

## BETH STEPHENS, ANNIE SPRINKLE, AND THE *LOVE ART LAB*

LINDSAY KELLEY



*White Wedding*, Saint Brigid's Centre for the Arts and SAW Gallery, Ottawa 2011. Image Credit: Benoit Aubry

### Part 1: *An Interview*

Beth Stephens and Annie Sprinkle have exhibited and performed in venues ranging from the Venice Biennale to the Galbreath Chapel in Athens Ohio. Lindsay Kelley is an artist and writer researching uncommon modes of food preparation and ingestion. This interview took place in San Francisco on January 7, 2011, after a long walk around Bernal Hill with Bob the dog.

For the last seven years, Beth Stephens and Annie Sprinkle have been performing as the Love Art Laboratory. Engaging with Linda Montano's cyclical endurance performance *Seven Years of Living Art*, Sprinkle and Stephens have devoted each year to a chakra, or bodily energy center, and its corresponding color. Moving from the pelvis to the top of the skull, participants in Montano's seven year performance pass through red, orange, yellow, green, blue, and purple before reaching the year Stephens and Sprinkle recently entered, the white, or silver, crown chakra. Of her decision to invite others into cyclical performance structure,

Montano writes, "When I finished *14 Years of Living Art*, an art experience-endurance based on the 7 chakras, I became so enamored of working with time that I wanted to share that joy with others, and so I designed *Another 21 Years of Living Art*. I felt that other artists could become a virtual/internet art family and I would feel as if I were in good company, with like-minded friends, doing work based on time, endurance and with reference to my past work, but interpreted by each artist according to their discipline, practice and personal aesthetic."<sup>1</sup> In this interview, Stephens and Sprinkle reflect on their seven year journey as they enter their seventh year, making "symbolic gestures intended to help make the world a more tolerant, sustainable, and peaceful place."

KELLEY

I thought we should start by talking about what you're doing for the silver year. Is it silver, or white, or both?

SPRINKLE

Officially, it's the white year. There are about twelve people doing Linda Montano's seven-year, seven-chakra structure.<sup>2</sup>

KELLEY

Is everyone in the white year? Did they all start at once?

SPRINKLE

Yes, almost everyone. One or two people came in a little later. We all connect by email, and Linda is our Art-Mother Superior.

STEPHENS

It's a big collaboration.

SPRINKLE

When we went into white, I thought, oh, white sounds so racist. Always this idea that light is better than dark. Beth has been studying race issues in grad school so we think about these things lately.

KELLEY

Silver is one way of thinking of the color associated with the crown chakra as something other than white. What do you have planned this year, and how was the transition from last year, the purple year?

STEPHENS

We had a nice transition, and we had a great Purple year, especially because we had two big art weddings in the places where we grew up. We married the Moon in Los Angeles and we married the Appalachia Mountains in Ohio right across the river from West Virginia.

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<sup>1</sup> Personal correspondence with Linda Montano and Annie Sprinkle, January 24, 2011.

<sup>2</sup> In addition to Stephens and Sprinkle, Michelle Bush, Barbara Carrellas, SC Durkin, Koosil-Ja Hwang, Vernita N'Cognita, Esther K. Smith, Krista Kelly Walsh, Victoria Singh and Kurtis Champion, and Steven Reigns are joining Montano in her third seven year cycle. Personal correspondence with Linda Montano and Annie Sprinkle, January 24, 2011.

KELLEY

I thought the purple year was one of the most focused, because you entered into it with developed theories of ecosexuality. When did you start developing ecosexuality and sexecology? The green year?

STEPHENS

We began articulating ecosexuality and sexecology in the green year. It took us a year to really understand how important ecosexuality is to the *Love Art Laboratory*, which is what we call our version of the *Seven Years of Living Art* project.

SPRINKLE

We didn't make up the word ecosexual -- it was a dating term, like metrosexual or heterosexual, or bisexual. But we usurped the word and decided that ecosexual would also mean being lovers with the Earth. I don't think people had been using it in that way. And we invented the term sexecology to create a new field where one explores the places where ecology and sexology intersect.

STEPHENS

Sexecology is also a really nice representation of our relationship. This idea came together during the green year and the green wedding. But our passion for trees and tree hugging really came into fruition this last purple year.

SPRINKLE

By the end of the purple year we finally considered ourselves environmental activists. In the green year we were pretty new to it all. Our environmental activism came more into focus and is now our passion.

