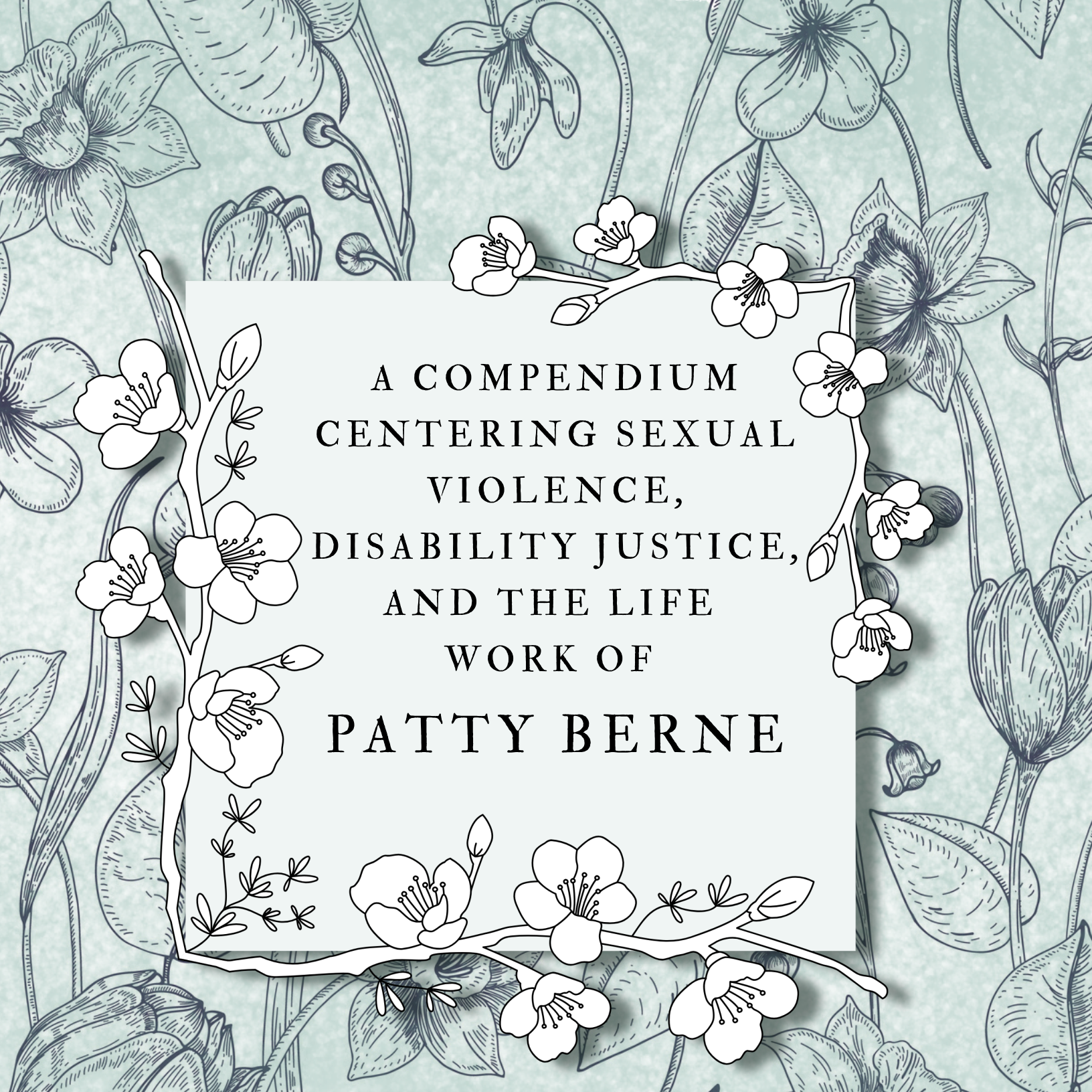

A COMPENDIUM
CENTERING SEXUAL
VIOLENCE,
DISABILITY JUSTICE,
AND THE LIFE
WORK OF
PATTY BERNE



Editorial Note & Disclaimer

This compendium brings together Patty Berne's writing and words alongside reflections, photographs, artwork, and memories contributed by people who knew, loved, worked with, organized with, and learned from her.

Some contributed reflections have been lightly edited for grammar, clarity, consistency, or length while working to preserve the meaning, voice, tone, and intent of the contributor. The memories, perspectives, and reflections shared by individual contributors are their own and reflect their particular relationships with Patty and their experiences of her life and work.

Every effort has been made to accurately credit writers, artists, photographers, publications, and source materials. In some instances, complete attribution or original source information was not available. We welcome corrections, additional information, or fuller attribution where it becomes available.
This compendium is offered as a living tribute to Patty Berne and to the communities, relationships, movements, and political work that shaped — and were shaped by — her life. It is not intended to be a complete account of Patty's work, relationships, or legacy.

"A DISABILITY JUSTICE FRAMEWORK UNDERSTANDS THAT ALL BODIES ARE UNIQUE AND ESSENTIAL, THAT ALL BODIES HAVE STRENGTHS AND NEEDS THAT MUST BE MET."

— PATTY BERNE



Photo Credit: Unknown

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"MY BODY DOESN'T OPPRESS ME, SOCIETY DOES."

— PATTY BERNE





INTRODUCTION

Brilliant thinker and beautiful activist Patricia "Patty" Berne transcended this world to join the ancestors on May 29, 2025. Patty was an active member of San Francisco Women Against Rape (SFWAR) for nearly three decades. In 1996, she started her work with SFWAR writing curriculum and facilitating workshops on sexuality, pleasure, and consent for young women with disabilities. In 2002, Patty joined the SFWAR Board at a tumultuous time in our history and went on to serve as Board Chair for 10 years. Patty has trained countless SFWAR staff and volunteers on ableism and supporting disabled survivors, facilitated numerous support groups for sexual assault survivors, and played a key role in the development of SFWAR's women of color leadership principles. Patty was also instrumental in the launch of SFWAR's Disability & Deaf Services Program in 2016; she even directed the program at one point. And, today, SFWAR continues to partner with Sins Invalid – the renowned arts and social justice organization Patty co-founded in 2005.

This compendium is a collection of Patty's writings – both poetry & prose; community reflections on Patty's contributions to the anti-rape and disability justice movements; and photos and visual illustrations of Patty and her community of friends and loved ones. A goal of this work is to raise awareness about sexual violence and its pervasive impact on communities with disabilities. We also endeavor to honor Patty by illuminating (some of) her formidable legacy of work, so it may continue to shape our mobilizations to end sexual violence and oppression in all its manifestations.





INTRODUCTION TO OKAASAN

Patty has described her mother, Sugako, as an "amazing badass" who she worked to model herself after. Patty said, "She [her mother] left Japan shortly after World War II and married a Haitian man, and defied Japanese…everything." [1]

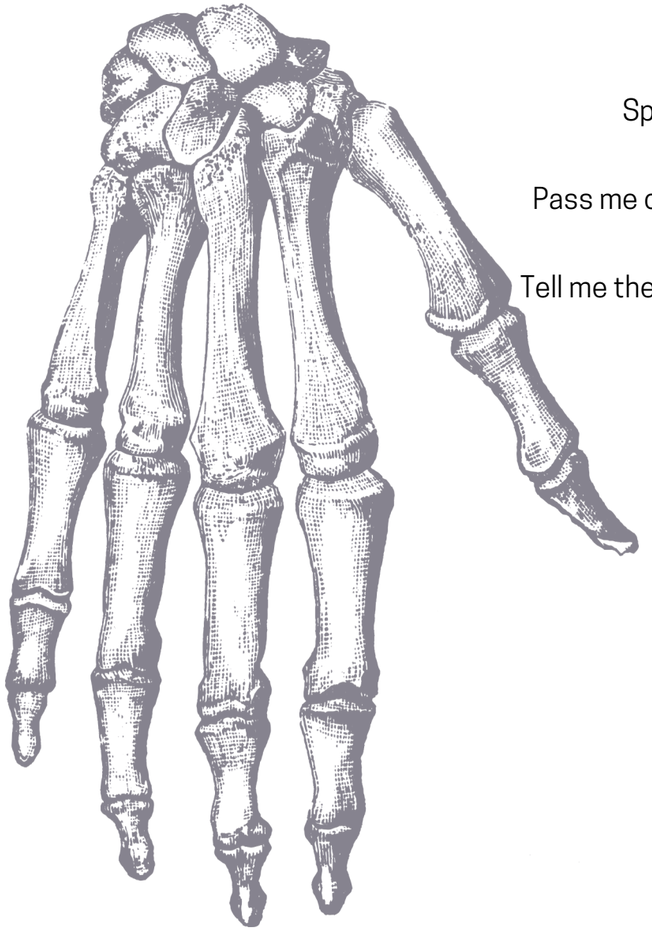
On January 10, 2016, Patty's mother transitioned at the age of 92. Patty wrote OKAASAN – which means "mother" in Japanese – to Sugako. The poem was featured in the 2016 Sins Invalid performance titled "Birthing, Dying, Becoming Crip Wisdom."

When I first experienced this work during its performance, I was so impacted I cried. It touched me so deeply. When I learned that Patty had joined our ancestors, I hoped, with all my heart, that Patty was reunited with her beloved mother.

