"Tell me everything."

She does, and now he's doing her act...

please them, I'm thinking 'what is going on in my life and how can I get it out?'"

But it is the audience's reaction in the end that helps connect her to herself when others connect to the feelings she conveys. "Like in the 'Sugar Ants in the Kitchen' song – I can feel that others in the audience have sugar ants in their kitchen too. They make me feel a little less murderous for smushing mine."



Lisa Rogers
'Spiritual Nutritionist'

When the going gets tough, crack a tough joke

Lisa is the quintessential inner child performing adult work with an ingenuous flair. Her signature song about turning 40 and realizing responsibilities ignored is visually caricatured by her mismatched sneakers, fluorescent leggings and a comical beanie topping her crown.

She is the child's view into societal quirks of habit, commenting with brilliant simplicity on grody adult self-inflation in her "Guys in Ties," and just as handily portraying pubescent angst in the obnoxious "Teenager." It's not just that she's been there – she continually revisits youthful impressions.

Her connection to the vulnerably young is her day job as well. As director of Austin's Out-Youth program that supports lesbian and gay teens, Lisa overlays her precociousness with adultlike concern for her charges. She says she's in the business of saving their lives. In educational forays she has to "go out there and say 'no, we're not recruiting or perverting or teaching how to have sex – we're trying to keep them alive.'" That's a very serious mission for such a playful person, and maybe that's why she's so playful.

Here is a woman whose activism has been so far-reaching that national response to the Out-Youth 800-number hotline has gone beyond the organization's ability to pay the phone bill. And yet, when we regaled each other with our tales from the March on Washington, she didn't speak of the lobbying, the petition drives nor the informative workshops, all of which surely

marked her experience there. "What was your favorite chant?" she quizzed instead with a sparkling grin. Hers were "We're here, we're queer, we have disposable income," and "Lesbians ... united. We'll always be excited!"

At her day job and in her nightly dedication to the band, Lisa's work is her play and vice versa. With that rigorous schedule it doesn't escape notice that Lisa is all work, playfully.



Marilyn Rucker
'Sax Therapist'

*Her straight path
curves quite a bit*

I met Marilyn long before she joined the band, just after she'd graduated from college before entering law school. She was running around ditzily at a friend's party performing what I thought was a very odd lamp post ceremony. Who knew then that she was destined for musical counseling?

On stage, she is only slightly calmer than at our first introduction. And her attire is no less eccentric than that curious rite she concocted. Marilyn is the dramatically expressive clown of the group whose body language serves up delicious one-liners.

She hails from a musical family who attend the performances when possible, doling out praises and criticism afterward. When I asked her if she feels extra pressure under the scrutiny she negated "no, not at all — it really doesn't bother me," but her smile was so tellingly strained and, after all, she did write those several dysfunctional-family songs.

On the band's lesbian-venues and women's-festival circuit, Marilyn, who is straight, is exposed to a private, women-supportive world to which few straights are privy. And she's appreciative of that view: "It's great to see women supporting and loving women. I really like to see that," she smiled warmly. The exposure has heightened her awareness of the invisibility imposed against lesbians and gays and the

assumption that everyone is heterosexual unless proven otherwise.

"I always thought lesbians were real exotic. I thought I'd never met any," she recounted. "Now I know I've probably met hundreds who had never let me know."

In those women's havens, lesbian-identified songs performed by the other two sisters lead the audience to assume Marilyn is lesbian by association. Maurine and Lisa kidded her about the fawning attention I told her she gains from lesbian fans.

"Yo, breeder," Lisa hailed Marilyn in guttural tone. Maurine created a scenario of Marilyn "coming out" as straight: "Lesbians just break down in tears over her — 'Oh, but I have such a crush (dramatic sobbing). What a waste ... what a waste.'" Marilyn deflected, "I haven't had that happen. It would be very flattering if it did."

