

MVSE

Feminist Magazine

ISSUE 5
WINTER
6/07

FREE!

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wonder awe magic fear anticipation intuition hope love

inside:

*Women, Children, Choice
...and the fem sex project*



How to Get Involved

We are really keen to receive writing, images, art, etc, from women to be included in future issues. Muse reserves the right to select content based on the Muse Values and Profile, and on available space. For information on contributing, email muse@riseup.net and we will send a copy of the Muse Profile and Contributors Information.

Deadline for Issue 6 is 23 July 2007.

<<<< Issue Four

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We are a group of young women, living in Wellington, who have come together to provide a space for women's voices.

Muse is produced by the Muse editorial collective - Karen Price, Jenn Jones, Tanya Newman, Karin Brown, Teresa Buckthought and Keiller MacDuff.

Additional editing of this issue was completed by Karen Price, Karin Brown and Keiller MacDuff.

Design by Jenn Jones. Cover photography by Karin Brown. Illustration in the Fem Sex Project and Tea with Fleur Wickes by Natasha Falconer. Back cover art by Abby Jones.

Muse wishes to thank all those who have contributed to this issue.



Editorial



Kia ora dear reader

Thank you for picking up Muse! This is the fifth issue of our Wellington-based magazine and it is our first issue with a specific theme. The theme for this issue is women, children and the choices that surround them. It is a topic we're really interested in but hadn't yet covered, and one we found people were enthusiastic about volunteering to write about. Perhaps we will have more issues with a special theme - perhaps you have an idea for one? As we go to print we are pleased with our efforts for this issue but we are also aware that the content regretfully does not represent a broad range of perspectives. We have however collected some very personal contributions on the topic. Thank you to all the women who have bravely shared their thoughts and experiences in this issue.

In this editorial we wanted to speak to you more directly, dear reader. We have been receiving much positive praise about Muse and we are stoked by that. We love the fact that people enjoy reading the magazine as we feel the content published is interesting and topical, and there is considerable work involved with putting Muse together. (The rewards far outweigh the occasional groans though!). The task we find most challenging is finding content to print. It is perhaps the most important responsibility though, which is why we wanted to encourage you to contribute to Muse. We completely understand that it may feel a bit intimidating to submit a piece for consideration. Putting thoughts and words out there may make you feel a bit vulnerable, but people might really like what you have to share! And the feeling of seeing your work in print could

be a real buzz! We have found writing for Muse really challenging, but even more rewarding. We'd love to have your voice heard on these pages too. We are looking for all sorts of work, serious written work, creative pieces, reviews, recipes and more. And we always need images, cartoons, illustrations and other doodles.

In other news, the collective has evolved yet again, and we warmly welcome Teresa. Sadly one of our original collective members, Tanya, is heading overseas, however we look forward to feminist contributions from afar, and to Tanya rejoining the collective on her return to New Zealand. We are also exploring additional creative ways for people to be involved in Muse without asking people to commit to being a full member of the collective. One avenue we are trialling is by involving women as regular contributors and/or distributors. We'll keep you informed as to how this works out.

Enjoy this very personal issue.

The Muses xx

P.S. Muse is currently produced and distributed primarily in Wellington. We have received many requests for further copies, but due to our small budget we are not always able to provide them. To secure a copy of Issue 6, send in \$5 and we will add you to our mailing list.

Disclaimer

Muse is a forum for feminist voices and discussion. Our purpose is to provide space for expression and encourage a diversity of perspectives. These are not necessarily the perspectives or opinions of the Muse Collective. We do not represent all women or all feminists.

Letters

We would love to hear from you! Share your thoughts on issue four. Letters can be sent to muse@riseup.net or Muse Magazine, P.O Box 11731, Manners St, Wellington.

Please note: all letters here have been replied to directly but to clarify for readers - Muse accepts letters from men and women which we may print depending on space. However, as this is a feminist zine aiming to provide a space for young women's voices, we only publish content from women.

Kia Ora Muses,

Thank you so much for my copies of issue 4 (and to Tanya for sending them). I received them yesterday and nearly read it cover to cover as it was so bloody good. It looks fantastic and there is such a wide range of interesting and grunty articles. Another massive achievement on women power! Can't wait to spread it around over here a bit.

I have put \$30 in the Muse account today, to help with postage, but would prefer it to be spent on wine or snack for your next meeting or get-together.

Lots of love to you all, miss you heaps

- Nat xxx (Horsham, England)

Dear Muse,

I've recently been applying for jobs, and I've learnt you can tell a lot about a place from the reading material available in the waiting area. One place had nothing, except one poster exhorting me to do something or rather, another place had boring in-house material, and the third, The Green Party, had the Dominion and Muse.

As soon as I picked up Muse, my nerves were a fraction allayed, and I knew this was a place I'd love to work. That's the job I picked and it's all panning out just as the Muse suggested.

Thanks

(name supplied,
Wellington)

yay!

i'm so excited....yes please send me 100 or more i pass on that many easily.

thanks and keep up the good work!

from marama (hamilton)

BIG thanks to Marama for distributing Muse in Hamilton for us!

Hello Muse Laydees,

I have one issue of your guys 'zine and would love to have more!!

I have issue 3 but would love to have copies of any earlier/later issues that you have available - happy to pay for postage! Also - I hear that your latest issue is based on Parenting/Motherhood I've attached an article that I have written - I'm not sure if it's really what you laydees are looking for but if it is feel free to use/edit it will;

Also if you require more hands to assemble/distribute/whatever the zine I'd be totally keen; it would be great to be involved in a feminist zine and meet some more like-minded feminist laydees.

Look forward to hearing from you and good luck with the current edition!

Teresa (Wellington)

Tena Tatou e te whanau

My Name is Daniella and I got a hold of issue 3 of muse on a whakawhanaungatanga visit to Hamilton YWCA and borrowed it for copying. I was inspired by the conversations that I had with women there and by your zine!

I have made a deposit to your bank account to assist with your printing costs and was wondering if I could be included in your mailing list. I am happy to continue to make donations to cover the cost of this - I would like to create more of an information centre in our student area here on campus and would appreciate being up to date myself!

Please let me know if this suits and if it would be possible to get copies of your other issues.

Nga Miki Nui

Daniella (Hamilton)

Muse responds: We are thrilled that people like Muse so much that they are requesting back issues. We are currently working on a way of making these electronically available. Watch this space!



Flexible hours an important issue

In 2006, the Department of Labour called for public submissions on the best mechanisms to deliver flexible work practices in New Zealand at the request of the Transport and Industrial Relations Committee of Parliament. The Department has released the results of these submissions. 90 percent of respondents supported the idea of flexible hours, and over 60 percent of respondents thought that legislation was the way of implementing flexible working hours. There were over 800 submissions on the topic, from both individuals and groups. Flexible hours would mean the ability to balance work and life, which is a major concern for many women. The full findings of the Department can be found at: <http://www.dol.govt.nz/consultation/qualityflexiblework/overview.asp>

Men still better paid than women

The recently released results of the 2006 Census reveal glaring disparities in income distribution between the genders in NZ. 75% of those earning more than \$70,000 were men, and 63% of those with personal income below \$5000 were women

Female graduates face inequity

Statistics NZ released data in April that showed males' income was consistently higher than females' income five years after leaving tertiary study, across every field of study. The average income one year after leaving study for males who left study in 2000 was 6 percent higher than the average income for females who left in the same year. Males' average income five years after leaving study was 20 percent higher than females' for the same cohort of students who left study in 2000.