— Janelle L. White, Ph.D., Executive Director, SFWAR

1 *Feministing Five Interview*

OKAASAN



Speak to me.

Speak to me like only you can.

Speak to me with a whisper in my ear.

Pass me candy through your mouth. To mine.

Tell me the secrets that you've learned there.

Tell me that I'm doing good.
Tell me what I need to do better.

I miss you.
(crying)
I miss you so much.
(crying harder)

I know you're here.

Everywhere.

But still I miss you.

I miss your hand on my cheek.
I miss the rough of your skin.
I miss the silk translucence that you became at the end.

Maybe your love for me doesn't shine from your eyes anymore, but it shines through the moon. (crying)
Maybe that was you shining for me tonight. (crying louder)

I always said that everything I am I owe to you.

And you always fought for fairness.
I hope that my work honors you.

It was the biggest honor when you told me that I taught you.
Your daughter,
teaching her mother.

I want to become a good lawyer
to defend the person who are powerless.

Are you a gift from heaven to me?

OKAASAN

— PATTY BERNE

"WHEN I HAVE MY ACCESS NEEDS MET, I AM FUNCTIONALLY NOT DISABLED."

— PATTY BERNE

TWO BLACK/BROWN KRIPS HAD A DREAM THAT BECAME A REALITY

I remember when I quit my job at a non-profit in Berkeley and started Disability Advocates of Minorities Organization, DAMO, and at one of our events a brown woman wheelchair user introduced herself as Patty Berne, that was back in 1998. In the Bay Area, in the late 1990's, I was looking for Black and Brown radical disabled people and Patty was right there; that kept me going even when I closed DAMO. And, when we sat at La Peña Cultural Center watching a beautiful Flamenco dance company, then we both turned to face each other and said something like, "Where are the creative stages for Black/Brown disabled activists/artists?" Aka the birth of Sins Invalid, who went on to birth Disability Justice!

Patty made the revolution sexy, fun, accessible and serious. Her house became a safe zone for disabled people of color who were Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer or Questioning and straight. At the same time, it was an office where she and I would write grant proposals with the aroma of food cooking. Before I knew it, I was back inside a non-profit, but this felt different and that was all Patty's doing.

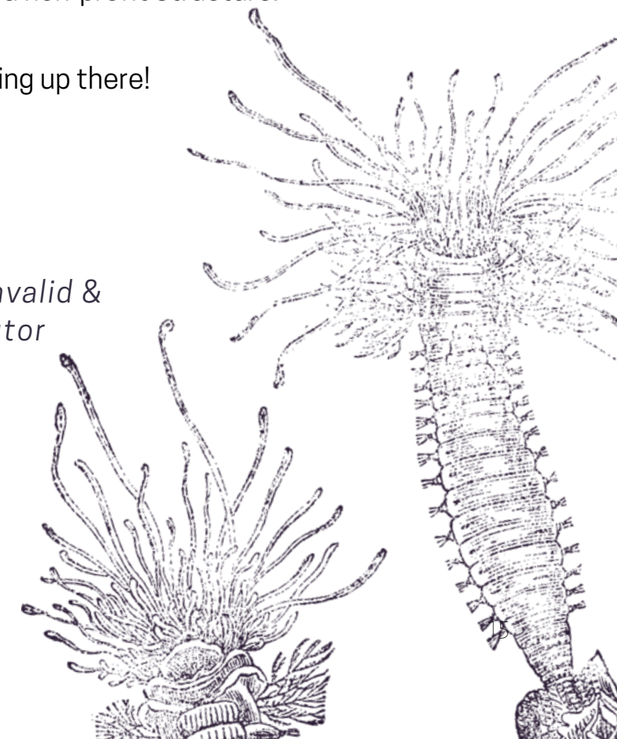


We made a good team playing off each other's strengths and knowing our weaknesses. Patty opened all doors to her life and I got to know her family, close friends and her beloved SFWAR!

As a straight Black disabled man, Patty gently led me to face my male privilege and at the same time to be open about the need of accommodation. Her mind was awesome and always creating -- from her garden to her house to Sins performances on stage that always had a radical sharp edge to them. I didn't know back then sitting at La Peña Cultural Center that Patty Berne made a Black/Brown disability cultural revolution a reality even in a non-profit structure!

I know you are organizing, creating and cooking up there!

— Leroy F. Moore: Co-Founder, Sins Invalid & SFWAR Artists Against Rape Contributor



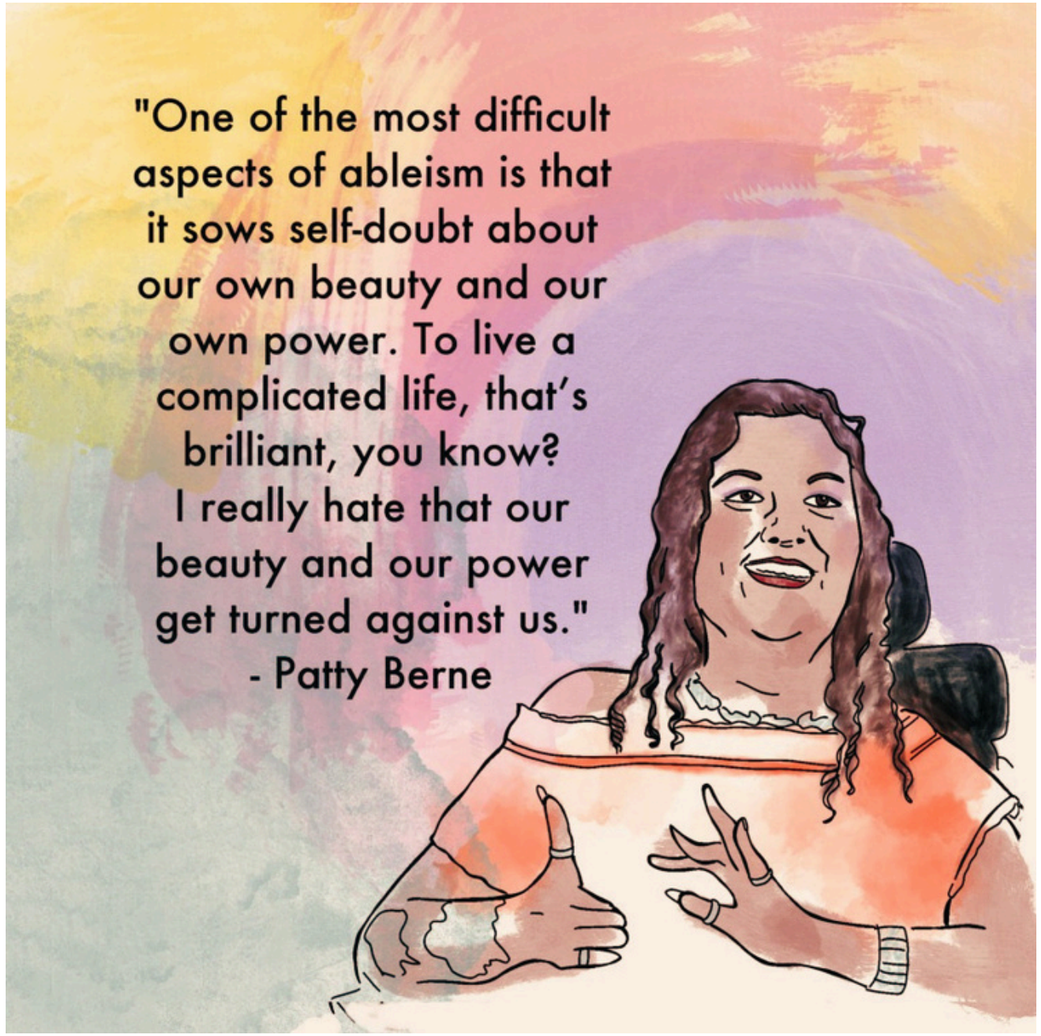


INTRODUCTION TO PATTY'S BLOG POST OUTLINING DISABILITY JUSTICE

In June 2015, Patty wrote the following blog post outlining the components and practice of Disability Justice. Like her Combahee River Collective foremothers who delineated the framework of Black Feminism in 1977, Patty acknowledges many individuals who contributed to the understanding of Disability Justice she outlines. This stands out showing Patty's long-time dedication to collective process and connectedness — as reflected in the Disability Justice principle of Cross Disability Solidarity. Also, like the Combahee River Collective, Patty acknowledges the essential leadership of marginalized people (i.e. disabled people of color and of queer and gender-nonconforming disabled people) in the formation of Disability Justice as an analysis and practice, reflecting the principle of Leadership of the Most Impacted.

Disability Justice, as Patty and her compatriots note, is the second wave of the disability rights movement. SFWAR calls on those engaged in anti-rape movement work to thoughtfully consider this powerful framework and, perhaps, most importantly, to adopt and practice Disability Justice in our work supporting survivors and ending rape.

— Janelle L. White, Ph.D., Executive Director, SFWAR



DISABILITY JUSTICE - A WORKING DRAFT

In recent years, on websites and new media locales, on flyers and in informal conversations, I've witnessed people add the word "justice" onto virtually everything disability related — from disability rights based services and access audits to disability scholarship — while doing nothing to shift either process or end goal, thinking that the word change alone brings that work into alignment with disability justice.

