Drops of Ink: LGBTQ+ Poetic Expression in WNY, 1958-1990

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Drops Of Ink:
LGBTQ+ Poetic Activism and Expression in WNY

Works taken from the Dr. Madeline Davis LGBTQ+ Archive of WNY at Buffalo State College
Compiled in 2019
Contents:

Pg 1-2: Contents
3-4: Introduction
5-6 For Suzanne by Madeline Davis
7-8: Untitled by Madeline Davis, 1975
9-10: Background on Madeline Davis
11-12: Songman by R. Schroeder
13-14: For A Woman Leaving by K.T. Vermeulen, 1975
15-16: Untitled by William Alan Robinson, 1975
     Untitled by A. Russel Schlesinger, 1975
     At The Sight of You by Ross Vaughn
17-18: Afterwards and To N.J. by Patricia M. Boquard, 1970
19-20: For Jim by Donald Licht, 1979
     Libra’s Trick and Nameless by Loretta Lotman
21-22: Birds Dance Too by Richard Cogliandro
     Plain Words, Without Regret, For My Lover by Unknown
23-24: Later and Kitchen Love Poem by Tina Wright
25-26: Billy Boy and To Michael C. by Dennis Donnelan, 1972-1975
     Sound by Timothy Lennox, 1975
27-28: Untitled, Pair by Greg Kerekes
29-30: Love Song by Peter Thomas
     One Philosophy and Untitled by Grant King
31-32: History by Tommi A., 1979
33-34: The Painful Mystery by Bill Shuckhardt, 1978
     Once Upon A Lie by Dave Wunz, 1975
35-36: Graveside Sequel by Jimmie Gilliam, 1990
37-38: Alone by Fifth Freedom Editor, 1980
     Untitled by Donna Serbert, 1976
39-40: XIX and XXVI by Heather Koeppel, 1976
     Untitled by Madeline Davis, 1969
     Untitled II by Madeline Davis, 1958
Introduction

The idea behind arranging a collection of poetry by local LGBTQ+ community members and activists was to support and enhance the concept of writing as activism, expression, and means of connection. Writing is a fecund space, a linguistic crucible from which one may express identity and experience, externalizing that experience into an accessible form. To write oneself or to write one’s self becomes a critical curatorial effort, arranging what one encounters, feels, and lives.

Many of the poems in this collection, for example, convey struggles with longing, desire, isolation, quiet love, and discouraged lust during stretches of time when LGBTQ+ identities were more commonly and explicitly censored, subdued, and silenced. Translating those feelings into words and sharing them beyond the moment curtails the experience of loneliness not only for the author, but also certainly for readers recognizing they are not alone with similar thoughts, passions, and intensities. By sharing those words and their intimate inner-worlds, these poets are forging connections among and across generations.

The contents of the following collection of poetry was arranged with works from the Dr. Madeline Davis LGBTQ Archive of WNY at Buffalo State College, with dates ranging from 1958 to 1990. These 30+ original works by local community members and activists were compiled from small press publications, handwritten journals and papers, and several issues and submission folders for Fifth Freedom, the Niagara Frontier Muttachine Society periodical. Some works were submitted for inclusion in Fifth Freedom, but never published. Words carefully curated to express individual emotion and experience are now being circulated and shared anew, around 40 years after they were initially written—undoubtedly a unique snapshot of individual, local passion.

Please enjoy, absorb, and share this bundle of local, LGBTQ+ linguistic art. Do not hesitate to make an appointment with the archive to peruse the primary source materials.
For Suzanne
by Madeline Davis
Box 5, Folder 5-42

We would have been lovers
if you had stayed
if you hadn’t been afraid
if I had known a little more

There was no laugh on earth like yours
strange bells, warm honey, endless evening;
frantic phone calls in the middle
of the night
made me grateful you were scared
of spiders.
I killed for you...you thought.
(Secretly I held them by their legs
and dropped them in the bushes.
I was never good at death.)
But I would have—
I would have battled all your dragons
with my dedicated sword
and brought their smoking heads
and laid them at your feet.

Instead I wrote you melodies
and sang you arias
and shivered as your lovely fingers
curved around my arm.

We would have been lovers
if you had stayed.
Tempestuous, passionate,
ultimately tined
each others’ instruments,
each others’ endless song.

We would have been lovers
if you had stayed;
if I hadn’t been
afraid.
This is not our anniversary
I have not been there since ‘70
Nor you here in four years.
The opium you left was used one night with friends.
Terry ate two boxes of Lorna Dunes
and fell asleep
I smiled a lot
and fell asleep.
We missed you when you went.