Equal pay in tennis – but not in NZ

Wimbledon will pay women and men equal prize money for the first time at this year's grass-court tennis grand slam, in a unanimous decision by the Wimbledon committee. Last year the women's champion prize was 95% of the men's champion's prize. The tournament joined the Australian and US Opens in paying equal prize money across the board in all events and in all stages of competition. The French Open introduced equal pay for their men's and women's singles champions in 2006 but remain the only major tournament not to offer the same prize money throughout the rounds. However, the International ITF Tennis event held in Wellington earlier this year had a prize pool of \$19,500 (US \$15,000) for the men's event and \$13,000 (US \$10,000) for the women's. This is a 33% pay gap.

Research on sexual violence prioritised

The NZ government is committing \$900,000 to fund a two-year research project into improving the justice system for adult survivors of sexual violence. The project, led by the Ministry of Women's Affairs in conjunction with the Ministry of Justice and the NZ Police, will investigate how many reports of sexual violence in NZ end up with a successful conviction, look at ways to improve the likelihood of victims making formal complaints and investigate how survivors can best be supported through the criminal justice system. It is estimated that sexual violence costs the NZ economy \$1.2 billion per annum.

in Brief

Few women in power

Chile may be notable for having a female president, Michelle Bachelet, but overall female representation in both houses of Congress is only 12.6 percent, and well behind the regional average of 20 percent for South America. The government is trying to rectify this by introducing a gender-quota bill that requires political parties to ensure at least 40% of their candidates are female. It also allows for parties to be disqualified if they do not have enough female candidates. 50 countries around the world have adopted quota laws, eleven of those in Latin America.

Legal abortions still not available

Portugal's socialist government recently held a referendum on whether to make abortion legal. There was 59 percent agreement with the motion, but there were not enough people who participated for it to be binding. However the govt has said they have a majority in parliament to pass the law and intend to introduce and debate the bill soon.

Workers asked about menstruation

Women civil servants in India are shocked at new employment appraisal rules which require them to reveal details of their menstrual cycles. Under the new nationwide requirements, female officials also have to say when they last sought maternity leave. The questions had apparently been included on "health advice", but the women believe the questions to be an invasion of privacy and had no relevance to their work performance or physical fitness levels.

Protests Against China's One-Child Policy

Protesting and rioting has occurred in China's south western province in reaction to a recent crackdown on violators of the country's so-called one-child policy. Current law limits families to one child except where the first child is a girl, and a second child is then allowed. Officials ensure the policy is implemented, in an effort to control population growth. Reports indicate that recently efforts to control births have included mandatory health checks, forced abortions and fines often exceeding a villager's average annual income for families violating the one-child policy anytime since 1980.

Kuwaiti women barred from working at night

The Kuwait Parliament has just passed a law to restrict women's rights by limiting the hours women are allowed to work. Women will be banned from working between 8pm and 7am, except for those working in the medical profession. Women will also be prohibited from jobs that require them to work in otherwise male-environments.

Equity of access to contraception

Contraception is set to get considerably cheaper and more accessible in Brazil, where the government has plans to subsidize birth control pills. The impetus for change was outlined by the President, who stated the plan would allow Brazil's poor the same rights as the wealthy to plan the size of their families, and is part of an initiative to reduce unplanned pregnancies and maternal deaths. Such initiatives have drawn praise from the United Nations, and sharp criticism from the Catholic Church.

in BRIEF compiled by Karen Price and Jenn Jones

Sources: Feminist Majority Foundation, Feministing, Women's E-News, Stuff, BBC World News, Scoop, Statistics NZPA

things that
make you go
GRRRR!!

Every day there are so many frustrating, sexist, ridiculous or unacceptable images and comments that we see or hear and that make us go grrrr! Often there is no-one around to vent to - or for self-preservation you just walk away. This column is for you to express your anger and sheer disbelief at the things that happen to women in every day life.

Stuff you!

Stuff.co.nz has a section on its front page where they put opinion polls. Normally these are about current events, world issues, and generally relate to a news story. There is a disclaimer on the polls claiming "Stuff polls are not scientific and reflect the opinions of only those internet users who have chosen to participate", and I'm not sure anyone would think they were. However, on 25 January, Stuff went to a new low. The poll question was "who is hotter: Jennifer Anniston or Courtney Cox?" with the related story being about a "sizzling lesbian kiss" between the two actresses on a Cox's new TV series. As if this wasn't bad enough, the very next day the Stuff poll question was "Is Ugly Betty star America Ferrera: Hot? Not?" I really think they missed the point of the programme, don't you? Since then there have been at least four or five similar polls with actresses and models. I suppose I've never really expected much gender analysis or sensitivity from the online media site anyway. (U)

Breast Expectations

On Jan 28th the presenter of the NZ show 'Breakfast' commented in relation to the story of the 67 year old woman who bore twins that: 'Older women breastfeeding makes me feel uncomfortable'. This comment is so offensive!! Is he uncomfortable because he thinks only young women with young breasts should breastfeed so he can enjoy a sneak peek? Is it because he thinks that breasts are only on this earth to turn men on, in which case does breastfeeding in general make him uncomfortable? I think he should spend less time thinking about women's breasts and more time respecting the women who bear them. (KB)

Visually Disturbing

Menshealth.com has got an online eyechart which has you look at naked women while 'diagnosing' your visual disturbances, such as 'glaucoma' (covering the naked woman), 'floaters' (showing scattered patches over the women) and last, but not least; 'beer' by turning the young woman into an unflattering picture of an older woman with garish makeup made up to look like a German farmers wife. This was done to imply that if your 'condition' is 'beer' it will make the older woman look like the naked young woman. (KB)

Choose your purchase carefully

Walking through The Warehouse the other day I spied a T-shirt for young girls which said: 'I've got a nice pear' on the front. Just further evidence of the inappropriate sexualisation of young children. Why would anyone want their 10-year old to wear a shirt that that encourages a sexual appetite of young children? (KB)

Lifestyle choices

In February I visited Borders book store and cafe in Auckland on Queen Street. I searched everywhere for Bust, Yen or

Bitch magazines but there were none, not even under the 'women's interest' section along with Marie Claire, Vogue and the bridal magazines. On searching around the magazine section for the feminist magazines I noticed a peculiar section down the back. There was a "men's interest" section with mainly FHM and Ralph magazines, but on closer inspection also included ALL the music magazines like Real Groove. What the? So music is a men's only interest? There definitely wasn't a separate music section that I could see in the store. And to add insult to injury, directly under the men's interest section was the slightly different "men's lifestyle" section, made up entirely of porn. *sigh* Luckily the new Wellington Borders has a separate music section or I would be fuming. And I did see both Bust and Bitch magazines in the Culture section - amazing! (U)



A chubby babe?

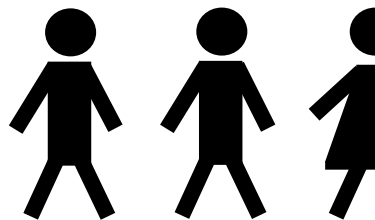
I have a wonderful, strong, clever, assertive, gorgeous niece. Her body is perfect and it serves her well – she is really fast and a great dancer and musician. She has a healthy relationship with food. She delights in her body, and so do the people closest to her. She is 10 months old.

My niece is lucky to have a Mum, Dad, Grandparents, Aunts, and an Uncle who actively resist gender stereotyping and who understand and reject the body image pressures society puts on women and girls. Yet, despite all these positives, she has already experienced negative body image pressure from her wider community.