STEPHENS

We started hanging out with activists, and we went to an activist training camp, the Mountain Justice Summer Camp, where we learned how to dump composting toilets—that was very, very exciting—and we learned about security culture, which is what to do and not do if you get busted or infiltrated.

SPRINKLE

We also noticed how white, straight and middle class the environmental movement is. This is also part of the reason we don't want to call our crown chakra year white, because we want to add color.

STEPHENS

We learned the difference between the environmental movement and the environmental justice movement, which is really dependent on race. The environmental movement is white and middle class, whereas the environmental justice movement is more of an urban phenomenon, and it deals with people of color and people who don't have as many economic options.

SPRINKLE

There were only two or three other queers at the Mountain Justice Summer Camp, and out of 250 or so folks, there were two black folks, two Hispanic, maybe two Native Americans, if that. We gave a talk about our ecosexual research, and it was generally pretty well received. Some folks were totally excited and really resonated with our work, but of course it was a little controversial, especially among some of the Christians. We're eroticizing the Earth, finding sensual pleasure in nature, making it hot and hip to be tree huggers.

## STEPHENS

This particular event was near the Appalshop Collective in Whitesville, Kentucky.<sup>3</sup> In Appalachia, there aren't many economic options for working class and lower middle class people other than going into the coal industry, so there has been a huge diaspora. It's a no win situation. So the Appalshop cooperative made a media center and taught Appalachian kids how to make films. Theoretically it was so the kids could go out and get jobs in the film industry, but they decided they didn't want to leave, they wanted to make films about Appalachia. It is an amazing place with a media center and theatre and radio station. The Appalshop radio station interviewed us on our way out of town. In the local Whitesville newspaper, anyone can write in and say anything and their letters will be published. Someone wrote in and said "we think tree huggers should be lynched," and that was published. So we got on the radio and we started talking about how much we love tree huggers, that we were are tree huggers, and everyone should be a tree hugger. And that was the most controversial thing in the whole newsroom. There's a big hatred between coal people and environmentalists.

## SPRINKLE

And out-of-towners. We were from California and they have a thing about Californians for some reason.

## STEPHENS

Well, actually, I'm from Appalachia, and I have a pretty deep knowledge of coal mining and extraction cultures and practices. This summer we were making a film. In large part the film is about me growing up in West Virginia. Jordan Freeman and Climate Ground Zero invited us to film a demonstration that was happening at the Environmental Protection Agency in Kanawha City. It was at five in the morning. The demonstrators were doing this thing called the sleeping dragon, where you embed your arms in a barrel filled with concrete, and you put your arms into a pipe that transverses the barrel and you clip yourself in, so you as the activist can unclip yourself, but no one else can. If they do, it means they'll move the barrel and your arm would be ripped out of your socket. It's horrible, but it's quite effective as a protest device. Some people from Rock Creek, WV were documenting along with our video guy and a reporter from AP news, who was a fan of Annie's older work—he even asked her if she still wore her wristwatch on her ankle. There were the people locked into the sleeping dragon, and ten or twelve cops, an ambulance and a fire truck. It got pretty scary and quite tense. Somehow this thing came up about our being from out of town and environmentalists, so I walked over to the head cop, and said, "Do you know the state song of West Virginia?" He looked at me like I was crazy, I know he was thinking I was an outsider. A lot of people think the state song of West Virginia is this song that John Denver wrote called "Take Me Home, Country Roads," and that is NOT the state song, and people from West Virginia hate that song, because it has very little to do with West Virginia. I started singing the state song of West Virginia to these cops. I learned it in about the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, and I'm a terrible singer, but it absolutely diffused the whole situation.

## SPRINKLE

It was also provocative, because she was singing about the love of the mountains.

## SPRINKLE & STEPHENS, *singing*

Oh, the West Virginia hills! How majestic and how grand,  
With their summits bathed in glory, Like our Prince Immanuel's Land!  
Is it any wonder then, That my heart with rapture thrills,  
As I stand once more with loved ones On those West Virginia hills.

Oh, the hills, beautiful hills, How I love those West Virginia hills!

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<sup>3</sup> "Home | Appalshop," accessed January 9, 2011, <http://appalshop.org/>.

If o'er sea o'er land I roam, Still I'll think of happy home,  
And my friends among the West Virginia hills.

STEPHENS

These were big fat West Virginia cops. They were porkers.

SPRINKLE

Honey, be nice. We're really into West Virginia. The politics there sort of remind me of the 80's feminist porn wars. The anti-porn feminists vs. the pro-sex feminists, and both sides cared about women, but were diametrically opposed politically. There are the "Friends of Coal people" vs. the "I love the mountains people," and they both really love the mountains, but are diametrically opposed. It's a very exciting time in West Virginia, the passions run so deep. It's a life and death situation.