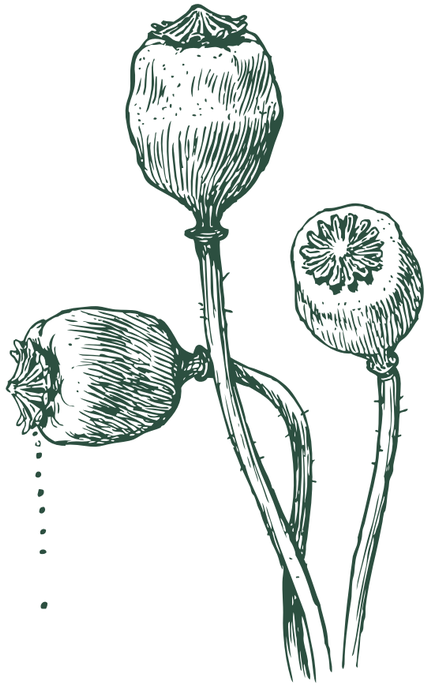
Not so. So when Jane Dunham with the National Black Disability Coalition asked me to write "What Is Disability Justice" for the 2015 SDS Pre-Conference Disability and Social Justice Summit, even though SDS was demonstrating NO commitment to Collective Access for those of us who cannot pay, physically or financially, for ableist transportation, I appreciated Jane's valuing my voice and contribution, and her efforts struggling with the unspoken and passive aggressive liberal racism of the academe, so I agreed. Plus, I really like Jane ♥. I wrote the following also knowing that it would serve as a good draft for the upcoming Sins Invalid project writing a Disability Justice statement, which will certainly be different and better after being worked through by the crew here.



However, I wanted to put it on this blog to continue my individual process of decolonization from ableist heteropatriarchal capitalism which tells me to keep a low profile lest I be hurt. So, with the deepest thanks and acknowledgements to Aurora Levins Morales and David Langstaff for their words intertwined with mine, and with gratitude to Aurora Levins Morales, Cara Page, Lisa Weiner-Mahfuz, Stacey Milbern, Kiyaan Abadani, Micah Bazant, Leroy Moore, seeley quest, Ernie Cath, David Langstaff, Nomy Lamm, Kay Ulanday Barrett, Laura Hershey, Leah Lakshmi Peipzna-Samaransinha, Natasha Simpson, Lateef McLeod and so many others who have all held fierce conversations and sleepy eyed dreams of what we are building together..

I'd like to start off with a quote from Aurora Levins Morales' book Kindling:

"There is no neutral body from which our bodies deviate. Society has written deep into each strand of tissue of every living person on earth. What it writes into the heart muscles of five star generals is distinct from what it writes in the pancreatic tissue and intestinal tracts of Black single mothers in Detroit, of Mexicana migrants in Fresno, but no body stands outside the consequences of injustice and inequality...What our bodies require in order to thrive, is what the world requires. If there is a map to get there, it can be found in the atlas of our skin and bone and blood, in the tracks of neurotransmitters and antibodies."



There was phenomenal and historic work to develop the disability rights movement in the U.S., and it had many successes in advancing a philosophy of independent living and opening possibilities for people with disabilities through the establishment of civil rights for people with disabilities. Like other movements, the current disability rights movement includes advocacy organizations, service provision agencies, constituency led centers, membership based national organizations, as well as cultural and academic spaces.

And, like many movements, it is contextualized within its era of emergence and left us with "cliff-hangers": it is single issue identity based; its leadership has historically centered white experiences; its framework leaves out other forms of oppression and the ways in which privilege is leveraged at differing times and for various purposes; it centers people with mobility impairments, marginalizing other forms of impairment; and centers people who can achieve rights and access through a legal or rights-based framework. The political strategy of the disability rights movement relied on litigation and the establishment of a disability bureaucratic sector at the expense of developing a broad-based popular movement.

While a concrete and radical move forward toward justice, the disability rights movement simultaneously invisibilized the lives of peoples who lived at intersecting junctures of oppression – disabled people of color, immigrants with disabilities, queers with disabilities, trans and gender non-conforming people with disabilities, people with disabilities who are houseless, people with disabilities who are incarcerated, people with disabilities who have had their ancestral lands stolen, amongst others.

In response to this, in 2005, disabled activists of color, originally queer women of color incubated in progressive and radical movements that did not systematically address ableism – namely, myself, Mia Mingus, and Stacey Milbern, soon to be joined by Leroy Moore, Eli Clare and Sebastian Margaret – began discussing a "second wave" of disability rights and ultimately launched a framework we called Disability Justice.

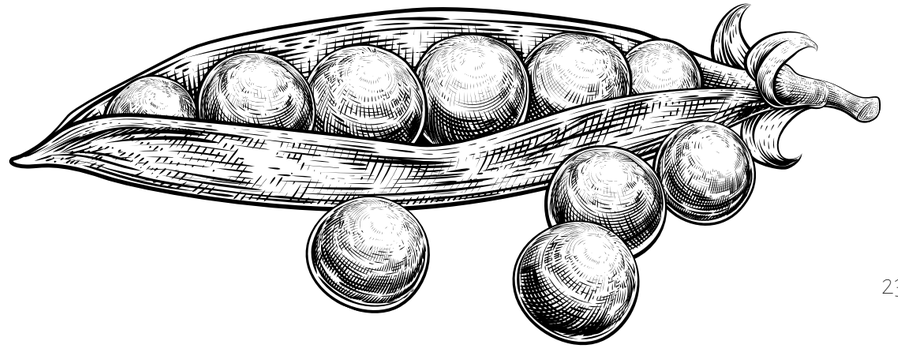
Given the isolation enforced by ableism and classed boundaries, many of us have often found ourselves as agents of change from within our respective communities and isolated from in-person community with other disabled people of color or queer or gender non-conforming crips, finding "liberated zones" instead online. In many ways, Disability Justice is a nascent framework that some call a movement, still identifying the "we" – sometimes in fluid spaces and sometimes in each others' hoped and spoken words, touching each other through the echoes of those we mentor close by.

Given this early historical snapshot, I assert that Disability Justice work is largely done by individuals within their respective settings, with Sins Invalid, the NYC-based Disability Justice Collective, Seattle's Disability Justice Collective, and Vancouver's Disability Justice Collective being notable exceptions. Some voices may emphasize a particular component of the framework over another, as can be expected in early movement moments. However, what has been consistent is the leadership of disabled people of color and of queer and gender non-conforming disabled people.

Disability Justice activists, organizers, cultural workers understand that able-bodied supremacy has been formed in relation to intersecting systems of domination and exploitation. The histories of white supremacy and ableism are inextricably entwined, both forged in the crucible of colonial conquest and capitalist domination. We cannot comprehend ableism without grasping its interrelations with heteropatriarchy, white supremacy, colonialism and capitalism, each system co-creating an ideal bodymind built upon the exclusion and elimination of a subjugated "other" from whom profits and status are extracted. 500+ years of violence against black and brown communities includes 500+ years of bodies and minds deemed dangerous by being non-normative – again, not simply within able-bodied normativity, but within the violence of heteronormativity, white supremacy, gender normativity, within which our various bodies and multiple communities have been deemed "deviant", "unproductive", "invalid."

A Disability Justice framework understands that all bodies are unique and essential, that all bodies have strengths and needs that must be met. We know that we are powerful not despite the complexities of our bodies, but because of them. We understand that all bodies are caught in these bindings of ability, race, gender, sexuality, class, nation state and imperialism, and that we cannot separate them. These are the positions from where we struggle. We are in a global system that is incompatible with life. There is no way stop a single gear in motion — we must dismantle this machine.

Disability Justice holds a vision born out of collective struggle, drawing upon the legacies of cultural and spiritual resistance within a thousand underground paths, igniting small persistent fires of rebellion in everyday life. Disabled people of the global majority — black and brown people — share common ground confronting and subverting colonial powers in our struggle for life and justice. There has always been resistance to all forms of oppression, as we know through our bones that there have simultaneously been disabled people visioning a world where we flourish, that values and celebrates us in all our myriad beauty.



From my vantage point within Sins Invalid, where we incubate both the framework and practice of Disability Justice, this burgeoning framework has ten (10) principles, each offering new opportunities for movement builders:

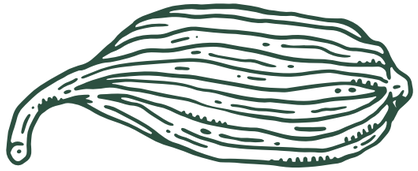
- The first, a primary principle of Disability Justice, is ***Intersectionality***. We know that each person has multiple community identifications, and that each identity can be a site of privilege or oppression. The fulcrums of oppression shift depending upon the characteristics of any given institutional or interpersonal interaction; the very understanding of disability experience itself being shaped by race, gender, class, gender expression, historical moment, relationship to colonization and more.
- Referenced earlier, the second principle is the ***Leadership of Those Most Impacted***. It reflects our understanding of ableism in the context of other historical systemic oppressions, thus we are led by those who most know these systems.
- Like the above principles, Disability Justice shares two additional principles with other justice-based movements — an ***Anti-Capitalist Politic*** and a ***Commitment to Cross Movement Organizing***. We are anti-capitalist as the very nature of our mind/bodies resists conforming to a capitalist "normative" productive standard, with the actual construction of "disability" derived from the exploitation of the body in an economy that sees land and human as components of profit, deriding the integrity of our very real crip labor. Necessarily cross movement, Disability Justice shifts how social justice movements understand disability and contextualize ableism, lending itself toward a united front politic.