When she was 6 months old her Plunket nurse told her that it was the only time that it would “be ok” for her to “be chubby”. Grrrr!! It is very depressing to be confronted with just how early damaging social pressure towards girls to conform to an idealised body size becomes explicit. And that, despite lots of positive influences in her life, my niece is vulnerable to such pressure simply by being a member of our wider society. Grrrr! (TN)

So women musicians are only half human?

Whilst listening to Radio Active the other day, I heard the most outrageously sexist comment about female musicians. The radio host was interviewing one of the Odessa musicians about a show they played with surf punk band The Dissenters. A comment was made about how the Dissenters are a three piece - two guys and a girl. The host then said “well, so they’re really only a two and a half piece band, right?” I was tempted to turn the radio off, but then he said something along the lines of how girls can’t/shouldn’t play guitar so they play bass and are just a pretty face. The Odessa guy then came out with this gem “well I suppose the guitar is an extension of the phallus, and it just wouldn’t be right for a girl to play it”. So much for progressive attitudes in the music world, huh. And where do they get off insulting female musicians on the radio like that anyway? (JJ)



What makes you go GRRRR? Email and tell us - muse@riseup.net with “grrrr” in the subject line.

Key:

- JJ - Jenn Jones
- KB - Karin Brown
- TN - Tanya Newman

Muse needs your help!!!

Muse’s funds are running low. To keep Muse free and accessible we need your help and donations. Whether this be dollars, resources, or even if you can help us fundraise or distribute copies of Muse we would love to hear from you. Email us or write to the usual Muse addresses.

Welfare reform impacts women

tina mcivor

Under this government’s plans for welfare reform, parenting no longer counts as a legitimate activity.

Since March the Social Security Amendment Bill has been moving through the select committee process at parliament. In part, the Bill changes the purpose of the Social Security Act 1964, and these changes are anti-feminist.

Since 1938 the purpose of social security has been to enable people to participate in the community regardless of disability or sole parenthood. The new Bill replaces that purpose with the New-Right policy of ‘work first’ where paid work is the ultimate goal for all. The government’s policy, revealed in this Bill, is that any paid work equals wellbeing and the entire system of social security will be built around this idea.

For feminists, a particular concern is that parenting is no longer counted as a legitimate activity. Bringing up the next generation is not counted as ‘work’ therefore it falls outside of the

government’s priorities and remains completely unsupported.

Over 90% of DPB beneficiaries are women and already many struggle to make ends meet and survive given the pittance they receive. However, should the Bill become law, the government is about to make it even harder. There will be more frequent work-testing for those on the DPB, meaning more government harassment and interference in the personal lives of those who take care of children. All this will amount to more pressure being placed on women to take on the double burden of childcare and paid work.

Given that over 90% of DPB beneficiaries are women, this issue represents the unfinished business of the feminist movement. Why are women still the poorest in our communities? Why are we the ones who, by a phenomenal percentage, take the primary responsibility for the care of children after a relationship breakdown? Why is society structured in a way where it often makes financial sense for fathers to retain their jobs and for mothers to stay at home?

I believe the answers to these questions centre around the structure of our economy. Who holds the majority of economic power and the most money/resources, therefore, who makes the economic decisions? And who decides whose work has most value?

The recent direction in welfare reform, contained in this Bill, suggests it is not far fetched to say that the patriarchy is still alive and well in New Zealand. The feminisation of poverty continues. The decades old phrase ‘Counting for Nothing’ remains relevant. Women are set to move further into the 21st century working – caring for our children and the elderly – for nothing!

**MAYBE
I WILL**

**MAYBE
I WON'T**

This isn't a story relating to being a mother and having children.

I did not grow up dreaming of my wedding and imagining what my husband would look like and how many children we would have and what they would be called. I'm not saying there is anything wrong with these sorts of dreams, but simply these are not things I desired.

I have now 'grown-up', I have a long term partner, but we are not married. We have a great life together and are planning for a fantastic future. We seem to have been largely spared the 'when are you guys going to get married' lectures from both sets of parents and surprisingly only a few friends ask this question in passing.

However, in recent months a new problem has arisen, the lecturing has begun and people have begun to advise me that 'NOW' is the time to have children.

This sudden emergence of advice seems to relate directly to the fact that in the last 6 months I have found out I have endometriosis.

I'm not writing this article to discuss all the perils of endometriosis, but rather, one particular aspect. One of the possible symptoms of endometriosis is infertility. I have been advised by my specialist that

I won't actually know the full effect my endometriosis has had on my fertility until I try to have children.

My potential infertility is something that my partner and I have dealt with over a period of time. My endometriosis did not appear overnight, there has been three long years between the initial symptoms and diagnosis.

However, although we have dealt with my potential infertility - it does not seem that the rest of the world is able to.

In the last few months I have felt like my education, my career, my friendships, my achievements up till now didn't really matter and all that was really important as a woman was having children. And given the state of my fertility I better get started NOW!

It appeared that people were now more than happy to tell me that we should hurry up and have children now - because if we don't have them now, we may never have them.

People didn't seem to want to consider that perhaps we were not ready for children - mentally, financially, emotionally. I know for a fact that if I had a child now, just in case I couldn't in the future, I would regret it. If I had child now, I may in fact come to resent that child, as there would be things in my life I would not be able to do, that I still want to do. I am not anti-children. I do agree that having children is one of the most incredible things a woman's body can do.

But having a child is a deeply personal experience and no woman should feel pushed into having children. No woman should be made to feel like less of a woman because she cannot, or chooses not to, have children.

**TERESA
BUCKTHOUGHT**

Letter to myself

What I wish someone had told me when I was first pregnant - by Karin Brown

Try not to be too afraid. I know it's a shock but trust me when I say it won't seem so strange later. I know that right now you have a million thoughts running through your mind and your heart is pounding. Your heart will settle down. Your thoughts will stop racing. They will begin to organise themselves and slowly you will make sense of this new reality.

You have choices, you know that, but I also know in your heart you have made your decision. It's a gamble, sure, but it always is. If a child will break a relationship it will do so whether the relationship is ten months or ten years old. Trust in your judgement. I can tell you that it will pay off.

You will be tested. More than you think. You will become a walking opportunity for other people's projections and many people will have opinions which they will feel compelled to share. They will give you advice whether you want it or not. Smile, say thank you and take only what you want from it. You'll surprise yourself. You'll peel back old layers and discover new layers of yourself underneath. You will grow but you will still be you.

Your body will change, but it will never feel foreign. You'll get stretchmarks that will reach like flames over your stomach and you will need to acknowledge your changing body. There will be days when you are clumsy and there will be days when you truly feel like the goddess you are. There will be times when you are sore, and there will be moments when you sit in wonder at the little life inside you, incredibly aware of your own mortality. You are never closer to death than when you are carrying life.

Though I know you long for a natural delivery, on the day it will happen the way it must and not the way you expect. Both you and the baby will work very hard. Hold on to yourself. Hold on to those with you. You are not alone. Ask for help when you need it. Don't turn it down when it's offered just for the sake of being stubborn or independent. This is the beginning of your transformation. Allow it to happen.

Love Me xxx

The fem sex project

Muse talks to Olivia and Kartini, the women behind a new community art project that's getting some people a bit hot under the collar...