STEPHENS

You have one group who feels that mining is the only thing that brings any kind of economic security to West Virginia, and of course it's destroying the state, and then you have another group who says that it's not only destroying the state physically, but it's dividing families, and perpetuating poverty.

SPRINKLE

There's also a lot of pride in the coal mining industry and history in the generations of miners, and it's an amazing thing what these underground miners did and continue to do. It's fascinating and beautiful. But underground mining is very different than mountain top removal mining.

STEPHENS

Our hearts really are in West Virginia.

KELLEY

How does West Virginia figure in the white/silver year?

SPRINKLE

We don't know exactly yet. Things unfold as we go along. We do the chakras and the chakras do us. We don't know where it will take us, but we want to spend time in West Virginia for sure.

We'll be done with our seven-year project at the end of this year, and we want to do an art catalogue/book about the seven years of our Love Art Laboratory project. It's been an amazing, magical and wonderful journey and we would love to share it in book form. Then we'll be devoting ourselves fully to Sexecology, the ecosex movement and the environment, and to our lovers, the Earth, Sky and Sea.

KELLEY

What are you marrying in the silver year? You married the Earth in the green year, the Sea and the Sky in the blue year, and the Moon and the Mountains in the purple year.

SPRINKLE

We're thinking of marrying the Sun.

STEPHENS

We might actually have our last wedding up here on Bernal Hill in San Francisco at sunrise on the last day of our project, December 18, 2011.

SPRINKLE

I love Bernal Hill. It's an incredible spot. San Francisco is the clitoris of the USA, so it's like the hood of the clitoris. A producer is also talking to us about doing a wedding at the Salton Sea, which is very silvery.

STEPHENS

And we're going to do something in Nova Scotia, I think, with Geoffrey Hendricks, but we're not sure what.

SPRINKLE

We've already proposed and are engaged to the Sun; the more eco-weddings the better. Our love is growing to Universal proportions.

STEPHENS

At my birthday party, during most of the day the sun was up. When we woke up, the weather report was horrendous, but the sun was streaming through the window. I said, "Sun, if you will stay out for the party, we'll marry you." So the sun stayed out for most of the day here, and then it started hailing. It was very dramatic.

SPRINKLE & STEPHENS

We've had a great time!

SPRINKLE

The *Love Art Laboratory* has been a great project for us to do together, and we want to keep working together.

STEPHENS

We might not have sex three times a day like a friend of ours does, but we've had ten weddings.

SPRINKLE

We've had ten honeymoons, too.

STEPHENS

We have ten anniversaries, plus the anniversary of our domestic partnership.

KELLEY

Didn't you decide to do the wedding project at City Hall while you were finalizing your domestic partnership?

SPRINKLE

That's when we realized wedding ceremonies could be a great political platform. We spoke out against the war, and talked about conflict resolution and how we have to learn to get along. Do we go ahead and make this commitment to each other after just a few months of knowing each other intimately? And we said, yes, let's do it, and whatever comes up we'll work it out.

STEPHENS

And we've tried to do that.

SPRINKLE

We could have ended our collaboration and relationship at the seven-year point, or it could have been possible that we got half way and we couldn't stand each other. It could have gone any way. We would have made the project work no matter what happened, but it's ended in the ideal way. We're still together; and we still love to work together.

STEPHENS

I like you better than ever. I love you more than ever.

SPRINKLE

I like her better than ever, too.

STEPHENS

Honey, will you marry me again?

SPRINKLE

Will you marry me?

STEPHENS

I asked you first.

KELLEY

How has Linda Montano's influence on your work shifted over the years? Do you understand her work differently?

STEPHENS

I find her work even more magical. I know she's Catholic, but there is a lot of magic in Catholicism. I really appreciate the beauty of her choosing to use the chakras as a structure for making art. And we love to get the word out about Linda Montano's work all over the world because we really love Linda, and she's a super important artist. Throughout this project, the right thing has happened every step of the way: Annie got cancer during the red year, the year of survival and security, I became the chair of University of California Santa Cruz's Art Department during the yellow year, the year of courage and power, we entered the environmental movement during the green year, and we really had to work on our communication during the blue year.

SPRINKLE

The orange year was about sex and creativity, and we really understood how sex and creativity were very linked. So while we may not have sex three times a day like our friend told us she does, we create a lot of art!