- The fifth principle of Disability Justice is a newly articulated contribution to justice-based movements, ***Recognizing Wholeness***, meaning that we value our people as they are, for who they are, and that people have inherent worth outside of commodity relations and capitalist notions of productivity
- Sixth is the cripped principle of ***Sustainability***, that we value the teachings of our lives and understand that our embodied experience as a critical guide and reference pointing us toward justice and liberation.
- Seventh we hold a ***Committment to Cross Disability Solidarity***, valuing and honoring the insights and participation of all of our community members and therefore are committed to breaking down ableist / patriarchal / racist / classed isolation between people with physical impairments, people who identify as "sick"or are chronically ill, "psych" survivors and those who identify as "crazy", neurodiverse people, people with cognitive impairments, people who are a sensory minority, as we understand that isolation ultimately undermines collective liberation.
- Eighth we have an awareness of ***Interdependence***, as we were taught before the massive colonial project of Western European expansion. The disability rights call for independence pried disabled people from systems of patronage and being spoken for and about, in companion to the ideas of self-determination and community. From this starting point, we can widen and deepen our analysis, as this state was never set up to serve brown and black people. We can see the liberation of all living systems and the land as integral to the liberation of our own communities, as we are all share one planet.

We can attempt to meet each others' needs as we build toward liberation, without always reaching for state solutions which inevitably then extends its control further over our lives.

- A ninth principle is ***Collective Access***, that as brown and queer crips we bring flexibility and creative nuance to engage with each other, that we value exploring and creating new ways of doing things that go beyond able-bodied/minded normativity. Access needs do not need to be held in shame — we all have various capacities which function differently in various environments. Access needs can be articulated within a community and met privately or through a collective, depending upon an individual's needs, desires, and the capacity of the group. We can share responsibility for our access needs without shame, we can ask our needs be met without compromising our integrity, we can balance autonomy while being in community, we can be unafraid of our vulnerabilities knowing our strengths are respected.





- Lastly, the tenth principle is the path and goal of ***Collective Liberation***, in which we hold the question "How do we move together" - as people with mixed abilities, multiracial, multi-gendered, mixed class, across the orientation spectrum - where no body/mind is left behind.

This is Disability Justice, an honoring of the longstanding legacies of resilience and resistance which are the inheritance of all of us whose bodies or minds will not conform. Disability Justice is a vision and practice of a yet-to-be, a map that we create with our ancestors and our great grandchildren onward, in the width and depth of our multiplicities and histories, a movement towards a world in which every body and mind is known as beautiful.

— PATTY BERNE





FUCK YEAH WE ARE!

Patty Berne was my friend. She was brilliant, sweet with a kick ass laugh and smile. I was lucky to work with Patty through most of the 90's where we dreamed about a world free of sexual violence. We spent a lot of time talking in meetings, in between meetings and after meetings!

We shared a lot of dinners that Patty made for us: gorgeous Japanese and Thai curries with bright purple eggplants and sweet potatoes, followed by an always sumptuous chocolate dessert.

These meals were the background of our talks about empowerment, love, sex and yes, violence. I would leave her apartment and we would often jump on the phone to talk after she was comfortably in bed for the night. We would talk until she would fall asleep sometime.

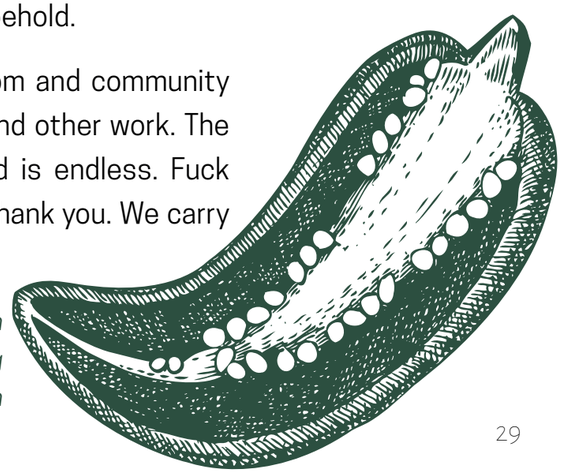
One night we started to talk about San Francisco public school sex ed - where the curriculum included the term ejaculation but not clitoris or orgasm. We talked about how dangerous it was for girls, queers and all students to have no education about sexual desire. We talked about what it meant to be growing into your adult sexuality with curiosity and interest but inadequate information.

We talked about how all the focus on rape prevention was about how to say no and not about knowing what you wanted to say yes to. Patty was deeply unafraid to create, collaborate and develop responses and answers to problems. She had the most energy and enthusiasm of any activist I had ever met. I remember the look on her face when we started to create the "I'm Too Sexy for My School" curriculum. "Are we really going to do this Patty?" and her response was the biggest smile and the words "fuck yeah we are!"

This curriculum engaged students in conversation with each other about the right to feel good in your own body. For the first time perhaps, a rape prevention workshop focused on knowing your body, understanding romantic and physical desire and knowing the difference between excitement and fear. Patty and I taught these SFWAR workshops and we brought in a velvet vulva hand puppet and passed it around classes of young women who asked questions about the labia, the vagina and the clitoris! It was a beautiful thing to behold.

Patty's belief in sexual health, body wisdom and community propelled me and so many others in this and other work. The list of work she started and/or supported is endless. Fuck yeah Patty! We miss you, we love you, we thank you. We carry on because of you.

— Jamie Lee Evans: Director, Foster Youth Museum; SFWAR Recruitment & Training Consultant; & former SFWAR Director of Teen Education



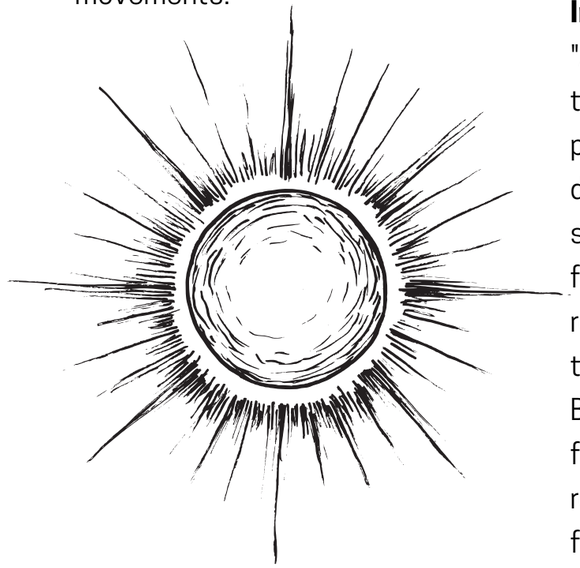
CONSIDERING SEXUAL VIOLENCE, ABLEISM, SURVIVOR ADVOCACY, AND DISABILITY JUSTICE

In 2022, Patty was the plenary speaker for VALOR's Statewide Conference titled Collective Action for Equity. VALOR is the statewide coalition of California rape crisis centers. You can listen to **Patty's full VALOR plenary** at VALOR's YouTube channel.

The following are excerpts of critical importance from Patty's talk:

Differentiating Disability Justice from Disability Rights

"It's really important to me that people who work with survivors of sexual violence understand the framework we use at Sins Invalid is Disability Justice, not to be confused with disability rights. Disability rights brought us so many things in terms of codifying what our legal rights are. And, from that, comes Disability Justice — where we are looking for liberation for all communities led by disabled people of color, Black disabled people, Indigenous disabled people, disabled people who are working and poverty-class, disabled people who are queer, Trans, and non-binary, folks that are typically pushed out of both disabled rights and other social justice movements."



Incarceration & Ableism

"And we have to know that many people that are in carceral settings, be they jails or prisons or detention, are people with disabilities. And I want to just give a few stats to underscore this: 32% of people in federal prisons and 40% of jail inmates report having at least one disability. And this is from the US Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice statistics. So, these are folks that are not inclined to wildly over-reporting. So, nearly 2 in 5 state and federal prisoners had at least one disability in 2016.

But, that's really over-represented in terms of people with disabilities. While we are 20% of the population, 30-40% of folks that are locked up are disabled — and that includes people that are ambulatory, people with visual impairments, people with cognitive disabilities. And, often times, that will be part of why someone was incarcerated to begin with– if someone didn't understand what the police were saying or didn't move "quickly enough."

Advocacy for Disabled Survivors

"If someone is having a rape exam, there's the added [layer] of a history of being medicalized because of a disability, a history of not being heard because of your disability. There's a history of the medical environment itself being dehumanizing, being abusive. We need to be aware that we are there to be an advocate for our client, right? Not an advocate for the doctor who's making his demands, or an advocate for the guard that's yelling. I've seen it so many times where the doctor tries to basically rope someone in to advocate for them, when I bring them to help me."