...So, tell us about the Fem Sex Project

Olivia: The Fem Sex Project is a community art project that has been churning away in the back of my mind for a few years now. I am a performer and I originally wanted to make a piece of theatre. I contacted Kartini about contributing video to the project and found that she also wanted to make a piece about female sexuality. We began to think about research and it occurred to us that our research and preparation for the project could be just as valuable as the end result. So it's an experiment really, to see how vocal women are prepared to be. To see if women are prepared to lay their cards on the table and own who they are sexually – something that I think many women struggle with.

So there are a few aspects to the project. We have our website where women can post anonymous confessions and where we will display some of the art submissions we receive. Then we had support from Creative Communities to produce 4000 blank postcards which we are asking women to return to us with a question, statement, fantasy or story presented in some artistic way. You don't have to be an artist to do

this project, just keen to put your experiences out there. Some women may find it thrilling to be anonymously exhibitionistic for a public project; others may enjoy the process of creating. At some stage we will also have posters in women's toilet stalls around the city saying 'women + sex equals' and hopefully we'll get people writing on the posters. Originally we wanted to plaster the streets with posters but of course the council wasn't into that.

Once we have collected enough postcards, online stories and the posters we intend to print a publication which will be distributed free on the streets to women over 18.

How did the idea come about?

Olivia: Personally, I've been thinking about the idea of community and sex for years. I grew up with very little dialogue in the family about sex and sex ed at school was pretty unhelpful. Sure I learnt about periods and how to make a baby, and how not to have sex for fear of pregnancy and STIs, but I never learnt that sex could be positive and because of my background I was unsure about my sexual self and afraid of expressing this very important aspect of my 'self'. I met a woman in New York when I was living there who founded Cake New York - a company that celebrates female sexuality. It's fair to say she changed my life. She educated me and introduced me to other sexually open

women. I attended her workshops and heard from other women who experienced similar things or from women who were so out there I realised I was perfectly normal and in fact potentially very sexy!!! – and that was cool! I continued my journey and read so many books and talked to women about sex. My worries about sexuality dissolved, my body image improved, I became confident in bed and consequently in life. I want other women to experience this through the support of community and sharing.

Kartini: My approach to this project is perhaps more general. I had been working with women in different countries to develop women's health programmes, and most recently I had done a documentary project on giving birth in France. Through these projects, I had come to the realisation that, while women are more and more confident at making decisions in their professional lives, many of us still have a lot of trouble asserting ourselves when it comes to our bodies. This might be because we don't know what we want, or it might be because we haven't wanted to think about it or are used to having decisions made for us about our bodies (by doctors, partners or parents). So I wanted there to be some way that we could share information and decide where we each wanted to

place ourselves on the sexual continuum. This idea of a continuum is very important to me, because it means that there is no right or wrong, no 'us' and 'them'. And that implies that the information we present cannot be the kind of objective, prescriptive information that is currently available from institutional sources. The form has to match the content! The FemSex project for me is an experiment in collecting and presenting information

that is useful to women because it is subjective, multiplistic, heterogeneous.

What do you hope to achieve with the project - both creatively and philosophically?

Olivia: I think I've begun to answer this. But to expand...American feminist sexuality researcher/writer Nancy Friday said something like 'only women can give other women the permission to be sexually expressive'....that's not a direct quote but if you're interested I can find it. It's interesting...after years of patriarchal suppression



or control of female sexuality; it's actually some women who continue to police other women's sexuality through judgment and bitchiness – for example labeling a woman a slut if she chooses to wear revealing clothing. It's time women valued safe sexual expression in all its forms. If a woman feels good about herself in that skirt – go girl! Although young women today are far more open about their sexuality than others, there are still massive problems in this country with teen pregnancy and sexual disease. I wonder if one of the problems many young women face is they don't feel they own their bodies. They have no idea about the struggle older generations have fought to own the right to be sexual and proud of it. There are still romantic notions that a woman should be swept away under the spell of a man. Where as boys learn to separate sex and love through masturbation at an early age, girls do not masturbate with the same frequency (in a recent book called Sex Life of Australian Teens by Joan Sauers, young women were obviously not masturbating like the males in the book), and so there is a certain reliance for approval and satisfaction to come from the male. Girls are lying down with boys and not feeling strong enough to demand protection (condoms) because they haven't separated sex from love and they haven't been taught by their mothers to own their bodies and their sexuality with pride. I'm hoping that a forum such as this will educate young women (and older women), provide a support network, and make women feel like they are part of a powerful sisterhood that encourages safe, healthy sexual expression and fantasy in all its' forms.

Artistically, I'm interested in the process as much as the product; the act of making and writing and how it affects and empowers each woman. It's both voyeuristic and exhibitionistic and in it's very nature satisfying for the creator from either perspective. How will this generally reserved and conservative community react to the project? And what will this say about where female sexuality is at in this country? We're very used to the idealised notions (or media portrayals) of female sexuality, but what about the realities and the secrets?

Kartini: My big hope is that we will be able to collect such an incredible number of stories that there will be something in there for everyone. Perhaps one story that makes you realise you're not alone. Another story that gives you an idea for something kinky to try out. And another that helps you address something with your partner that you haven't been able to bring up before.

I want women to realise that they can be as creative with their bodies as they are in other parts of their lives. For me, creativity is all about making choices, exploring the spectrum of possibilities and deciding where in that spectrum you would like to be. In art school, you spend time just training your 'eye' by feeding it all kinds of images and aesthetics. I want the FemSex project to be like this for women and their sexuality – a space where we can explore and judge for ourselves. It begins with choosing a decoration for your postcard and it might blossom into something much bigger.

What kind of response have you had so far?

Olivia: Not great to be honest...but perhaps that's our answer. There is a silence that still surrounds sexuality no matter how blatantly it's shoved in our face by mainstream media. It's really hard to get

women to take ownership, be honest and actually get active and participate. But we're going to keep on pushing. We're just at the beginning so we have to be patient. We haven't even publicised it yet.

Have many women agreed to be interviewed on camera yet?

Olivia: No. Any ideas?

Would you describe it as a feminist project?

Olivia: Definitely – we have been inspired by American feminist sexual pioneers such as Betty Dodson (who liberated masturbation), Nancy Friday (the fantasy guru), Susie Bright and Carol Queen whose contribution to sexuality has been incredible in America – but even they find it's a case of two steps forward, one step back as new generations emerge with new issues. These pioneers have carved away a

lot of hard work for us in terms of defining female sexuality in its own right so that women begin to see themselves as sexual beings away from the male gaze. They have made it safe for us to stand up and continue the fight, however there is clearly still work to be done. Have there been any major figures in NZ so far? I know there's that woman in Auckland researching the female orgasm but I don't know of any others. American women are much more open about their sexuality than NZ women – I'd like to conquer that!

While it is a feminist project it's also male friendly (not to dilute the potency of an all-female project, but at the end of the day we live them with and hopefully they will benefit from our evolution). We're interested in cultivating happy relationships through encouraging dialogue and educating females directly (and males indirectly) on the secret needs of women. As women continue to grow in their sexual evolution, men are being left behind (through their general lack of sharing with each other) and are potentially facing women who they fear they cannot satisfy. Hopefully this project will foster discussion between heterosexual and same-sex couples.

I would perhaps also describe it as a social project benefiting the entire community. I firmly believe that our sexual selves are so interlinked with our public selves that sexual acceptance is paramount. If we are not comfortable with our sexual selves, we will not be comfortable with our whole self, which will affect relationships. I'm not saying happiness begins in the bedroom (although it sounds great!), but I am emphasising the importance of self acceptance and self realization; the difference between thinking 'oh I'm so embarrassed about this or that, to this is me and what I'm into – take it or leave it.' That is sexy and life affirming.