KELLEY

You make art three times a day?

SPRINKLE

On the record, we do still have sex as often as we can, and we are ecosexual, so we are having sex every time we take a walk.

STEPHENS

Our sexuality has grown to intergalactic proportions.

SPRINKLE

No penis can compare to the erotic love of the Earth, Sky, Sea, and Moon. It might be a close tie. We love penises, but, it's bigger than a penis now.

STEPHENS

We are post-penis. (*Laughter!*)

SPRINKLE

But in the silver year, who knows what will happen. Sperm is very silver and white. Maybe we should do some sperm performances.

KELLEY

Looking back, do you see ecosexuality manifesting in your work before the green year?

SPRINKLE

We've been doing it all our lives. I used to teach a workshop in upstate New York, where I would send all the participants to go out and be sensual and have sex with something in nature. Many came back after a couple of hours and said "that was the best sex I ever had."

STEPHENS

I knew how to do that without taking a workshop.

SPRINKLE

A couple of decades ago, I wrote a piece for a book on bisexuality called "Beyond Bisexual," about having sex with clouds.<sup>4</sup> This summer Beth and I went to a writer's retreat in Akamal, Mexico with Michelle Tea, and we spent ten days writing our ecosexual herstories, and we're about to write a manifesto. We have a grant to do a visual art show called "Ecosex Manifesto" at the Center for Sex and Culture in San Francisco (opening on June 17, and the symposium on June 18th and 19<sup>th</sup>). The show will include purple wedding stuff and the manifesto as wall text.

STEPHENS

I'm also interested in ecosexuality as a political strategy. What we're trying to do with this work is garner more love for the Earth. People respond to an offer of love for the Earth, as opposed to fighting for something or being critical of something, or hating something or abstaining from something. If you can present something as an opportunity for love and for protection, that can alleviate some of the overwhelming feelings we bring to the environmental crisis. What's going on with the environment is really bad, and people don't know how to deal with that much darkness.

SPRINKLE

They can feel powerless.

STEPHENS

The environment is not getting better. You don't see valid studies saying, oh we were wrong about global warming.

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<sup>4</sup> Annie Sprinkle, "Beyond Bisexual," in *Living with Contradictions: Controversies in Feminist Social Ethics*, ed. Alison M. Jaggar (Boulder: Westview, 1994).



SPRINKLE

Did you know that way more money is spent by the United States government on “ecoterrorism” than on any other kinds of terrorism? “Ecoterrorism” meaning the environmental activist movement, really. Meanwhile US government bombs and chemicals devastate the environment.

STEPHENS

We think the environmental movement is very cutting edge and sexy right now, in part because environmentalism is a direct threat to capitalism and profit.

SPRINKLE

God forbid the environmentalists get too networked and powerful and stop animal abuse or stop mountain top removal mining.

STEPHENS

The overall picture for the environment is quite dire. Even if we clean up here, other countries are starting to build up to using equivalent amounts of electricity as the US uses, and creating the same types of mining and pollutants that will add to the stress on the Earth, not alleviate it.<sup>5</sup>

KELLEY

Do you have international plans for the Love Art Laboratory?

STEPHENS

We go where we're asked to go. We're invited to Europe a lot.

SPRINKLE

We married the earth in Croatia, and it turns out it was the first queer wedding anyone had ever heard of happening in the Balkans. It's so taboo for gay people to get married in the Balkans that nobody would dare to do it.

STEPHENS

Queers regularly get death threats in Croatia, especially if they are having parades and such.

SPRINKLE

Because our wedding was part of a queer arts festival, and we married the Earth, we only got one death threat. Not bad.

STEPHENS

It was subversive.

KELLEY

How do you think the gay marriage debate has changed during these seven years?

STEPHENS

We always see the gay marriage debate as a human rights debate. It's really about who's human enough to gain the right to marry.

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<sup>5</sup> See Derrick Jensen, *Endgame; Volume 1: The Problem of Civilization* (New York, NY; Seven Stories Press, 2004).

SPRINKLE

...about who deserves the same legal rights heterosexuals have.

STEPHENS

Humans are not the only important thing in the world. So if we less-than-human queers can fight for certain rights, we should bring our less-than-human brothers and sisters like the trees and the birds and the bees and the rocks into the fight. All beings should have the right to protection and well-being and peace and health, freedom from murder and violence.

SPRINKLE

Once we actually got legally married in Canada, which was a beautiful experience—

STEPHENS

—after that it was like, why bother with any more of the legal marriage stuff?

