

GORGONS AND GARGOYLES

By Dan Armstrong

It was rare to see a city so firmly and obviously controlled by women. Surely we are accustomed to seeing men in the most important public and social positions, but in _____, however, the usual was reversed. Aggressive, individualistic women were the majority and very much directed public thought.

In the late 1950s, when population stresses in the United States prompted a new trend of western migration, _____, a small northwest, college town, began to attract people. The influx of people brought business, growth, and money. _____ prospered. A town of ten thousand became a city of fifty thousand over a period of twenty years.

During that time, a constant flow of people coursed through _____. Many came. Many stayed. But also many left or kept going as it were. _____ had become a major stop, it seemed then, on the winding road of the American wanderer. Backpacks, bedrolls, traveling families, students, hitch hikers, bike riders, motorcycle enthusiasts, that class of modern day gypsy from a retired Colonel and his wife in a Winnebago to just some kid on the bum for the first time, all were part of the crowd that filtered through _____.

Yet of all the diverse people that passed through _____, an unusually high number of young free-thinking females from the first wave of newly liberated women stayed to live. There was no specific reason why these women gravitated to _____, but once the trend was recognized it began to snowball.

In the mid-sixties, the atmosphere of _____ was still very much that of a small town. The market place was compact and the casual gathering places were few. It seemed one could know every face in town then in just a few months, so a new face stood out. This allowed the

transplanted woman to easily recognize and meet her peers. Their similarities, as _____ newcomers and sincere disciples of women's freedom, made for rapid friendships among casually meeting strangers. This was the modest beginning of a truly grassroots women's movement. It was a slow and haphazard process in actuality, but the result seemed some wildly conceived sociology experiment.

Over the course of four or five years, these women began to sense the uniqueness of their situation. Possibly never before had so many individualistic women with so much in common accumulated mutual friendships with so little intention. Their unity became an afterthought, and because of this, it became a natural, totally without presumption, awakening community of women.

At first there was nothing particularly tangible in their union beyond a common freeness of mind, and yet this is what bound their mass. There was no true organization to the movement; the women merely supported each others independence. Then they began to realize their own numbers, and how many of them were active and influential. They began to recognize that they could create and were creating in _____ the best possible atmosphere for the new woman. They could hardly keep from feeling that in their mass they were part of a social vanguard; for when they looked over the expanse of cities in the world, they could imagine no other place as large so radically oriented to women. They began to feel that they were chosen in some way, and this fueled their pride and an awareness for their unique situation.

Little of all this was obvious at first to any but the women themselves or the longtime observer. The numbers were not so unbalanced as to be terribly visible. The percentages of those in better jobs still favored the males, yet not by so much. A newcomer might notice those rare women carpenters or plumbers or the peculiar firmness of eye and brisk step of the up and coming woman on the street, but the women's influence was most apparent behind the scenes, amid the political and social workings of the city. There at the city council meetings or the more social parties women could be seen orchestrating their influence; and indirectly because of this, many of the most talented men were not present at either. Lesser men filled the better jobs, while these others simply did not participate.

As the town had become a collecting spot for free-thinking women, it had also attracted counter-culture males. Oddly enough, they were generally low-profile types—the exact opposite

of the women. They were artists, musicians, craftsmen, free-lance carpenters, drug dealers, actors, street hippies, mystics, drop-outs of all kinds who had come west seeking individual freedom through alternative lifestyles. Where some were strictly potheads or druggies, others were health food experimenters or students of yoga or some other mind-body technique. Low-life and withdrawal claimed the heart of the _____ male society. They preferred to have their personal disciplines, not their jobs direct their lives.

There must have been some understood union in these men also, but it was not something they spoke of or announced in any way. They were merely united in their appreciation of radical individuality and quiet rebellion. They might recognize each other on the street, but theirs was some dry union—a silent nod could seem as fully satisfying as a conversation. It seemed sometimes like a movement without dreams.

Perhaps the least visible but best organized faction of the women's movement in _____ was the lesbians. There were many women that were open to bisexuality or light women's intimacies, but the more radical dykes were something else and stood firmly on political ground. They cropped their hair and wore working class clothing. From a distance, it was difficult sometimes to differentiate the sex of these people. In blue jeans and black leather jackets their appearance was strictly masculine, though as a group they espoused a detached resentment of men. Individually, however, it was rare to see them display any outright antagonism toward males.

For all their low-life semblances, these women were mostly quiet intellectuals. Could we imagine some kind of Freudian-Marxism we might near something of their philosophy. Though radical bohemians should be surprised if they get any respect at all, the lesbians in _____ did have the support and respect of the other women and the more aware males. Unfortunately, however, in many cases, the older males of the _____ working class—those the lesbian's Marxist's philosophy could have embraced as brothers—found these women the most revolting of the counter-culture and a favorite target for abuse. They laughed and hooted whenever they saw these tough looking women walking together arm-in-arm in men's clothing. Yet, more often than not, these lesbians were extremely sensitive women of gifted intellect disguised in rough apparel.

Rebop Flavona was the leading proponent of radical women's politics in the city. Mostly due to her efforts, lesbian women flourished as a group in _____. Rebop published and edited a women's newsletter and arts weekly called *Gorgons and Gargoyles*. Its appearance was strictly stylized Black Panther. So was Ms. Flavona's.

Rebop was an intellectual refugee from New York City. She was a Cuban who had grown up in the Bronx. In 1964, she graduated from the School of Journalism at Columbia University. She stood number two in her class and took a job with *The New York Times* three days after graduation.