Kartini: Looking at the form our dialogues and 'educating' takes, I think it's important

that we find a way to communicate that is 'feminist', that counters patriarchal information dissemination without mimicking it. If you have a system that prides itself on being neutral, objective, right and universal, then the only way to communicate differently is by focusing on the subjective, the small story rather than the big picture. For me, feminism is about being strong as individuals and not feeling like we have to conform to anyone else's idea about ourselves. That means escaping categories, letting go of generalisations and emphasising the power of singularity. That's why this project is so multimedia – it doesn't really fit into any artistic category except for perhaps 'new genre' public art. And like many new genre projects, the work is created by a heterogeneous community effort rather than by one artist acting as a filter for reality.

How can Muse readers contribute to the project or get in touch with you?

If you want to contribute to this project, send an anonymous personal statement or secret using as FEW words as possible to the given address. Decorate it artistically and imaginatively - this is your chance to express yourself. The best submissions will be published. If you want to write in more depth, go to our website and post a confession.

You can find examples of people's submissions under 'voyeur' on www.femsexproject.co.nz

Send submissions to

The Fem Sex Project

PO Box 7148

Wellington South 6242

check out www.femsexproject.co.nz

be our friend at www.myspace.com/femsexproject

This project is supported by Wellington

City Council Creative Communities.

being pregnant is great news.... ?

Although not according to most information that I have read so far.

By way of introduction let me tell you that firstly I have had a history of STI's and PID (pelvic inflammatory disease) so I thought the likelihood of ever getting pregnant was pretty slim, oh and I also have fibroids too. Imagine the delight then when I found myself 'up the duff' at the age of 37. However it seems that my joy is not shared by, well, anyone really, especially people who write information for pregnant women. My (female) GP has already started saying things like 'well because of your age.....' in hushed tones like I am 190 or something, never mind that I am in the best physical and mental shape of my life - I no longer take drugs, drink heavily and smoke incessantly and I keep myself fit through yoga, walking, swimming and the gym which I am still doing, albeit at a slower pace. I am also financially secure, although the additional cost of childcare is giving me a few sleepless nights. The perfect time to get pregnant you would have thought, well apparently not, and rather puzzlingly I should have done it in my twenties when I was a complete wreck, financially destitute and a 24 hour 7 day

a week promiscuous party animal - go figure! It's almost like I have committed some kind of criminal act by getting pregnant over 35. I am sure I will get increasingly irritated by further contact with the medical profession. It makes me feel some sympathy for American 'freebirthers' who apparently go through pregnancy and birth with no contact with the medical profession and sail through the whole affair with no problems whatsoever. Although it does make me feel that most women in the world have no option but to be 'freebirthers' and would probably kill for the medical facilities and care that pregnant women can access in countries like New Zealand.

So what is my problem with pregnancy info? Well nutrition for a start - if I started to eat everything I am supposed to in the quantities and number of servings I am supposed to well I would have to give up my job and dedicate myself to eating non-stop every day - there simply wouldn't be any time to do anything else! And I know the people who write the info have to tell you of the complications and things that can go wrong but it might be nice if perhaps they balanced it out with a few positive comments every now and again. Instead it is all 'you must', 'you must not', 'never...'. I am heartily sick of it all already and I am only ten weeks into the whole thing! And breastfeeding info, my god, they make it sound like the most terrible thing that could possibly befall anyone but of course you absolutely MUST do it and not to breastfeed is akin to killing your child at birth - no pressure then! So I have gone from delighted to slightly crestfallen to rebellious, to terrified, and back to delighted (nothing to do with my hormones), a state of mind which I will rebelliously try to maintain (secretly of course!).

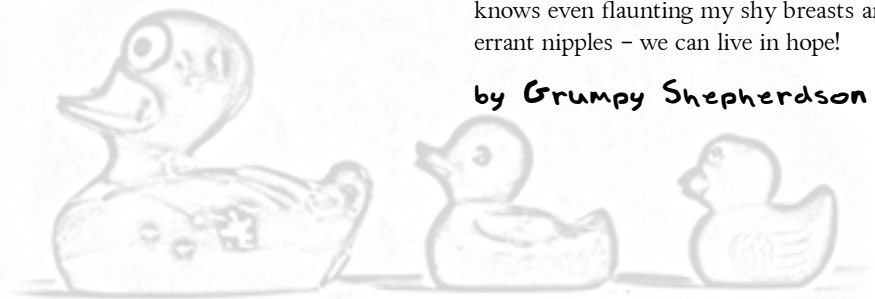
So the second trimester, a time to say goodbye to morning sickness, to revel in your expanding waistline, to feel alive,

sexual and fabulous.....or perhaps not! The second trimester has revealed its own challenges mostly related to my changing body and I am not sure that I am revelling in it, nor feeling like grabbing my other half and heading for the bedroom - look what happened last time I did that! Still my sickness went away when I hit about 18 weeks which I am hugely thankful for although I was expecting it to disappear at 12 weeks like all the info promised me it would - huh!

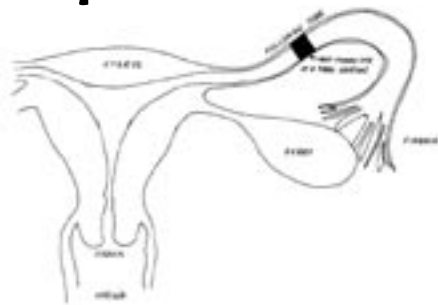
Apart from still feeling grumpy about being misled by 'pregnancy info' I am wondering why nobody tells you that it is probably the weirdest, as well as the most wonderful, thing that will ever happen to you? I am totally freaked out by the whole thing and feeling at times distinctly unenthusiastic which already makes me feel like I am a bad mother. I find myself desperately trying to enthuse when people I don't know very well tell me how exciting it is, instead of giving in to my urge to whack them soundly round the head. I guess it is an intensely personal affair that women who decide to have children have to live out in public which I am starting to get annoyed about. Its not even as if we can live it out in public truthfully for goodness sake and say to people that we are terrified, grumpy, unenthusiastic, apprehensive, incredibly happy and complete, wonderfully enthralled by our growing bump, freaked out, worried about how to cope with work as parental leave is appallingly inadequate, and all the rest of the things that we would

actually like to say. What I would like to say is that I feel anxious about my bodily changes and I'm not exactly revelling in them, nor feeling sexual or particularly fabulous. I have enormous, sore, vein covered breasts (I was an F cup before I got pregnant), zero sex drive, stretch marks, incredible facial hair that any teenage boy (or even grown man for that matter) would be proud of, alarmingly enormous nipples that appear to have a mind of their own and become erect at very inopportune moments which frighten men under 40 in the street - thank goodness winter is approaching so they can be hidden under thick jumpers, although I'm not sure that even that will work with mine. I have also discovered that my breasts (this doesn't include my errant nipples) are shy and that while they are not totally adverse to the idea of breastfeeding they just don't like the idea at all that they may have to make very public appearances at the whim of an infant. After all these years of being told that they have to stay covered, that nice breasts don't flaunt themselves and trying to act like they are not really there (in case they are 'asking for it'), suddenly.....ta da.....they are to make public appearances several times a day! However I am not sure if work colleagues, people on buses and casual acquaintances are quite prepared for this level of honesty so much to my disgust I have developed a fixed smile and a vague 'yes' when they start telling me how wonderful it ismaybe if I wasn't so constantly tired I might feel up to being controversial in public and who knows even flaunting my shy breasts and errant nipples - we can live in hope!

by Grumpy Shepherdson



TUBAL LIGATION: ONE WOMAN'S STORY



Towards the end of last year I underwent a tubal ligation - as an unmarried 31 year-old this was the result of a very long battle to have my non-maternal feelings recognised. I want to share my story as I know that many women don't have a maternal instinct and that does not mean we should be denied (or have to fight any harder than a married 31 year old with 2 babies!) the contraception options that work for us.