KELLEY

And after legally marrying in Canada, you transitioned into marrying the natural world.

STEPHENS

We are in a funny situation, because we never told California we were legally married in Canada. They see us as domestic partners. As queers, you're more secure as domestic partners than married queers. In the time since we've gotten married, the Supreme Court of California has said gay marriage is legal, then thrown it out, then reinstated it, then Proposition 8 came along, and now they're saying if you married in a place that accepts same sex marriage then you are married. But we never told California we got married. I kind of like that we haven't, because I have problems with the institution of marriage.

SPRINKLE

We're not pro-marriage, really. We largely do it as performance art and as protest.

STEPHENS

However, we do believe in love. Love is grand.

## Part 2:

### *Unnatural Closeness to Nature: A Ecosexual History*

ELIZABETH STEPHENS



Dirty Sexology, Vienna 2010. Image Credit: Mark Snyder

#### ***Earthworms***

I knew that I was an ecosexual when at the age of four I found myself delighting in the dirt under my fingernails gotten from digging around in my grandfather's earthworm farm. I loved the rich, black loamy dirt that the earthworms made with their shit. I loved their slimy purple pink ribbed bodies when I picked them up. I loved them more after I learned that each individual earthworm contained both male and female reproductive organs. This seemed like a perfect way to be in the world, self contained, hermaphroditic, slimy and great fish bait.

#### ***Plants***

Sometimes I would sneak down to my grandmother's tomato patch in the afternoon while she was napping. It was forbidden to pick any of her tomatoes unless she had specifically requested I do so. I knew that if I got caught with red stains on my shirt or fingers sticky with sweet tomato juice, I would get a licking. So I had to sneak through the tomato patch in the hot Virginia sun, carefully selecting the one ripe tomato that was ready to burst its own skin and spill its forbidden juices. I would take my time making my way over to the reddest, plumppest juiciest fruit, so as not to disturb any of the other plants or leave any trace of my having been there. I'd pick my tomato and make a careful exit trying to walk like a hunter-thief leaving no trace. Upon exiting the garden, I'd make a beeline to the hay barn where I had stashed a shaker of salt and I'd have my way with the sweetest, reddest, most succulent Big Girl around.

## ***Water***

I knew that I was an ecosexual when I went on camping trips with my mother's best friends Aileen and Mattie. We'd hook up their trailer in the early morning hours and drive 30 miles up to Summersville Lake. Even though it was only a short distance from home it felt as though we had driven all the way to Europe. In the middle of the hottest afternoons Aileen and Mattie would let me go skinny-dipping in the lake. Skinny dipping is not only a great way to cool down but just knowing that it was kind of naughty to swim naked in public made it even more delicious. My feelings of oneness with nature were boundless as the minnows nibbled at my toes and I peed in the water. I loved nature and I knew that nature loved me.

My fascination with mud puddles as a child may have been another early sign of my ecosexual tendencies. I loved to jump into the dirty water feet first and just feel the warm water splash up against my legs and then run down again, sullyng the Sunday school clothes that I had been forced to put on to impress Jesus and his friends. Not only was playing in mud puddles a rebellion against my mother who had made me get dressed up in the first place, but it was also my way of embodying my belief that dirtiness, not cleanliness, was next to godliness.

I knew that I was an ecosexual when my dad and I got baptized at Calvary Baptist Church in Charleston, West Virginia. We both thought that if we got saved our lives would magically change for the better and so we went together to have our sins washed away. I'm not quite certain whether it was for the love of Christ or having the preacher's hands holding me down in the water that I got so turned on. All I remember is going under and thinking that now everything was going to drastically improve. It was an electric transformative experience. I was under water for what seemed like an eternity, which felt much more exciting than losing my virginity. Plus, because there was no fumbling, blood or embarrassment, there was only salvation in letting go. Salvation underwater is hot.

## ***Animals***

I knew I was ecosexual when I had an out of body experience galloping through the mountains on a fast, sweaty, sure-footed pony. Not caring about anything as I flew, I was one with the animal beneath me. I just egged that pony on and she went faster than the wind. Wrapping myself around animal body, hanging on for dear life, hands in mane, reins let loose, legs gripping for all I was worth. My heart was in my throat in rhythm with the drumming of hooves on the ground and the world was a watery blur. Slowing down was a bit of a dream and when I came back to my body I was surprised to get off and walk away as a separate creature.