Ableism & Sexual Violence

"Regrettably, because of ableism, 83% of women and 32% of men with developmental impairments have been sexually assaulted. 83%! An estimated 70% of women have survived a sexual assault... We have a high exposure to many people in our intimate circumstances, and that means that because of ableism—because we're seen as not fully human, because we're isolated, because we are often marginalized— because of ableism, that makes us vulnerable to sexual assault. People that are elders, for example, aren't vulnerable to sexual assault because they're elders. They're vulnerable to sexual assault because of ageism and because elders are not seen as credible at a certain point in their lives."



From Left to Right: Kebo Drew, former Member SFWAR Women of African Descent Task Force, Queer Women of Color Media Arts Managing Director; Patty Berne; Janelle L. White, SFWAR Executive Director; and Jamie Lee Evans, former SFWAR Teen Education Director, SFWAR Recruitment & Training Consultant, Foster Youth Museum Director. This photo was taken in the late 1990s.

WITH GRATITUDE



When I began serving on the SFWAR board in 2011, I got the opportunity to work with and learn from Patty Berne, who was also on the Board at that time. We would sometimes meet in her apartment, where her strategy and analysis would guide our direction, alongside her sharp humor and laughter.

I also witnessed there how community was always around her, how she had a magnetism that compelled people to be by her side. She brought community together. What I learned from Patty about Disability Justice continues to inform my work and how I try to be in the world. I have immense gratitude to Patty for her vision, her care and warmth, and her wisdom.

— Nadia Khastagir: Co-Founder, Design Action & former SFWAR Board Chair

A NECESSARY PART OF THE WHOLE

I'd like to start by saying thank you Patty. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

It's hard to believe Patty is not with us. Not just because of the immeasurable loss of such a radiant individual, but also because her teachings and spirit are so very much alive with us.

When I think of Patty I remember her as a teacher. I did not know Patty as long, or as deeply as some in the SFWAR community, but over the past decade I had the privilege of participating in disability justice trainings led by her and Sins Invalid, and being part of this organization that has been so influenced by her leadership.

In recalling what Patty meant to me and to our community at SFWAR, I do not only get brought into my memories of her brilliant lessons of the intersections of disability justice and the anti-rape movement, but I find myself pulled into the memories of my heart.

I think about our trainings sitting in the sun hosted at her home in Berkeley out in her garden among her plant friends. Or gathering in the group room eating together and being asked about my access needs. Something I had to be taught that we all have. I remember the feeling of partnership in working through the complexities of understanding our own experiences with disability and ableism as women of color survivors. Patty taught and listened with such intention. She made you feel not just welcome but a necessary part of the whole. She challenged us to find ways to practice finding any of the roots of ableism in our work and ways it is internalized within ourself- and to imagine alternative embodiments. I think about how she had a gift of inviting in others so that they too became teachers through the telling of their own experiences.

Patty was a generous, and fierce role model of disability justice principles. My heart, body, and mind will remember that there is a call to answer in her work that requires my committed practice.

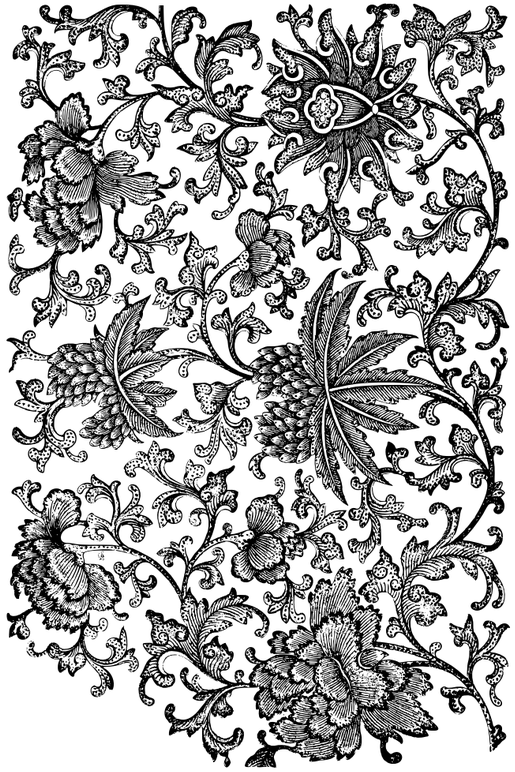
— Alicia Maldonado: SFWAR Director of Community Initiatives

"THE WORK OF DISABILITY JUSTICE IS TO MOVE FROM A FRAMEWORK OF 'FIXING BODIES' TO ONE OF 'FIXING SYSTEMS'."

— PATTY BERNE

PATTY BERNE: TRUE MENTOR AND FRIEND

Patty opened their home to host us and it was such a joy to feel their passion for transforming communities…[and to witness their commitment] to challenging the oppression disabled Black/Brown bodies face every single day.



I am amazed at the world that Patty opened [to me]. A world that would not be possible without …the contributions of and struggles led by members of the Disability Justice Movement.

Patty's training showed me the ways others have not shown up for me, in fact, abandoned me, because they did not understand my disability. "Aguanta," which in English means to endure, to put up with, and to hang on, also translates into suffering. This is very common in my community — to suffer silently. [With guidance from Patty,] I have developed my voice to push back and fight in order for others to understand my disability.

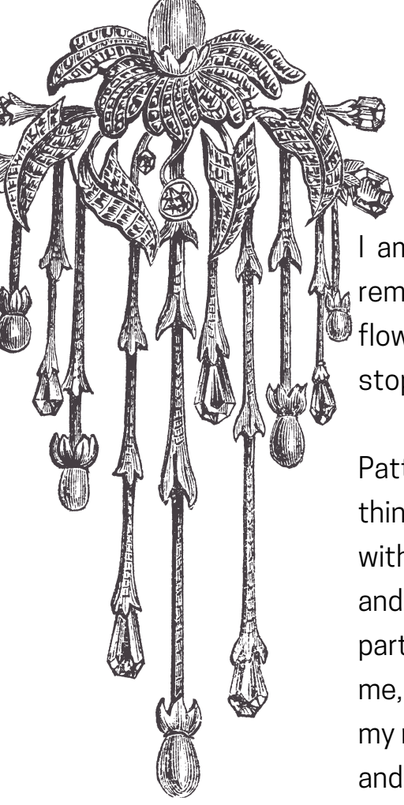
Because Patty has left us a treasure chest of knowledge, lessons, and love… I find it [inconceivable] for her work not to continue. Therefore, we **must** continue to teach, teach, TEACH, AND put into ACTION. Every person Patty trained and those who have crossed paths with them and who have integrated [Disability Justice] teachings into their [respective] communities makes the Disability Justice Movement grow.

Patty Berne taught us that Disability Justice is missing from many [social justice] movements and in our education system and that the only way we can integrate it into the fabric of our society is through popular education. To name [ableism] when it is not being [acknowledged] and to push systems to [change].

Thank you from the bottom of my heart, Patty, for the light you were and continue to be in this world and in [my life].

— Sandra Sandoval: SFWAR Special Projects Consultant & former SFWAR Director of Community Initiatives





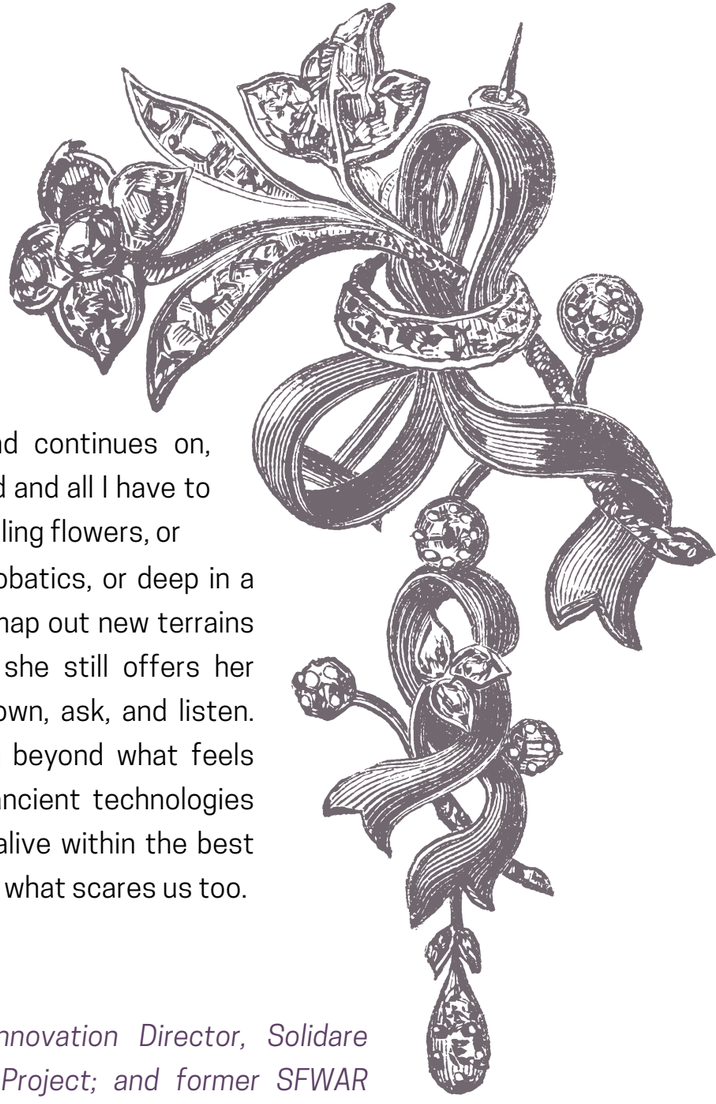
PATTY IS ALIVE WITHIN THE BEST PARTS OF US

I am so proud to call Patty a friend and now a spirit guide. I remember laughing and laughing, looking at her beautiful plants, flowers, and latest jewelry purchases. She inspired me to never stop learning or feel that my limitations were unconquerable.