So

I have never wanted children. I am not anti-children, I have two honorary nieces (and hopefully some "real" nieces and nephews on the way soon!) that I love to bits. But I cannot conceive (forgive the pun) of growing babies inside me and the actualities of childbirth itself are just not something I can even begin to contemplate. I certainly don't want to be responsible for the safety, health, development etc of a baby, toddler, child, teenager and eventually adult. I feel in no way qualified. I am sure many people don't - but neither do I feel motivated to be.

It is a very hard thing to explain to people and many don't understand - not just women but men are baffled by this complete and utter lack of desire to reproduce. I am sure I have lost many relationships in my life because of this and there have been times where I have cried myself to sleep at night - wanting to be "normal" ... wanting to want babies like everybody else. It has been a hard acceptance and therefore I can understand that it will be hard for others to accept. But just as some are born a certain colour for example, or sexuality, and there is nothing in the world that will make a black person white or a gay man "straight", I was born without the desire for children in my life.

This resulted in the need for reliable contraception. Condoms were my first step. Unfortunately (and I won't go into details!) I have a latex allergy. I

know they do allergy-free ones now, but they didn't when I was 16! This ruled out diaphragms, too. So I moved onto the pill with the joys of all its' side-effects. Bloating. Acne. Mood swings. Break-through bleeding. Forgetfulness. Oh yes, and then you forget to take the pill in the first place and have to open your life for inspection at the doctor's clinic or the pharmacy until they deign to give you the morning after pill.

Abstinence, withdrawal, rhythm methods or various types of "natural" contraception options were all far far too low odds for me to be comfortable with them as long-term choices. So eventually I moved onto an IUD. This was a battle of its' own as these are normally only inserted into women who have had (you guessed it!) babies. I finally managed to persuade the doctor at Family Planning that this was an option for me - actually it was a compromise option as I initially went in and asked to be put onto the waiting list for tubal ligation. I was 27 at the time and was told in no uncertain terms that they would not even put me on the list "until I was over 40 and had had babies".

I was happy enough with my IUD (eventually!) until three years later after a number of abnormal smears I was referred for a colposcopy. The result came back with low-grade abnormal cells and a biopsy was taken with the recommendation of removal by laser treatment. This could only be done if my IUD came out. And not only that, but it couldn't be put back in for 6 months after treatment. Adding to

my dismay, if they put the IUD back in after 6 months there was no guarantee that they wouldn't have to take it out all over again if the abnormal cells grew back. I am sure that anyone who has had an IUD inserted knows this is not a pleasant (or cheap!) procedure, and that it takes a good 6 months for your body and cycle to adjust, so the possibility of an endless roller-coaster ride of this sort was very distressing for me, especially at a time when I was trying to come to terms with a diagnosis of abnormal cervical cells!

I was not happy. I went back to Family Planning and demanded to be put on the waiting list for tubal ligation again. I was refused. I said I was not having my abnormal cells treated until they did. That worked! However, it was not even a week later when a letter came saying I had been declined as I was not "high priority" (I assume that meant I wasn't over 40 and I hadn't had babies yet). It was at this stage I decided to go private.

I visited my GP to get a referral to a private specialist. He wouldn't give me the referral until I saw a psychiatrist. As I later told someone who interviewed me "Just because I don't want children, doesn't mean I need my head read!" I was quite angry, but also determined because by now I saw this as my only valid future contraceptive option. I organised two appointments with a psychiatrist through the work psychologist (who was the first person in this long journey I came across who was completely non-judgmental - something that was very refreshing as everyone at every stage seemed to

have an opinion on my life and feelings and control over the outcomes).

In the end I was really glad I had to go through this process, as it just made me more sure. People can really confuse you when they try to convince you you're wrong. If you get told often enough that you're crazy and abnormal, you do start to doubt yourself and think you are. But I came out of it all after only one appointment with the psychiatrist with her full backing that I was quite a sane, rational and in all ways "normal" human being.

From there I got my referral to the specialist from my GP and once I was in the private system things moved fast. He had no qualms about performing the operation, which was scheduled for Friday 6 October (a date still marked in my calendar with a giant HALLELUJAH!) I wasn't nervous, in fact in the days leading up to the procedure I was more and more sure of what I was doing and that it was the right thing for me.

After the operation was performed I felt as if I had been reconciled with my true self. I could finally be who I really felt I was as my physical body (which previously always had the ability to be a traitor to me!) was finally in tune with my heart and mind and spirit.

I am very lucky to have had a supportive boyfriend throughout this process. He doesn't understand and I don't think he even completely agrees, but he had seen my earlier desperation often enough to be there 100% for me throughout. He just about walked into the operating theatre with me and was right outside as soon as I came to. And

I couldn't have asked for a better post-op nurse!

My mother was also very supportive and understanding. She fully supported my decision and that has been important to me. My Dad is resigned to the fact that his much-longed-for grand-children are now unlikely to come from me!

Many people have said "but what if you change your mind" and I know there is a biological clock that can suddenly start ticking very loudly. But mine hasn't started yet, and I'm nearly 32. I don't think it ever will, I really do think I was born without one. My aunty, who is now 54, feels the same way I do and has never had children of her own. Her clock never arrived either. And even if it does, I am no worse off than someone who was born infertile. I still have the same options as are available to them. Also, adoption makes more sense to me than bringing more children into a world already overloaded.

Often people ask why my boyfriend didn't have a vasectomy? It's a short, easy and cheap procedure for men. But I needed a solution for me. What if (god forbid) he is run over by the proverbial bus tomorrow and I am back to square one! It does need to be stressed that this procedure cannot often be successfully reversed. If that is what a woman wants and she can demonstrate an understanding of that, I would really like people to think about this situation and acknowledge tubal ligation as a valid contraceptive choice for women of all ages and stages.

HELEN CULVER

South African Melktert

Pastry: Cream together 125g butter with 1/2 cup of sugar. Add 1 egg. In a separate bowl, sift together 2 cups of flour, 2 teaspoons of baking powder and a pinch of salt. Add to mixture. Should be consistency of rough breadcrumbs. Press into 2 pie dishes (non-stick if possible but don't grease if not) Bake at 220°C until just brown (about 10-12 minutes)

Filling: Boil 800 ml of milk with one tablespoon of butter. Beat 2 eggs with 1 cup of sugar. Beat in 5 tablespoons of cornflour and 1 teaspoon of vanilla essence. Take boiling milk off stove and add cornflour mixture to it. Put back on stove (low heat) and stir until it thickens

Pour in to pastry cases. Sprinkle with Cinnamon. Cool. Enjoy!

A fact of life

Helen Wernham, my daughter, died 20
January 1996, aged 31.