*Physicians, heal
thyselves?*

I turned to Marilyn. "What do you

think about these two," I probed, gesturing to Maurine and Lisa.

Marilyn didn't hesitate. "Well, they're really weird. They need therapy."

Lisa rolled her eyes indignantly. "We are in therapy, Marilyn."

"You haven't done therapy, Marilyn?" I mocked.

Marilyn recouped: "Not with them. It might be kind of interesting though to psychoanalyze the dynamics of the group. You know — family therapy."

The doctor is in: the family is doing just fine; it's members all seem well adjusted. *fa*

Marilyn:

**We are a delicate bud
about to bloom,
are we not, sisters?**

Lisa:

How Georgia O'Keefish.

Analyze them yourself:

Pleiades Productions
presents

The Therapy Sisters

in concert

Saturday, Oct. 9

8 p.m. at

Agape Auditorium

4615 SE California Pkwy
(I-20 & Anglin Dr. exit)

Tickets:

**\$11 in advance
\$13 at the door**

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COMING OUT

continued from p. 3

dirty. As we gleaned from our voter registration drives, some among our community think even voting is too political. Some among our community are offended by our increasing visibility, thinking it just draws trouble.

At the heart of these aversions is a debilitating core of fear. Our experiences have taught us to fear: as a body we've lost our jobs and our homes for being queer; we've had our children yanked away from us physically and emotionally; we've been bashed, harassed and murdered for being queer. With these realities it is a natural reaction to lay low, avoid attention, and to feel as if we are completely powerless over our circumstances — so powerless that it is useless to vote, futile to write our own letters to the editor, a waste of time to canvas blocks promoting gay-supportive candidates or to contribute financially to their campaigns.

Historically it has taken one person deciding that they wanted more control over their life — enough to wade through the risks — to open the door to basic human rights for others. Historically it has been far easier, less disruptive to the routine, to just do nothing, to accept limitations and inadequacies in the social system. But all of the civil rights

laws enforced today began with one person declaring "I've had quite enough of this crap," followed by a stream of similarly motivated individuals echoing, "Yes, we have too."

Empowering ourselves as a community is a process, through which we are rapidly moving. More and more of us are deciding it's okay to vote and to use our voices, to show our faces, to say no to oppression and to press for our rights. Gradually we are recognizing the realm of possibilities for taking control over our lives and the ways in which we might interject our own influence.

October 11 is National Coming Out Day. This year, instead of confiding in a close friend or an extended family member, confide in yourself. Write a letter to yourself, make a phone call to yourself or tap yourself on your shoulder and request a minute of your time.

Within your conversation, boldly reveal to yourself all the troubles and the risks you have braved by your orientation. Talk honestly about how it has affected family and peer relationships, your job security, your physical safety and your self-esteem.

And then, as the best, most empathetic listener you might ever hope to encounter, give back to yourself the strongest of support and affirmation. Offer to yourself that being gay or lesbian is, in your opinion, one of the most beautiful aspects of you, one that makes you

special and unique, a true enrichment to your life.

Point out to yourself proudly how successfully you have gained in a struggle that was not of your making. Look candidly at your growth and emotional awareness that are gifts from the struggle. And whenever you are on your path of development, look ahead eagerly to the more that will come.

Finally, make a list of all the rights you think you deserve, those that currently are denied you. Then give yourself permission to pursue them, because you are a worthy individual.

When you are done with your conversation, turn to all others in our community who will have had the same conversation leading to a list very similar to yours. When enough of us unite to achieve that list together, we will, by our numbers, walk more safely on the streets, spare our jobs in the workplace, keep our children and our homes, elect enlightened candidates to office, and pass the laws of social parity that will reflect a change in prevailing attitudes.

When we achieve those together there no longer will be any such need for a "Coming Out" Day, when risks outside of the closet no longer exist.

Until then, enjoy this Coming Out Day as a celebration of all that has passed, and a promise of what is yet to come. *fa*