This is not our anniversary.
I play flute concertos
And think of you.
Remember how awful it was to be married?
Remember how we laughed?

This is not our anniversary.
You were the end of an era
The close of a season
The final chord
The last of the wine.
And I loved it when you said
I did beautiful things to the sunshine.
But this is not our anniversary.

This is not our anniversary
My life is full of women now
Beautiful, smooth, soft, flower women
Women I shall always love
Women for whom I was born and made
and melt with perfectly.

This is not our anniversary.
And you are not
you
my greatest betrayal.
Dr. Madeline Davis began the archive which now bears her name in the basement of her Buffalo home in 2001. The foundational rationale behind the creation of the archive was that the LGBTQ+ community had a past, but no history—a series of joyous events, acts of forceful activism, and a web of individual lives, but no traceable record of those struggles and triumphs which continue to characterize the LGBTQ+ community. Maintaining such an archive helps pull together fragments of that history into a community heritage from which current and future members of the community can ground themselves, draw inspiration, and forge new experiences.

Davis herself claims a prolific history of artistry and civic engagement as a folk singer, LGBTQ-rights activist, librarian, and writer. She, for example, was a founding member of the Mattachine Society of the Buffalo-Niagara Frontier, served as the first openly lesbian delegate for a major political party at the 1972 Democratic National Convention, wrote the song Stonewall Nation—considered one of the first gay liberation songs—, and co-authored the book Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold which traces the history of the lesbian community in Buffalo. Consult the archive to more deeply research and appreciate Davis’ contributions to the LGBTQ+ community of Western New York.
SONGMAN
by R. Schroeder
Box 5, Folder 5-42

To look at him,
one would not know
of his habits.
Those who know him love him.
Those who only love him
wonder why they move at
his voice.

They do not watch while
he creates, the broken music
stand leaning dangerously
to the right, the lyrics I
find scrawled across the
breakfast napkins, the
notes written in the window frost.

It is not him they desire,
only his glow, reaching
like spectators after a
fight, trying to touch the winner
to rub off luck.

Where he loves, it is warm,
like twins, sharing a
womb.
Where I love, it is awkward,
my fingers tangle buttons.
And he comes at me in
tee shirt sleeves to set me free.

So we dive in, blend sleeves
with buttons, until the
only way to get free is to
take everything off.
I need excuses that way.
He makes reasons to be held.
And we sink into a mixture
of arms and legs, that very
quickly, drowns out any
music.
Cars on the expressway splash east,
we move westward
as we sit breathing grass
behind the wall.
Margaret, I wonder if I kiss you
will you pull or push
pull or push stoned in this rain?
If I stroke your palms
will the fingers close or open
close or open, would you wax or wane?
There is no answer in m/your eyes
glazed as new plate windows
thru the haze
thru the hair swaying loose
across your face.
Tugging blades and weeds,
I prick my finger on a dry stem
thorns like kitten claws.
It is an offer.

“Touch it,” I say. “Hold it.”
Margaret, tempted, you reach slowly
but recoil.
You don’t know that if your skin tears,
I will close my lips around your finger
and you won’t bleed.
I tried tonight

to be for him

all that I ever

wanted from a

previous love affair

named Perfect,

sub-titled Michael.

How many times I have in and up

in once nightly anger,

anguish.

What I did

like never before

hardly fazed him,

but my efforts

pleased me much.

Then came

together

until time was

a violent

and some hot

happy

making us both.

Then came

together

until time was

and then came

and went

both again.

My tired friend by my side,

hold out your hand to me that at least I may touch it.

So long there’s been no one beside me, for too long no one to touch.

at the sight of you,

i stopped;

for you were too beautiful to draw me near,

and keep me here.

at the sound of your voice,

i jumped;

for you were too close
to make me feel

and make me real.

at your touch,

i fled;

for you were too (not) strong enough
to hold me tight, and keep away the night
I go on dreaming
    dreaming up
dreaming down
up-down dreaming
dream dreaming of
You
In this longest sleep
Waiting for the sun in winter
Or shadows of spring and
    you.
In this dream your voice calls to me
And reaching out for you I
Catch only a handful of today.

From the east my eyes see another day
Coming toward me without you and
I choose to dream until tomorrow.

To N.J.
By Patricia M. Boquard, Buffalo 1970

In the quietness of the night
night quiet,
I listen to all nights and
the sound of wind fondling the trees
the sound of dreams dreaming
the sound of stars shining
Sounds of the east and west,
    north,
    south
diverging
And then merging together I hear
You.
The night becomes our song:
the trees sing
the stars sing and
in my dreaming I sing of
You.