Her death is a fact of life that surges like a
wave a force field a shimmer through every
particle and molecule a weight a fog a pain in
the heart an unbearable clenching this truly
is heartbreaking for ever with days weeks
even months off then it's her birthday or the
anniversary of her death or the last time she was
here or some sight or sound or smell or the look
of someone is a reminder and there it is again
whammy like a sandbag between the shoulder-
blades carry on because there is a living to earn
and responsibilities and commitments to meet
and friends yes always friends and the grief
fades sleeping does the job sometimes and in
the morning here is life again not just going
through the motions there is love and joy and
laughter and the fact of her death remains.

Pat Rosier

genesis
(for mum)

first the formation
in the chrysalis
of darkness pulsing
womb sounds

a beat chugging
the acoustics
of a sandstorm

a beat chugging
the frequency of
deep sea

and the bass
of her voice
welcoming

then the yielding
shift
pull
toy
on a tide of pethidine



and then
there was light

and skin

and the harsh
new rhythm
of oxygen

and she beheld
a vagina
fingers
toes

eyes
a mouth
and a nose

she looked at
everything
she had made

and she found it
very good

by mariana

Tea with Fleur Wickes

Late last year I picked up a flyer for an art exhibition called 'Mother' and was intrigued by the topic. Having missed the exhibition itself I approached Fleur the photographer for an interview. She came to my house and over a cup of tea we conversed about photography, motherhood and integrating the two.

Karin - Tell me a bit about yourself.

Fleur - I have been a photographer since 1989 and I am now totally focussed on portrait work. I have been self-employed for six years now. I have two sides to my work, one is commissioned portraits for private clients and the other side is doing

artwork like the 'Mother' exhibition. The 'Mother' exhibition is the beginning of big series I would like to do about mothers.

I have four stepchildren who are fantastic. I have been in their lives for about 12 years and that has really informed me. But then having David (who is now three and a half) really gave me a fright as far as the attitudes towards mothers. I had 'been there done that' with everything else but I was so surprised by the attitudes. I took a year's sabbatical from work to be with David but also to explore my own artwork. During this time I made a decision that if I met someone and they didn't know me and they asked what I did that I would say I was a mother because that is really what I was. But they would always ask me what else I do or what I did before. I had one person at a dinner party turn away in complete disinterest. Like that was such a boring topic.

Seems like if you are a home mother you are just a mother and that is really boring. But if you are working mother you are only a working person and being a mother didn't count. It absolutely freaked me out. I am not a very political person but the whole mother issue has me absolutely fascinated.

Karin - The dualism you mention around motherhood is really interesting

Fleur - Society seems to think what you have done before is important and what you are going to do afterwards. Not what you are doing right then. I couldn't believe it! It was absolutely astonishing. We chose that David our son will be looked after one or other of us until he is five. We really believe that is a good grounding for him to be with someone he loves. And that is just our choice and it's really awesome for people do it however they want. If we had chosen to put him in childcare we would get a subsidy from the government, 20 hours a week. We don't get any benefit



Karin - Were you part of a mothers group?

Fleur - Yes I was but it's not something I really enjoyed. I am not very good at spending time with people just simply because I have a child. I don't bother spending time with people who I don't enjoy. That sounds really harsh but I just found the fact that the only thing we had in common was nappies, excruciating. I went to one meeting and just found: 'nah'. Also because I've got quite a lot of other children that it was a different experience for me. I would rather be alone than talk about

from choosing to stay at home. It makes me really sick and really annoyed!

Karin - About nappies?

Another thing about motherhood that I find interesting is, especially when baby was little, I found that when you are feeling great that is really fantastic but you only talk to people when you are feeling great. I found the isolation very difficult and you feel like maybe sometimes you are the only person who is feeling like that and that it is not ok to talk about the hard times.

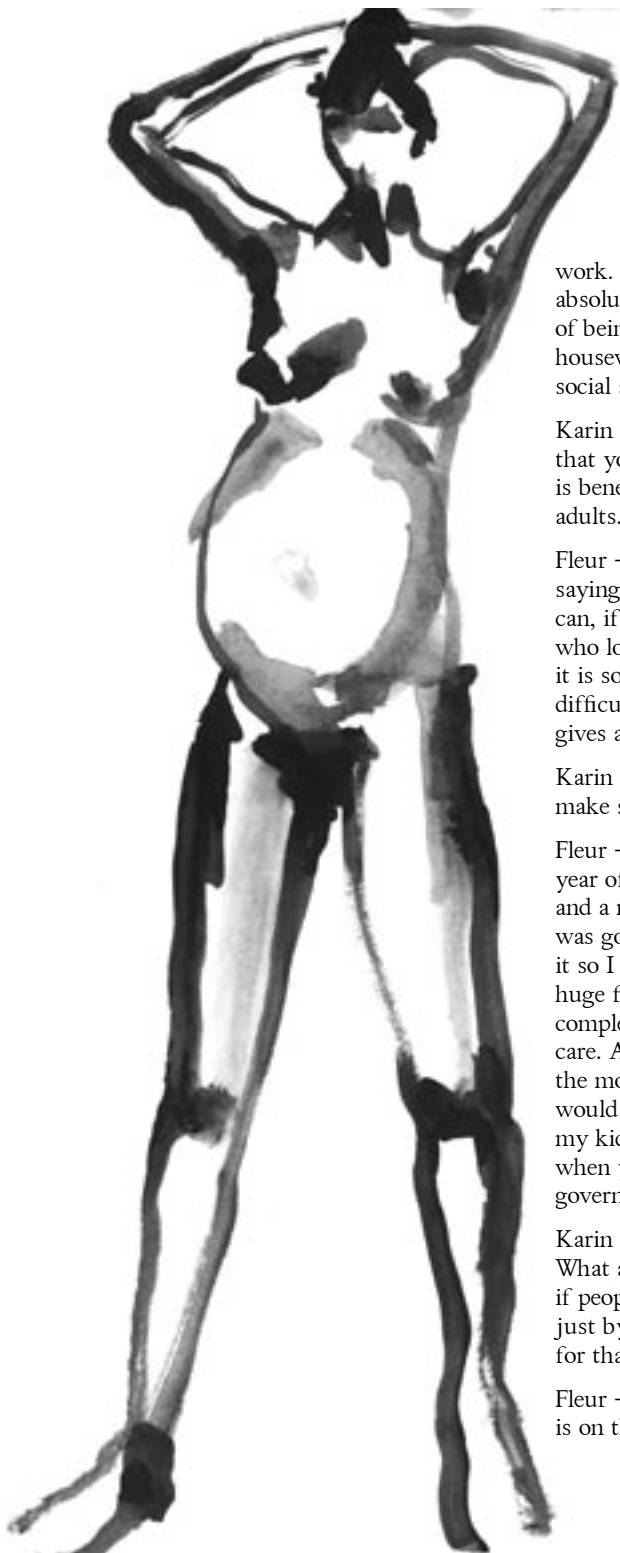
Fleur - Yeah! Nappies are interesting and I talk to my friends and the people I like about nappies, it's an interesting topic. But I prefer to have a connection.

Karin - I can relate to that, particularly around the birth experience. There wasn't much discussion of how gross it was going to be. The reality, the hard-core reality of giving birth wasn't part of people's conversations, only the prettiness was discussed.

Karin - Not just creating a social environment for the sake of social environment as opposed to because you like the people. So how are you finding balancing work and parenting?

Fleur - It's really true! I photographed a couple of births before I had David. One of them was a beautiful homebirth. She was a midwife and there was a birthing pool, flowers everywhere and it was really beautiful and the other was in hospital and she tore from everywhere. So I saw a range. It's the same with life in general I think, life is a duality, you have the good and the bad and that's great. But it's like it's not ok to think about the hard times like the difficult times of birth, but you can't have one without the other.