Patty taught me so much as she was one of the most strategic thinkers I have ever met. When we first met she spent hours with me breaking down different stages of Haitian revolutions and how they related to revolutions across Africa and different parts of Latin America. This was before she generously sat with me, teaching me nuances around access and inclusion that blew my mind. Patty was so kind when I told her I wanted to learn more and never judged me for not being an expert in whatever it was we discussed. Instead, as a true popular educator, she offered thoughtful insights and questions that allowed me to reach conclusions based on my own experiences and values. Patty trusted me and operated from that place. To honor Patty is to state clearly that she was a mentor and friend.

When Patty asked me to act as a strategic planning and organizational development consultant for Sins Invalid, I can truly say that it was as much a supportive experience for me as she said I provided to her and the organization.

Patty's life and political work were magic. This kind of magic is about taking all the various things one has experienced and one knows and mixing them with courage and the ability to boundlessly dream.



This kind of alchemy changed and continues on, changing the world. I miss my friend and all I have to do is close my eyes and we are smelling flowers, or watching incredible accessible acrobatics, or deep in a planning process where meetings map out new terrains of organizing work. For all of us, she still offers her guidance if we are able to slow down, ask, and listen. She is alive every time we dream beyond what feels possible. She is alive as we use ancient technologies toward creating the new. Patty is alive within the best parts of us and within us as we face what scares us too.

— Malachi Garza: Strategy & Innovation Director, Solidare Network; Co-Founder, Brown Boi Project; and former SFWAR Organizational Development Consultant



Photo Credit:
SFWAR

Standing, from left to right: SFWAR STAFF: Teresa Currie, former Office Manager; Bhavana Manchanda, Associate Director; Janelle L. White, Executive Director; Cynthia, former Community Educator; Kristina Lee, former Director of Recruitment & Training; Kristie Chan, former Director of Crisis Intervention Services; and Alicia Maldonado, Director of Community Initiatives.
Seated, from left to right: Stacey Milbern, disability justice activist and Director of Programs at the Center for Independent Living, Berkeley; Patty Berne, Sins Invalid; and Martina Rollins, SFWAR Survivor Advocate.
This photograph was taken at Patty Berne's beautiful home in Berkeley on May 31, 2017, during one of SFWAR's ongoing learning sessions, part of a sustained organizational practice of deepening our understanding and analysis of disability justice. Patty Berne and Stacey Milbern facilitated the session.

THE COURAGE OF COMPASSION

I first met Patty Berne in the urgency and idealism of campus activism at UC Berkeley—through the Campaign Against Apartheid, Students Against Intervention in Central America, and efforts to prevent the first Gulf War. Patty stood out for her warmth, her smile, her openness, and her clarity of conviction.

When she began her PhD in clinical psychology, she did her clinical internship at Men Overcoming Violence where I was volunteering. As a clinical intern working with men who had used violence against their partners, Patty brought an unwavering commitment to accountability paired with profound empathy, and a clear understanding of the intergenerational cycles many of these men were living. She never minimized the harm, but she refused to reduce people to their worst acts. She held a rare balance: never flinching from the reality of violence, and never giving up on people.

Now, thirty years later and a long way away in Cape Town, Patty remains a kind of moral compass. From her I learned what integrity, courage, joy, and friendship look like in practice. I carry those memories of her with me still—as a source of guidance, and as a reminder of who I want to be in the world. I am deeply lucky to have known her.



— Dean Peacock: former Youth Program Director, Men Overcoming Violence; MOVE partnered with SFWAR for a decade to facilitate sexual assault prevention education

AN EXPANSIVE LOVE

I first met Patty in 1994, in a large, echoey meeting hall. We were practicing guerrilla theater where we as students at UC Berkeley would highlight the situation in Haiti. The student group, Students Against Intervention in Central America (SAICA), was formative for many of us who were part of it back then. Although I was initially intimidated by Patty, I soon learned that she was as generous as she was fierce, gentle as she was insightful.

In 2005, Patty recruited me to join the board of SFWAR. In those years, SFWAR was growing its community programs and launched its annual fundraiser Walk Against Rape. Patty and I were excited to support SFWAR as it continued exploring and deepening what it meant to be a movement organization seeking to end sexual violence. Patty had much to offer regarding the intersecting systems of oppression that enable sexual violence - how to understand them and what it might look like to uproot them in our day-to-day work. Patty and I also worked together on hiring an executive director. With Janelle White still at the helm more than 20 years later, I can say with confidence and pride what a great decision that was!



While I was grateful to have collaborated with Patty at SFWAR, she was first and foremost my friend. I was blessed to know Patty for many decades and through many different phases of life.

At SAICA, SFWAR, Sins Invalid, and many other movement spaces where I had the honor of witnessing Patty lead, I saw her create a political home, a community, for so many groups - young people, people with disabilities, queer women of color, amongst others - with generosity, vision, wisdom and love. And for many individuals within those spaces, I both witnessed and experienced Patty inspiring you to be your best, calling you in when she knew you could do better, and simultaneously being the person you could turn to when you faltered. Patty's love was so expansive that, much as I mourn her loss, I still feel her present with me.



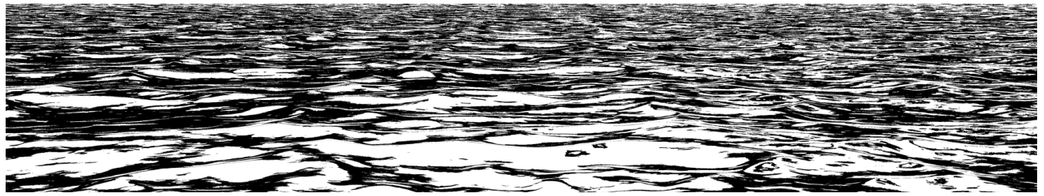
— Hilary Klein: Author of Compañeras: Zapatista Women's Stories; Deputy Director, Jews for Justice; former SFWAR Board Member; & the Feminist Patty would most want to take with her to a deserted island.

INTRODUCTION: TO SURVIVE CLIMATE CATASTROPHE, LOOK TO QUEER AND DISABLED FOLKS

In writing the introduction to Patty Berne's To Survive Climate Catastrophe, Look to Queer and Disabled Folks, I recognize that I cannot separate Patty's words from where I am reading them. Returning to Delhi, India—a city that shaped so much of who I am—has shifted the way I hold this piece. Here, where the consequences of these intersecting systems are so visible and immediate, I find her analysis amplified in ways that are difficult to move past, resonating with an intensity I could not feel anywhere else.

It feels so very strange to be in a city that is still deeply familiar, and yet also so profoundly changed, almost unrecognizable in ways that are difficult to hold. There is a particular heartbreak in seeing, more clearly than ever before, what the destruction of ecological systems is doing to the land, the air, and especially to nonhuman animals, and how that is changing my relationship with a place I always thought of as home. Writing this introduction felt like an attempt to sit with that dissonance, to bring together parts of my life that I have often held separately, and to make space for the grief of finding that the home I had carried within me no longer quite exists on the outside.

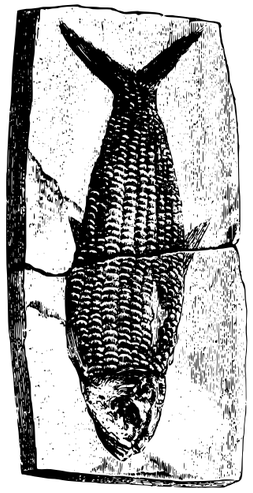
These reflections feel deeply connected to the work we continue to do at SFWAR. As we continue to query, deepen, and expand what anti-violence work asks of us, we are called to look beyond the forms of violence that are most familiar to us and to examine the deeper beliefs that make violence possible. At SFWAR, our work has always been grounded in the understanding that sexual violence is not separate from other systems of oppression. It grows from the same belief that some bodies matter more than others, that some lives are more worthy of protection, and that power gives one the right to control, exploit, confine, or dispose of another.



This is part of why SFWAR has sought to understand speciesism and expand our analysis of sexual violence and rape prevention. In 2018, we hosted *Last Night a Pigeon Saved My Life: The Inescapable Connections between Violence Against Women, Ableism, & Speciesism*, with A. Breeze Harper, Lauren Ornelas, and pattrice jones. The conversation asked us to consider what it means to claim a commitment to consent, bodily autonomy, and nonviolence while leaving unquestioned the ways human beings exert control over nonhuman animals and the natural world.

