

D E N E U V E TM



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THE LESBIAN MAGAZINE

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ARE CELEBRITIES DODGING
THEIR LESBIAN FANS?

SEASONAL SPREAD
GORGEOUS GALS CELEBRATE
WITH TUXES AND TOYS

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BIG HOLIDAY EDITION

INDIGO GIRLS EXCLUSIVE

Amy says the "L" word



'tis THE SEASON?

Sure, I have fond memories of the adolescent buzz of anticipation I sustained for weeks, trying to figure out what surprise lay hidden in glittery red and green wrapping paper under the heavily laden evergreen tree in my living room. I like presents as much as anyone. But national holidays started out problematic. Although my great-grandmother never made a big deal of our living on welfare, I always sensed the careful choices she had to make in order to provide that Christmas tree. Why celebrate Christmas when we had enough trouble making ends meet on the regular days without the conspicuous consumption of Dec. 25? Even as a kid, enjoying new ice skates, I thought it was kind of weird.

And then there was the Fourth of July. For the kids in my neighborhood, it was only a reason to get together for some great food and fun. For adults it was probably a much-needed release from frustration at poor housing and no jobs. The pimps and prostitutes from the local bar used to donate the burgers and franks to make sure everyone got food. In this light the celebration of the signing of the Declaration of Independence meant very little on my block. The fireworks of 1776 simply marked the continued enslavement of the African-American branch of my family tree and the justification of acts of genocide against the Native American side. Although I couldn't know all of this as a young child, it was there in the edge of sarcasm I heard in the voices of the women and men as they sea-

soned the ribs and laid out the deviled eggs.

Once I was in college and finally had access to black aspects of U.S. history, the taste of irony that threaded through the barbecue sauce made sense. It was in those later years that I finally heard the derivation for the word "picnic." Apparently, Southern plantation owners took luncheon outdoors on special occasions and as entertainment would "pick a nigrä" to torment or kill.

My great-grandmother, who raised me, was born on an Indian reservation, so she never thought much of Columbus Day. And even though she could create heaven out of a turkey and creamed onions, Thanksgiving was not her favorite, either. No matter how many colorful, friendly Natives and heroic Pilgrims I cut out of construction paper in elementary school, the unfathomable look in my great-grandmother's eyes never left me.

Growing up on welfare as a colored kid in the Fifties and Sixties did give me the advantage of the civil rights movement, so the contradictory feelings and information could be put to good use. We had a political context that helped explain why we never quite fit in, and the atmosphere encouraged action to address our feelings of isolation. Being politically conscious (now smugly called "PC" by those who don't know any better) was as much a challenge then as it is now. Black women had to work on being beautiful African queens and still spend all day cooking a Kwanzaa (rather than Xmas) meal by themselves for their revolutionary brothers.

Now in my forties and child-free, I

don't have to pretend interest in those holidays except for the opportunity they offer to take a vacation. Yet, settled into our own home, my lover, Dr. Diane Sabin, and I found we missed the anticipation and excitement of holidays. Just like everyone else we looked for reasons to ostentatiously celebrate life. Because my lover is Jewish, she had the same impulse around traditional U.S. holidays as I: Skip it! But we both have a desire to connect to the historical and cultural elements of our lives that have contributed to our survival as women and as lesbians.

In the time we've been living together, we've kept trying to figure out how to avoid feeling deprived of the excitement and anticipation of holidays, periods that help to consolidate the feeling of "family" for most of us. Just because those days have been preserved by commercialism or denuded of the difficult history they represent doesn't mean we have to live out our days in drab, anhedonic piousness. We're still working on several different approaches.

In December we reclaim the lights that pagans used to cheer up the long, dark winters, a tradition that predates Christianity. We simply resist settling for red and green lights and search out the combinations that speak to us. Out mantelpiece holds a cornucopia of symbols of survival: an Ashanti stool, candles of Kwanzaa, corn, a menorah.

On Dec. 31 neither of us can get up much enthusiasm for the Julian calendar. Who cares, really, when one year ends and another begins? Who knows what a year is? So we prefer to use that night to com-

B Y J E W E L L E G O M E Z



photo by Jill Posener

Diane and Jewelle celebrate: Is it Christmas morning? A Chanukah morning? A Kwanzaa morning? Or Gertrude Stein's birthday?

memorate Emancipation Proclamation Day, Jan. 1, 1865, when the document freeing U.S. slaves was actually signed.

We pick other days that can have meaning for us, like the Day of Atonement, when we can meditate on things we might have done better and give thanks for the goodness of our lives. When I lived alone, I made holidays of things that represented something important to me: birthdays of people like Billie Holiday (April 7), James Baldwin (Aug. 2), Audre Lorde (Feb. 18) and George Sand (July 1). Now we might add some of my lover's favorites, like Marilyn Monroe's birthday (June 1).

We also have an assortment of anniversaries to choose from throughout the year: when we first met in 1984, when we decided to live together in '94, when she

first visited me back east, the day I moved west, the day the moving van finally arrived with my stuff, etc. We're discovering an ironic truth: If we take our lives seriously enough, our holidays are just as much fun as those nostalgic memories of our childhood.

What's important for me is the development of traditions that speak about who we are as lesbians, the history we bring with us and the future we'd like to encourage. We get to decide who our family is and what we think is important to commemorate. As each generation of lesbians becomes more "out," we also seem to be less in touch with the history that paved the way for our independence. Making our own holidays is one way of sharing that history, giving it life for those who've missed it and ensuring that the repressions of the past

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are not allowed to creep back in.

Our celebrations are sometimes solemn and sometimes silly (e.g., Academy Awards Dyke-Spotting Party), but the purpose remains the same: to consolidate a sense of family and to find some hope for the future. It's the reason we look forward to Pride Day each June. And it's fun trying to figure out which recipes to make for the annual Gertrude and Alice Dinner (April 30).