Fleur - Now I am finding it absolutely fantastic, really good. At the moment I have just started working three days a week. Initially I went back to work when David was six weeks old. At the time I got pregnant I was responsible for the entire family's income and my partner was looking after David. That was fine at first and I was working part-time. When he got to about six months, I was really unhappy and I realised I just wanted to be with him. So that is when I took that year off. I really wanted to think about where I was going with my work and creativity. But now (that he is being taken care of by other people) it's actually great. I think he's as at that age where he needs other people now. And it's good for him. I feel really happy now and I can really love him and enjoy being with him. And I can enjoy being with my work and I love my



work. I find the work of being a mother absolutely brilliant but I find the work of being a housewife sucks! I am not a housewife. I needed that intellectual and social stimulation.

Karin - I like how you acknowledge that you like your work and that David is benefiting from socialising with other adults.

Fleur - I really believe, I feel almost guilty saying it, but I really think, that if kids can, if at all possible, be with someone who loves them until they are at least three it is so good for them. Financially it's a difficult decision to make for us but who gives a toss about the financial thing.

Karin - Have you found you have had to make sacrifices?

Fleur - Oh, Christ yeah! Hugely! Taking a year off work, with quite a lot of children and a mortgage. I had a business that was going really really well, but I stopped it so I could be with David. It was a huge financial sacrifice. We have been completely broke for two years, but I don't care. As far as we can see it's not about the money and it's a short term thing. I would never put money in front of any of my kids. But it's very difficult, especially when you don't get any help from the government.

Karin - Let's talk about the exhibition. What attracted me was how you wondered if people could see that you were a mother just by your face. What was the genesis for that exhibition? How was it received?

Fleur - I really believe that peoples stuff is on their faces and their bodies. I felt so

completely different in some ways (after having David). And I became completely curious and I would look at other women and think: I wonder if they were mothers. So I had been thinking for ages that I should make some pictures. The exhibition ended up being just five photographs of mothers because it is just the beginning. But they were really big (2 metres by 1.6) and they looked amazing. The reception was fantastic, people liked the images, but I got so much response to the idea itself. Because I think so many women wonder: 'what do I look like now?' - all that stuff about being a mother is really quite big. So the response has been absolutely fantastic and that has encouraged me to keep going with the series.

Karin - Without the theme they are just portraits, but because of the theme people see them differently.

Fleur - I am quite good at my work doing portraits for private clients. This was a good marketing event for me. I wanted my clients to see that I could do artwork too. It's genuine. I find photographers like to take pictures of darker sides of life. But I am a middleclass chick and I interested in photographing the mothers I know. No one seems to do that. Are we invisible? Because that's how I felt, I felt invisible.

Karin - That was a word that was floating around in my head since you've been talking. When we are out in the world we are women and there all sorts of other things people can see about us, but they can not see that we are mothers unless we have a child with us.

Fleur - And when we have a child with us, they can't see us as anything else but mothers. I really believe that in terms of parenting that you need to make yourself strong. The stronger you are as a person the better off your child will be. I really believe you need to put yourself first in that way. A strong relationship between the parents, whether they are together or

not, is very important for the children.

I was determined not to get lost in David. That was one of my big fears when I was pregnant, of getting lost in him and not having myself. But I did kind of get lost but I think that is a necessary biological thing somehow for our world to get really small and for you to be completely taken over a bit because of all the physical needs. But I did come back and I did find myself and I am a different person now than I was, a stronger person and a clearer person. That is because of David and I am proud of that. I wanted to take these photographs of mothers who don't have their children with them. The whole point is that you wouldn't know if they were mothers or not just by the photo. I don't take photographs from a very intellectual place and just felt that was something I wanted to say.

Karin - Do you consider yourself a feminist?

Fleur - I am not sure. I am not a very political person. I certainly feel very equal in my relationship with my partner and would have nothing to do with a relationship if it wasn't. I have strong views about how women are perceived and how women perceive themselves.

Karin - I consider your work to be feminist work as you are making women visible and making a 'hidden' group of women visible.

Fleur - I used to be very ambitious and wanted to be the best photographer in New Zealand. Now I just want to do the best work I can and to make a living doing it.

I would like to thank Fleur for taking the time to meet with me and for her willingness to discuss her life and work. Keep your eyes open for more of Fleur's work. To find out more visit her website www.fleurwickes.co.nz/ or email her at photographs@fleurwickes.co.nz

*Interview by Karin Brown
Illustration by Natasha Falconer*

baby feet
by anabelle
(at 5 months)

The Feminist Bulletin Board...

Email your notices to muse@riseup.net by the 23 July 2007 .

Muse reserves the right to select notices based on the Muse Values and Profile, and on available space.

The 128 Womyn's Room

The 128 womyn's room is open to women, children, transgender and intersex people (ie-anyone who isn't a male identified biological male). It is a safe space to laugh, cry, sleep, talk, meet, share, breast feed, play, read, write,create.... The room can also be booked for meetings.

128 is a radical social and resource center located at 128 able smith st, te aro. It currently houses the Mechanical Tempest bike workshop, an open art space, meeting rooms, Revolting Books: Little Anarchist Library, a kitchen, the Womyn's Room, dance and yoga space, wood-workshop, ping-pong table, gardening resources, activist resources, event space and a community notice board.

The house is managed and maintained by a non-hierarchical consensus-based collective that includes live in caretakers. If you would like to check out the womyn's room, have a tour of the house, enquire about holding a meeting or event in the space, contact us

Phone: 972 7260, email: 128abelsmith@gmail.com, address: 128 Abel Smith St, Te Aro, Wellington

Looking Back, Moving Forward

Queen's Birthday Weekend, 2005, saw hundreds of women gather in Wellington for a convention marking the 30th anniversary of the United Women's Convention held in 1975. "Looking Back, Moving Forward" is a book recording this weekend, profiling attendees, exploring what has changed for women over the years, and considering the many challenges women in New Zealand still face.

For enquiries and orders email admin.janus@xtra.co.nz

Problems breastfeeding? Do you have a story to share?

We are a couple of new mums who battled to breastfeed our babies and are collecting stories of different breastfeeding experiences so other mums will feel less isolated if breastfeeding problems occur. We want to hear from mums who have been forced, or have chosen, to stop breast feeding. We also want to hear inspirational stories of mums who have managed to keep breastfeeding despite their problems. For more details send an e-mail before the end of July at: breastbestunless@gmail.com. Thanks - Nicky and Nic



Opportunity to
provide support

We are a small group of young women, living in Wellington, who have come together to create this free feminist zine. As a magazine, we wish to provide a space for women's voices, a forum for discussion, which enthusiastically encourages action, in a format that is easily accessible. We all work on Muse in our own time but really need assistance to get copies printed and available.

Donations

If you can provide a donation to support the printing and the cost of materials for Muse then please do so using the following options;

- Fill out this form and send a cheque to Muse Magazine, PO Box 11731, Manners St, Wellington

- Make a direct credit into the bank account below and provide your name/organisation

For more information email: muse@riseup.net

We are happy to follow up any correspondence or queries with a phone call.

Thank you!

Muse bank details

Name: Muse Magazine

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Account number: 38-9004-0318631-00

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Amount donated: \$ _____

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How can we contact you? _____



Nature is powerful...



...why do you think
they call her Mother?

abby jones 2007