We do not raise these questions because all forms of oppression are identical, but because the systems that enable them are interconnected. Racism, ableism, patriarchy, capitalism, colonialism, homophobia, transphobia, and speciesism are all sustained by the belief that perceived superiority permits domination, and that certain bodies, communities, animals, or ecosystems exist for the use of others.

As we become more curious about what it would mean to truly end violence, we must examine how violence is enacted and normalized not only between humans, but also in our treatment of nonhuman animals. We must ask what nonviolence requires of us not only in our relationships with one another, but also in our relationship with the larger living world of which we are a part.





Within this ongoing dialogue at SFWAR, it is essential to hold up Patty Berne's commitment to ecology, the environment, and the interdependence of all life. In the following piece, drawn from a conversation between Patty and Vanessa Raditz, Patty asks us to understand climate catastrophe not as a separate environmental crisis, but as another expression of the systems that mark some bodies, lands, and lives as expendable. She connects the destruction of ecological biodiversity to the violence experienced by disabled, queer, trans, poor, and racialized communities, reminding us that the same systems that extract from the Earth also extract from people.

Patty's analysis is not only about who is most vulnerable to climate disaster. It is also about whose wisdom has been ignored. Disabled, queer, and trans communities have long survived within conditions not built for them. They have created practices of mutual aid, collective care, interdependence, adaptation, and resistance in the face of institutional abandonment. Patty asks us to recognize these practices not as marginal forms of survival, but as essential knowledge for a world confronting climate catastrophe.

She also refuses the idea that queer, trans, or disabled bodies are somehow outside of or contrary to nature. Through queer ecology, Patty locates human diversity within the extraordinary biodiversity of the planet itself. Difference is not a failure of nature. It is one of the conditions through which life endures. In this way, her commitments to disability justice, queer liberation, and ecological survival are not separate commitments. They are part of the same insistence that no life should be valued only for its productivity, conformity, or usefulness to systems of power.

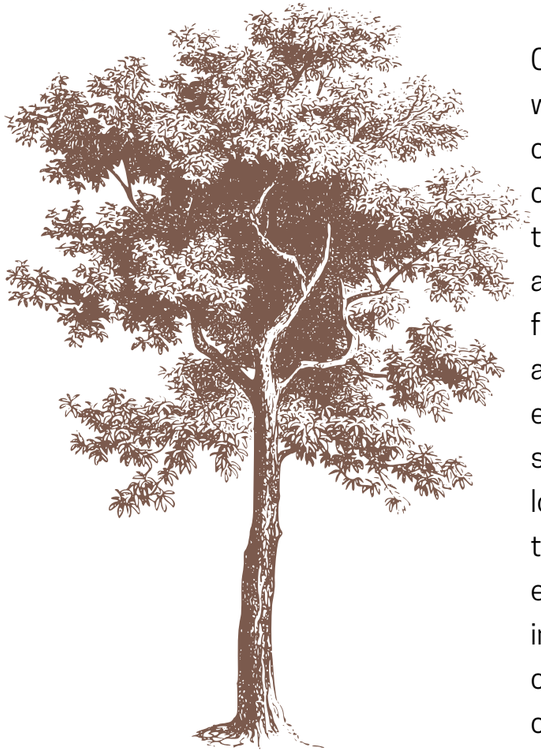
For us, this is deeply connected to anti-rape work. A politics of consent and bodily autonomy cannot stop at the boundaries we have inherited. It must remain open to questions about how domination is reproduced, whose suffering is made invisible, and what it means to build relationships rooted in care rather than control. Patty's work invites us to widen our imagination of liberation— to understand that ending violence requires more than protecting some bodies from harm. It requires us to challenge the belief that any body, species, community, or ecosystem exists for exploitation.

As we continue to deepen our analysis at SFWAR, we hold this piece as both a challenge and an offering. Patty asks us to consider what becomes possible when we reject human superiority, refuse disposability, and understand survival as something we create together. She reminds us that our liberation is bound not only to one another, but to the Earth and to all the lives with whom we share it.

— Bhavana Manchanda, Associate Director, SFWAR

TO SURVIVE CLIMATE CATASTROPHE, LOOK TO QUEER AND DISABLED FOLKS

This piece comes from a rich conversation between Patty Berne and Vanessa Raditz for the Fire & Flood Film. In a practice of mixed-ability organizing, Raditz has typed and crafted this piece from Berne's own words, ideas, and frameworks.



Communities around the world are grappling with the growing number and intensity of climate-related disasters because of climate change. Immediately after one of these disasters in the U.S., federal, state, and nonprofit agencies frequently pour financial resources into the communities affected by the latest fire, flood, or earthquake. But these emergency support systems are usually unable to address the long-term needs of those affected, and all too often, these structural support systems entirely overlook those of us who live at the intersection of multiple oppressions: race, class, gender, disability, and sexual orientation, to name a few.

There are endless stories: During Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico, queer and trans communities lost access to medical necessities such as psychiatric medicines and hormones, and many faced discrimination and violence. During the fires in Northern California, a black queer environmental justice activist with asthma went into respiratory distress and now lives with permanent brain injury. From homeless encampments to local jail cells, the social, political, and economic disparities among disabled queer and trans people of color put our communities at the frontlines of ecological disaster.

The forces of capitalism, racism, ableism, transphobia, and homophobia may have cornered us into a vulnerable position in this unprecedented moment in our planet's history, but the wisdom we've gained along the way could allow us all to survive in the face of climate chaos. The history of disabled queer and trans people has continually been one of creative problem-solving within a society that refuses to center our needs. If we can build an intersectional climate justice movement—one that incorporates disability justice, that centers disabled people of color and queer and gender nonconforming folks with disabilities—our species might have a chance to survive.



Let's start by openly, joyously proclaiming that we are natural beings, not aberrations of nature. We find healing and justice in the realm of queer ecology, a burgeoning field exploring the vast diversity of gender and sexuality that exists in nature, such as the more than 50 species of coral reef fish that undergo one or more sex transitions in their lifetime, completely transforming their behaviors, bodies, and even reproductive organs.

When we begin to see the planet through this lens, we remember that the entire world has biodiversity that is precious, necessary for our survival, and deeply threatened. Whether we're looking at ecology, society, or our human culture, biodiversity is our best defense to the threats of climate change.

When we begin to see our own diversity reflected in the ecology of this planet, we can also recognize that the same forces threaten both. It's not difficult to see parallels in the havoc that capitalism and the drive to hoard wealth has wreaked on our bodies as queer people, gender nonconforming folks, and people from colonized lands, and how that capitalism has abused and exploits the land.

Just as capitalism is one of the biggest threats to biodiversity on this planet—seen in the clear-cutting of forests to plant monocultures for fuel—it is also the driving force behind the violence towards multiply marginalized people with disabilities, because our bodies are not perceived as being "productive." This drive to hoard wealth is beyond anything we can conceive, and it has already cost our species so much loss.

What we're seeing in the climate chaos that's erupting is the Earth's resistance. The question is: How can we ally with this Brown, queer, disabled, femme planet to support her survival, and the survival of all who depend on her?

In the face of so much institutional apathy, it is left to those living squarely at the intersections of all of these injustices to tear down the centuries-old silos among climate justice, disability justice, and queer liberation organizing. Disabled queer and trans communities of color are already preparing for the survival of their communities through oncoming disasters, teaching each other skills in resilience-based organizing to strategically create the changes that we need for queer and trans futures.

During the fires and floods of 2017, queer disabled organizers in the Bay Area shared masks and air filters with one another, while in Puerto Rico, communities banded together to share generators to refrigerate insulin. At the 2018 Solidarity to Solutions grassroots summit, held alongside the government-organized Global Climate Action Summit, trans Latinx organizers affected by the North Bay fires led a healing justice workshop for queer and trans people of color environmental justice activists from around the world to connect and learn from one another. This burgeoning movement may be invisible, but it should not be surprising. We have to know our worth to value others. In this historical moment, we have to fight for the valuable lives of butterflies, and moss, and elders. Because our lives—and all life—depends on it.

We must move beyond our cultural beliefs that tell us we are only worth as much as we can produce. Just as each component in Earth's ecosystem plays a vital role in supporting everything around it, so do each of us have an essential role to play in sustaining our communities, our environment, our planet. In this time, people need strength models. Strength isn't just about momentary power to jump building to building, it is also endurance to handle what is less than ideal. It's the gritty persistence that disabled people embody everyday.

Even in the moments when we're in pain, when we're uncomfortable, when the task ahead feels overwhelming, and we feel defeated by the sheer scope of everything that's wrong in the world, we don't have to give up on life or on humanity. Queer and trans disabled people know that, because that's how we live. At this moment of climate chaos, we're saying: Welcome to our world. We have some things to teach you if you'll listen, so that we can all survive.

Vanessa Raditz is co-founder of Queer Ecojustice Project, a media and education collective. She is director of QEP's first film project, "Fire & Flood: Queer Resilience in the Era of Climate Change."

Patty Berne is the co-founder and co-director of Sins Invalid, a disability justice-based performance project.

