

October 13, 1989

WOMAN RANTING ON A BUS

I felt guilty about leaving my husband and children. You know, Gino and I didn't have a relationship based on love. We weren't in love with each other and that's why we got married. It was based on confidence.

Why are you turning away - hey don't leave - please lady...oh I see this is your stop. Excuse me sir- your breath stinks - why don't you share that emm - whisky? Yeah with me. I'm taking this bus to the end of the line.

Hubbie and me we did love each other. At one point - well into the marriage - I felt very much in love with him. I was satisfied sexually and comforted by going to bed with him at night and being next to him. Then because of my stuff from my past my incest stuff I couldn't sleep with him any more. Because I started getting involved in the women's movement and- just being honest - part of the women's movement is the personal is political - so being honest about myself, I started seeing these things that I was just not prepared for. It was just a very chaotic time for me and for a lot of people because of that. It stirred up a lot of stuff.

Gone lean on my shoulder...speak English? It's okay I just wanna talk to someone.

By the time I left him. That was sometime later - I felt a tremendous sense of guilt and that women in my family just didn't do that sort of thing. I mean that a man had to be really brutal to the woman never

mind the kids. They could knock the kids around and sexually abuse them. Like this man that my mother married never abused her only psychologically not physically. He never beat her up so therefore- Yes, he was a good man because he provided for her and she didn't have to go out and work. And so that was sort of the example that I had to fight. I had to look at my own life without defining it by what they did.

I bet you think only the worse type of woman would leave her children. Only the worse type.

When I was a kid in a catholic reform school. There were girls that left their kids in foster homes and even adopted them out. I thought they were awful women. - I never thought that a decent woman could leave her children anywhere regardless of the circumstances. Even if she was an abusive parent and suddenly realized that she couldn't handle it. But some of this may have come from feelings of abandonment by my own mother. Who could respect a woman who did that?

On the other hand, I know there were people who use to think my mother was wonderful because she kept her illegitimate baby, which was me. And yet when I began considering leaving my children I thought, now wait a minute, she would have been better off, she herself - never mind what happened to me. I'm just looking at how her life would have been better if she would have adopted me out and started over again. So this whole thing about mothers and children - I mean we've been fed a lot of myths and lies about it I think and for so long we believed it.

Questioning why women shouldn't leave their children is like questioning breathing. Do you question how many breaths you take? You breath that's all. When I left my children I felt I was doing something unnatural and had incredible guilt about it. And these children will never be normal because of me. But

then at the same time I began to think if I stayed what would happen. I said okay my husband's moving into a small place and the only extra room is his. It was a three bedroom place, one for my daughter another for my son and Gino's room.

It was while I was living on Dolores Street that I was beginning to resent my children so much. And I wasn't really giving them a mother. I was giving them this resentful woman. And I was being very nasty to them sometimes. Although I tried to apologize and talk to them about it - but they're either not ready for it or they don't believe it or they don't want to believe it or what ever so I think well one day I'm gonna get it, you know - one of them will write a book about the rotten lesbian mother they had. But even if I stayed and everything stayed the same - I mean they're still gonna grow up like we all do. And they're still gonna find some reason that it wasn't right for them.

I think it's a gift that we both have given our kids. You don't have to stay in situations just because society says that that is what you're suppose to do. It is quite alright to question it and make changes. I think that's what we gave our kids.

And also, I think that because we left our kids we know that they're separate people. Where if we had stayed they would never be separate from us. And no wonder they would hate us.

The women I knew in the 1970's did not stay home. I remember when I lived on Dolores St. - I was the only mother that was home. So my kids friends all congregated at my place which drove me crazy. I was not into these little creatures hanging about. I remember feeling put out by these mothers. Why couldn't they work it out so they could be home with their kids. I mean that was my prejudice.