## Part 3:

### *Diary of an Ecosexual*

ANNIE SPRINKLE



Desert Tour for Lovers, California 2009. Image Credit: Annie Sprinkle

MY NAME IS ANNIE SPRINKLE AND I AM A SYBARITIC COUGAR WITH ECOSEXUAL TENDANCIES. I am a new bride, recently married to the Earth, the Sky and the Sea, and engaged to marry the Moon. Never had I imagined that I'd be so lucky in love, or become so consumed with seemingly crazy, taboo, sexual desires. Nothing prepared me for this kind of relationship, and for this strange, new sexual identity. There is so much to learn that I feel like a total eco-virgin, sun-kissed for the very first time. In truth I'm no eco-virgin at all. I've been 'round the planet more than once', and it's no secret that I've had far more ecosexual experience than most other gals my age. For years, the Earth, Sky, Sea and Moon and I have been just friends. We like each other a lot, and have what I'd describe as an 'erotic platonik' relationship.

When I was nine, my dad discovered Yosemite and he fell in love. In retrospect, my dad must have been an ecosexual too. Our family visited Yosemite several times a year. That's when it started, between me, and the redwood trees. I liked them **BIG**. And they were **HUGE!** Big, round, hard, but soft, redwood trees. Gentle giants. I loved the scent of the trunk, like vanilla mixed with soil. I have a strong memory of coming across a redwood that had fallen over from a storm. I walked around and peeked at its freshly exposed roots. So soft, so sensuous, so sexy! I had to touch them.

My first oral sex experience was in communion with nature, on a secluded beach two hours north of Panama City. Mathew Van Guilder Howell was a sweet older man at twenty-four years old. I was a shy, sweet sixteen, high school student and budding hippie. We did what young people did in 1969 on their first date, a hit of mescaline. That night there was a sliver of a moon, and the stars were only how stars can be on a jungle beach at the equator—brighter and more abundant than anywhere else on the planet. There were so many shooting stars it was like a fireworks display, but way, way better. The gentle, rhythmic waves massaging the sand were filled with plankton, which made them glow in the dark with magical phosphorescent sparkle. Nature was at her most glamorous and seductive, dripping in diamonds. Van and I got naked. My heart was open and pumping, my senses aroused, and I was in love for the first time. I lay on my

back, dug my feet into the sand, and let my knees open like butterfly wings to welcome the Universe in between my thighs. The splash of a wave spit on my belly and vulva. For a few timeless moments the Universe and I made an exquisite, erotic, cosmic connection. Then Van kissed his way down my body and gave me, what we called at the time, “head.” To this day Van and I remain friends, but it is the Earth, Sky, and Sea that I ultimately married.

A person does not have to be outside of a city to have good ecosex. For example, there was the time I was lying on my living room couch masturbating with my Hitachi magic wand when I looked out my eleventh story window, over the skyscrapers and into the sky where a big, white puffy cloud cruised me. Earlier I’d been reading the book *Sexual Secrets* and there was a quote that resonated with me: “I am the sun, the moon and all the stars. There is no temple as sacred, no temple as blissful, as my own body.” I meditated on that thought and found myself fantasizing that the cloud was watching me, coming closer to me, then enveloping me in its pillowy puffs. This was very pleasurable, and triggered a series of deep clitoral orgasms, accompanied by a burst of emotion, which I call a crygasm. As I came out of a divine afterglow, a wave of shame washed over me. Was I some sort of cloud pervert? I decided to ask the cloud, is this for real? Is this consensual? Am I totally nuts? In that moment a red helium balloon floated up into the sky and pierced the cloud, like Cupid’s arrow. I took this to be a sign that, indeed, our love was real. Then before my eyes the sky darkened and it started to sprinkle. A cloud ejaculation! That was one of the best sexual experiences I have ever had, and I’ve had many. For a long time I never spoke to anyone about this experience. It was a love that dared not speak its name.

Around my fortieth birthday the Sea began to beckon. “Come to me. You can’t resist me. Come to me. I want you.” So I inched myself away from Manhattan to live by the Sea. First I moved to East Hampton for a year. Then I made my way to live in Provincetown where I fell in love with the humpback whales. After a couple of years I was called to the Pacific Ocean, got a houseboat in Sausalito and lived right on top of the water, happily in rhythm with the tides. When my houseboat burnt down, I learned about the power of fire. Free of material belongings, I took off with a male-to-female transsexual named Captain Barb. We floated north on her 55 foot boat to a marina on Orcas in the San Juan Islands. I recreated myself as a mermaid. After the three years on the boat, the city called again, and I moved to San Francisco, which is where I got together with Beth, and the rest is herstory.