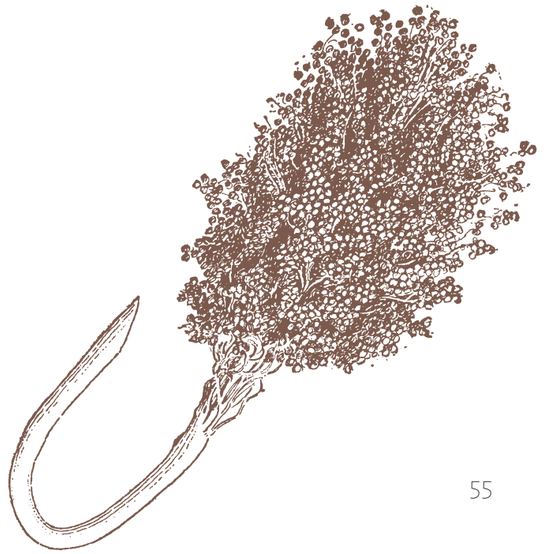




Photo Credit:
Unknown

what i have shaped into a kind of life

—Lucille Clifton, "won't you celebrate with me"

When people we love transition, we often lean toward remembering the softer edges of who they were. We celebrate the parts that were easy to love and the stories that feel seamless and linear. But the people who hold and shape our movements, just like the movements themselves, are anything but linear. They confront us, disrupt us. They are expansive, beautifully imperfect, and often ask more of us than we feel ready to give.

Change is messy, uncomfortable, and often deeply unsettling. It asks us to sit with contradiction and tension; to stay present in spaces that are difficult. That was Patty's profound gift and the part of her that I celebrate the most—the deep complexity of her, the refusal to let me settle into the convenient, the calling to rise into the struggle of what she stretched us to imagine.

Patty moved through this world like an old oak—rooted, unhurried, and unwilling to bend to every passing wind. There was a resoluteness to her that could feel challenging at times, but that resoluteness was a form of deepest care. She held her ground in moments when it would have been easier to soften, to smooth things over, to make spaces more comfortable.

She reminded us that “Love is action”—that we are the ones who must save each other. That when she looks at someone and knows they are worth saving, by extension she understands that she, too, is worth saving. And that this is not something we arrive at alone.



As Patty said, “Sometimes we have to be the ones to reflect that truth for each other. We see each other’s beauty and power even when we can’t see it for ourselves.”

Patty identified as a fighter—not just in the political sense, but as someone who fought a physical fight for her life. She taught us to struggle in grace and that fighting was not the same as violence. That “we can fight with love, we can fight with integrity, we can fight for each other.”

Patty showed me Disability Justice to be a vision of a world “in which every body and mind is known as beautiful.” That vision was embodied in the way she showed up—in her steadiness, her clarity, and her refusal to dilute the politics of liberation for the sake of being palatable.



Like the oak, she grew slowly and deliberately, shaping the ground around her. She remained anchoring, but also deeply relational and interconnected, responsive to what was around her—in principle, in accountability, and with a deep commitment to our collective.

Drawing from Aurora Levins Morales, Patty reminded us that “there is no neutral body from which our bodies deviate.” In that simple but radical clarity, she helped many of us understand that disability justice was never about inclusion into existing systems alone—it was about reimagining the world itself.

The work we carry forward is forever indelibly marked by her absence. And yet I am stronger for having had the chance to stand in the shade of that tree.

— Bhavana Manchanda, Associate Director, SFWAR



INTRODUCTION TO UNTITLED

During Patty's time as SFWAR Board Chair, she co-founded Sins Invalid. Patty described Sins Invalid as a culmination of her movement work with immigrants, women of color, survivors of violence, and queer communities. She shares, "Sins Invalid is a way of centralizing all of the intersections and of emphasizing disability and ableism."[2] This untitled poem, written by Patty, was part of Sins Invalid's first performance in 2006. Patty described that performance as, "disability and sexuality and embodiment and justice all in the same breath."[3] While this poem speaks directly to the oppression of individuals with disabilities, it also supports our understanding of safety being elusive for survivors of sexual violence. In this work, Patty recognizes the fundamental need to create and be part of home communities in order to heal, reestablish, and organize resistance to achieve collective liberation.

— Janelle L. White, Ph.D., Executive Director, SFWAR

[2] *Feministing Five Interview, a feature of the blog Feministing*

[3] *Mease, L. (2018, May 1), "Access is for Everyone: Interview with Patty Berne, Co-Founder and Director of Sins Invalid," Medium.*



Photo Credit: Unknown

UNTITLED

Is your desire “safe”?
Is “this” safe?
Are You safe –
Are You sufficiently insulated from Us
the deviant, the disabled, the non-normative, the crippled
or might you become stained
by our leaking needs?

Is this why you settle most comfortably
in your mental lazy-boy
as we labor
to shield you from our difference?
(We, the disabled, the unconscious yet visceral threat to the able-bodied
myth of emotional predictability and bodily control)
Is that why you contain us in institutions, police our bodies and movements, abuse us,
exterminate us,
eliminate us even before birth – do we
frighten you so?

Must we frighten you?



We concave our chests to hold your projections
cupped repositories for your fear of difference
your denial of your need for help

your terror of being vulnerable.

A wise woman once said
“Fear is behaving as though Truth were not the truth.”

Living requires risk, as does the hottest of desires.

We live in continual risk.

And tonight
We
Are
Coming
Home.

UNTITLED

— PATTY BERNE

"WE KNOW THAT WE ARE POWERFUL NOT DESPITE THE COMPLEXITIES OF OUR BODIES, BUT BECAUSE OF THEM."

— PATTY BERNE

SAN FRANCISCO WOMEN AGAINST RAPE

Founded in 1973, San Francisco Women Against Rape provides resources, support, advocacy and education to strengthen the work of all individuals and communities in San Francisco that are responding to, healing from, and struggling to end sexual violence. Services include a 24-hour rape crisis hotline, 1:1 peer counseling, support groups, legal and social service advocacy, medical accompaniment, rape prevention education for both youth and adults, volunteer recruitment and training, and more.

1973 San Francisco Women Against Rape (SFWAR) is founded as a 20-hour per week rape crisis hotline.

1980s SFWAR expands services to include a 24-hour hotline, in-person counseling and support groups.

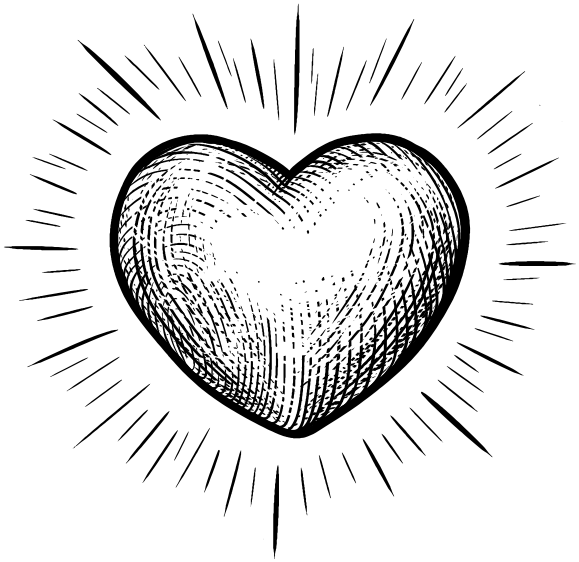
1990s SFWAR becomes a 501(c)(3) non-profit. SFWAR invited to join the San Francisco Commission on the Status of Women Domestic Violence Committee. SFWAR begins its rape prevention and education program, producing video for teens and publishing Spanish, Chinese and Vietnamese brochures. Establishes the medical and legal advocacy program. The first Poets Against Rape event is held. SFWAR becomes a member of the City of San Francisco's Adult Sexual Assault Task Force and Sexual Assault Response Team (SART).

2000s SFWAR becomes a majority women of color organization at all levels (i.e. volunteer, staff, executive director and board). Poets Against Rape grows into Artists Against Rape including poetry, performance, visual art, music, film and dance. SFWAR launches its Community Initiatives Program to develop and support community-based primary prevention approaches to ending sexual violence. SFWAR holds the first WALK Against Rape. SFWAR affirms its commitment to women of color leadership and develops working principles to sustain the leadership of women of color at all levels of the organization.

2010s SFWAR partners with the Center for Young Women's Development and Mission Girls Services to enhance and expand direct services to young women. SFWAR celebrates 40 years of supporting survivors and working towards ending rape with its anniversary event titled "Beyond Resistance Toward Liberation".

2016 SFWAR launches our Disability & Deaf Services Program.

Today SFWAR continues to focus on enhancing our work with those who are most vulnerable to sexual violence. This includes youth; individuals with physical, mental, and developmental disabilities; immigrant women, particularly those who are limited English proficient; lesbian, bisexual, transgender and queer women of color; incarcerated and formerly incarcerated women; and women who are marginally housed or homeless. To realize our shared vision of a world without rape and violence, we rely on and are strengthened by the support of our community, which has sustained us for over 50 years.



SAN FRANCISCO WOMEN AGAINST RAPE (SFWAR)

is a community-based, women of color-run, anti-sexual assault, social justice organization. We provide support to survivors of sexual assault, their families, and communities and use education and community organizing as tools of prevention. We believe that ending all forms of oppression is integral to ending sexual assault.

We will work to meet your access needs.

50 years
SAN FRANCISCO
WOMEN AGAINST RAPE
SFWAR

24 hr Crisis Line: 415.647.7273 (RAPE)

www.SFWAR.org