The women I speak of were definitely not middle class. They were maybe waitresses or maids in motels and that sort of thing. And I mean there was no way that they could have afforded to have anybody take care of their kids. And when I was living out there in the avenues - that was the late 60's - and I started taking care of kids- you know having them come in. And the most that any woman could pay me that went out to work at that time was \$10.00 a week. And I started out with four kids two were in school and two were preschool - as well as my babies. Right so I had all these kids. Then another person would call and another person would call - because I couldn't bare to charge them more than \$10.00. Of course I was getting calls from every where. I worked something out with other neighbors. It was temporary -but I worked something out like saying hey this kid isn't much trouble because I was reliving my past in some ways being the foster mother to my foster child - saying oh this kid isn't much trouble - so could you take her in or him in. And we worked it out so the neighbors shared in caring for the kids. If somebody wanted to go down town then the kids they took care of would stay at someone else's house. We had some arrangements like that.

Am I slurring my words?

How long are kids suppose to be around and how long are you suppose to hang on to the tit? I think that no matter how we're raised we always want to return to that safe place that you can label mother- you know because that's where we originally came from. So how far do you have to take it? Do we raise our kids by nursing them until they're in the first grade? Sitting with them in the class room so they don't have any traumas EVER? It gets to be too much. Just like this birth without pain kind of thing. I mean when does the kid learn that it's not going to be like that all the time? Not that it isn't in some ways brutal, I

don't mean that. But you know never letting them cry- just trying to take care of all their traumas from the very, very beginning.

No wonder we feel guilty when we leave them even though they may be practically grown. I'd nursed mine for a year and I was doing my best to keep them glued to me somehow. And when they were practically grown I thought Oh my god I can't do this. Those poor kids.

After I left, I was homeless for a while. You see Gino, my husband took the kids and moved up to Stockton. So they wouldn't become drug addicts. But you know they got into it any way. At least my son did. So, at first I packed everything and got them ready so they could go and then I left. And I went and stayed with my cousin in Texas for a while. And I tried to come back at some point. I was on a bus. I took the bus for a nice long ride, right, and I just passed through town and I couldn't bare it I couldn't bare the thought of seeing them. Like maybe they came back to visit a friend or something. I knew that I could not live in that situation and I had to separate from them. And make the separation be final. As final as it can ever be with mother and children. So then I left for a while longer - maybe two months or so passed. When I came back they were in their new place and I didn't really have a place to live. And Gino kept saying well you can move here and I said no I've got to make it on my own. And I'm not someone who has skills. I mean what I was doing was really very dangerous. Because I didn't have the skills even of typing. I knew how to type but not a hundred words a minute - I mean we're talking competitive - typing fast enough to make money.

I was living on the good will of people like M. and S. who were taking me in and looking after me. Then

I got involved with KG and we started getting together. I used her as a substitute for Gino and wanted her to take his place. I was outraged when she asked me for the rent the first time. I thought well this is different. Goddam! So then I went on welfare and I went down to welfare and they said, "How much money do you have?" and I said "\$20.00" and they said "That's too much. Come back tomorrow when it's gone.

Well then I went back and I got into some rehab program, thanks to KG, and went to school to pick up on my typing skills. and then I got a C.E.T.A. job. Which was available at that time. The reason why the right wing Reagan government got rid of the CETA jobs is because a lot of the people working were former house wives.

We don't need the housewives they need to stay home and take care of the kids. So then once that job was finished I was out of work again. And I worked sporadically all the way up until I got on SSI - thanks to my psyc problems, I'm living like a human being. Leaving was hard because he's an executive it would have been easier to stay. I could have just fallen into what ever it was that you know...

I really didn't have any skills. But you see because we did extreme things - I think we have to emphasize this for ourselves and others - there's been a lot of changes because we sat down in our first women's liberation meeting - because we said our husbands farted at the dinner table, it was that basic. Men had every right to be concerned over women congregating with one another and excluding them. Because we did those things and took very extreme measures there's been changes - there's been a whole lot of changes. I'm sure that men had learned instinctively from long ago not to allow us to talk with each other

- to name it gossip, hen pecking. We did find out how to make things different by talking with one another. Our revolution of words changed the world.