She was straight then and had even planned to marry a New York lawyer, but a series of revelations regarding her place as a woman with *The New York Times* and the shallowness of her fiancée's love caused her to reevaluate her life. In 1967, she quit her job with *The Times* and broke off her engagement. Nineteen-sixty-nine found her yet another east coast transplant in _____.

No one that had known her in New York could have recognized her now. She had cropped her hair to a quarter inch and dyed it fiery red. Combined with her widely flared nostrils, thick sensual lips, and dark complexion, in her usual attire of black from head to toe, she looked more like a hooker from Uranus than a publisher. She was at once entirely primitive and ultra-modern. As ugly as she could seem at first glance, her appearance was a singularly attention grabbing, strikingly exaggerated beauty—if you dared rest your eyes upon her long enough to absorb it. Though her demeanor was subdued, aloof, and confusingly sensual, wherever she went she was the center of attraction. She was too personally dynamic, too unique to be missed. Her reputation as a legendary bisexual lover alone caused her presence to charge the air.

Of all the lesbians in the city, only she commanded the respect of the coarser working class men. Even with all her masculine aura, this tall dark woman was sexually alluring in the most baffling way to these men, and it frightened them. They never hooted at her. They could barely suffer to look at her, her allurements was so unsettling and her returned glance so penetrating. Strange nearly superstitious stories about Rebop grew amid these men who watched her from a distance, yet for all their perniciousness, untruth, and exaggeration, the myth these stories created served only to enhance Rebop's power over these very same men.

In one redneck bar, *The Alibi Club*, there was a stall in the men's bathroom dedicated to Rebop. The owner encouraged all types of graffiti concerning Rebop to be scratched on the walls

of what was known as the “Rebop Room.” If men build memorials to individuals out of respect and honor, then this toilet stall was a shrine generated out of fear, jealousy, and petty wickedness in tribute to the imposing presence of Rebop Flavona in the redneck world of _____. Because the things that she could do, according to the scribbling on the stall walls, could only have been inspired by the most penetrating and soul searching horror in the men that produced them. For all the Rebop Room’s ugly graffiti lies, this was its backward truth.

There was a full-body portrait painted on the door of this stall that brought a kind of artistry to the Rebop Room. A truly talented painter who frequented *The Alibi Club* had done an oil of photo-realism of Rebop in the nude. She was sprawled upon a tiger skin rug with her tongue out, a full bosom, and legs spread. A thick penis lay between her legs and pushed off to one side, revealing a vagina where the scrotum would be. Beneath the picture was a caption, “and if I can't find some young thing to ride, I just tuck this beaut into the tunnel of love and rock back and forth until it gets hard and pokes right out my ass.” Needless to say, there was a running joke about getting a peek into “its” pants.

Possibly the most telling tale of Rebop Flavona concerns her reaction to the Rebop Room. Rebop, it seems, learned about the existence of this odd shrine to her through street talk and passing rumors. Of course, she was insulted and angered at first, but she was also a shrewd and elevated individual. Instead of demanding some kind of public action to destroy the stall, she decided to use the unusual shrine to her advantage.

To appreciate this it must be remembered that Rebop was a woman of great intellectual capacity and that she supported herself through the publishing of *Gorgons and Gargoyles*. She was primarily a poetess—or so she was reluctant to admit, yet she did all the editorials in the publication, and it was her editorials that sold the newsletter nationwide—though sparsely. And in some modest way, she was a respected writer.

One evening, Rebop decided to visit *The Alibi Club*, and just after happy hour, she walked in with another lesbian friend. Their appearance immediately sent a wave of tittering laughter through the bar, but the two women ignored it and sat at the bar for a couple of beers.

The owner was present that evening, and he, of all there, found Rebop's arrival the most tickling. He sat in a booth at the back of the bar giggling and whispering to a friend with what could only be called overt childishness.

About half an hour passed and Rebop happened to notice the owner disappearing into the men's room. She climbed off her stool and strode back toward the restrooms, but rather than going into the ladies' room, she entered the men's room hushing the crowd to silence.

The owner was at a urinal and didn't notice her enter. She ducked behind him and peered quickly into the hallowed stall to inspect the portrait and the writings. After a moment, she stepped up to the urinal next to the owner, unzipped her black jeans, and performed an act of deftness with her female organ that allowed her to accurately piss into the urinal while standing.

When the rather fat owner suddenly saw Rebop beside him, he was so dismayed he didn't couldn't complete his task. Rebop continued to relieve herself and casually pretended to peek into his urinal as though trying to catch sight of something of his. In absolute confusion, though he could have left the room, the owner edged up closer to the urinal so she couldn't see in. Rebop then turned her gaze to his face and caught his worried eyes.

"You know," she said to the porcine man, "whoever painted that portrait of me over there did a fine job, but he forgot one thing."

The owner who felt terribly stupid standing there holding his cock, pretending to pee, answered out of embarrassment, "How's that?"

"I've got balls." Rebop backed off, zipped up her pants with an exaggerated hitch, and went to the sink to wash her hands. The man remained pressed into the urinal until she exited.

Rebop strode calm and collected to her seat at the bar. No one could believe it when she ordered another round. No one spoke, and no one would go into the men's room while she remained. Two beers later she and her friend left.

When she was long gone, the owner came skulking out of the men's room to tell his story to the aghast crowd. The portrait was inaccurate he said. She had one, but it was bigger and included the rest of the family jewels.

The myth would only grow.