Sometimes I wonder if it was only when women started knockin' these guys off, that the men really decided to change the laws a bit. They began to see where women had civil rights. The laws in some states allowed a man to beat his wife and kids with sticks. This was not even considered abuse. And of course a man could never be considered raping his "own" wife. But then women began killing the men and other women rallied around them. That's really when the patriarchal laws began to change.

The younger women today can just assume that they have these rights without ever knowing how they came about. Because they're never going to learn it in school. No one is ever going to teach them this in school.

And what did I do with the guilt? Oh I use to be in agony a lot of the times. And other times I would justify it. If it wasn't for us...we're old soldiers ...we've been through war and nobody's ever going to know that because we don't have a military record or a medal for being a veteran of foreign wars on our record. We don't have chevrons and stripes and that sort of thing to show that we've been through all of this.

We've been through some kind of war for sure. And certainly it was very unpopular. The things we did were so unpopular. And just wanting to be able to send our children some place so we could have a respite from the 24 hour jobs we held, like day care. It was just unheard of - "why do you want to do that when there is no reason for it", we might have heard.

When the children were in school I was home by the time the children got there. And if they had a fever or something I wouldn't leave the house.

Helping them with their homework every night, really got to me. That's when I began to question motherhood. Trying to get my kids to do homework. You have to understand that I never did well in school. So I'm trying to get these kids to you know do what I never did? So they'd come home with all this homework and I'd say, "Why don't they make you do it all while you're in school. Why do you have to come home and ruin all your time at home doing this stuff?"

And their father would be furious. He's the one that always had to go down and see the principal. You know he did a lot more of the day to day stuff. I mean even while I was there he was the single parent. Because I couldn't handle that stuff it was just not part of who I was so I didn't really know how. And he was from such a different class. And such different values. And my kids are the only ones in his family who are not educated beyond high school. The thing is I keep making excuses -when I see the kids in his family they're all gloomy. They're all so serious. And my kids are so fun loving. But in his family, my kids are set up to be examples of what not to be.

My children have not taken an interest in higher education. I don't know if my being their mother really made the difference or not. I didn't think in a futuristic kind of way - well what's going to happen to them? You know I loved them in the moment. Maybe I would be different today with grandchildren. Maybe I would be more serious because I was so unsettled then. Also it's reliving being in school again. And every time they'd come home with homework - oh god I hate school. You know it was just being in

school all over again. So it's all my fault because they're not nuclear physicists today.

Well, my kids are disillusioned with the image of family. I find myself asking my daughter when she plans to get married because I'm so worried about her. Why doesn't she settle down get married have kids. I'm doing that to her and she just laughs at me. And she says that sounds so funny. Like out of a movie or something. This is a phrase that is only said in movies.

One of the things I think I gave my children was a choice not only to question where they were at and whether they wanted to stay there if it was a marriage or what ever it was - job anything - but also that they had a choice of who they could love. My daughter had friends who were lesbians her age. And I remember this one girl was very very attracted to her. She kept saying she wanted to see more of her and that sort of stuff. My daughter said she really liked and that she wanted to be friends with her but she was not a lesbian. Then the girl said that she'd better not see her. And daughter said, "I don't know why you want to do that - I just don't want to sleep with you."

But I can't imagine something like this happening when I was in high school in. If a girl had come up to me and said that she was attracted to me I would have freaked out. Cause I had those feelings myself and I didn't know how to handle them. And yet she was able to handle them. And not afraid. It didn't frighten her.

I was a lesbian before I left my husband. I use to fool around with the women over on in the 1960's. We mainly hugged and kissed each other a lot. And then when I went to New York. I got involved with a

woman who was the wife of my husbands friend. They were both actuaries. Gino and Michael worked together. And Jan and I were off doing our thing. And it was very nice and I thought this is what I want. I want this kind of closeness - this kind of understanding. And I believe young women when they say oh he's really very special. When they talk about men now. You know men then were so different from us. I mean the boundaries really separate us, completely and prevented us from loving each other in any real way. And those weren't there with women. We were able to love each other like we wanted men to love us.

Oh dear this the last stop - come on wake up- he's telling us drunks to get off the bus.

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