And you become the night, surrounding me
Caressing me and
We come together
Me breathing you
You becoming me.
**For Jim**
By: Donald Licht, April 17, 1979
Box 25, Folder 25-2

Love is that which makes us
Greater than each
Our strength lies in those qualities
Which complement and oppose
For those are qualities which
Support and give substance to
That which we are and
All we can be

Each will have many loves
May love and be loved but
Not possess love
It is given and accepted with no bonds
It cannot be caged for being so
Bound it withers
There are many loves as
leaves upon a tree
Each unique each bound
by ties to a single root

---

**Libra’s Trick**
By: Loretta Lotman, 1970s
Box 5, Folder 5-40

Balance out the scales,
let fury blur
to subtle blues.
Passion
settle down to peace,
emotion rest
in rainbow hues.

Do not flail the ribboned shards.
Tears will never wash the stain.
Allow intensity to fail,
then guard against returning pain.

---

**Nameless**

Dark vacuum of a party,
slowly oozing
person into person,
edges meshing
then departing
in some unnamed dance of fate.

Candles flicker
lower, lower
as we flow
our separate tides.
Hoarse from all this yearning
and the silence of our lies.
**Birds Dance, Too**

By: Richard Cogliandro, 1970s
Box 5, Folder 5-42

Being earthbound
was never any fun
Til one day
I met a robin
who flew on the ground.

I used to envy birds
because they could fly
and I couldn’t.

Now I look ahead
and not up.
When I breathe
I taste honey
And when I move
a small robin’s egg
all blue and alive
rocks in my hand.

Soon I will
no longer be
earthbound.

---

**Plain Words, Without Regret, For my Lover**

By: Unknown, September 1975
Box 5, Folder 5-42

Too comfortable,
too busy acting
in this unredeemed world
as if at home, and
with too little time
and
too much joy to recollect,
to feel alone (or when disenchanted, too obsessed
with plotting to regain
our usual, comfortably nervous,
tone), too comfortable, that is,
to forge an explanation
more comfortably (or joyfully) my own
than: “Lately I’ve been
too comfortable — too comfortably
nervous, that is;
too nervously
joyful, I mean— to write poems,
too comfortable, that is, without
the nerves (or nerve) to make
my old, unsettled, poems.”
Later
By: Tina Wright , 1970s
Box 5, Folder 5-45

the bathroom annie paints
another green coat so’s that old
pink stops bleeding.

she needs new walls new women.
everything familiar goes ghostly
bone white as moons wax wane
whips by.

why did i think amnesia could make her
love me purple like before.
that’s what comes from being so quiet,
looking down all the time
not straight blazing present tense
inter her green gray eyes

wells vaginas tunnels deeper than
the cracker jack canadian sparkler
high of first loving each other
ourselves.

Kitchen Love Poem
By: Tina Wright , 1970s
Box 5, Folder 5-45

woman of sleep deep as lava.
alone in the kitchen of your golden popcorn
i sit where grim green walls streak your
coffee cup crashing hatred of me,
grease ovenhot too with houdini foodcraft
the love your hands conjured here.

i’ve been hungry but i’ve never starved

we’ve floated right down to this cool speckled
floor mad cats moaning & crazy but not
crass i swear sex with you
makes a place my happy home.
even this kitchen.
where the coffee you stir out of sleep
in the morning you cup & carry to me,
slim fingers supple witch’s wisdom
yes the winning way you caress our little
kittens oh yes the wild way you nuzzle
deep into my own warm fur.
**Billy-Boy**
By: Dennis Donnellan, 1975
Box 5, Folder 5-45

Upon a gently chaotic summer’s night
Amid the derision of reality
Buried beneath a mountain of flesh
Music blaring and hands that grope
we met.

Echoing roles so carelessly played
Amid the visions of reality
Praying to regain a paradise lost
Through empty memories graced with tears
we kissed.

**Sound**
By: Timothy Lennox, 1975
Box 5, Folder 5-45

So often the sound tells all.
With tinny laugh
and slack-mouthed sigh
the tale is told.
When what should be heard
is not,
and what not, is.
Then indeed the air is filled
with falseness so audible
that crimes are lit
by sound.
So often the sound tells all.

**To Michael C.**
by Dennis A. Donellan, December 22nd, 1972
Box 5, Folder 5–44

You seemed so free to encounter the lighter aspects of life.
Enjoying the company of a warm admirer.
Greeting my every kiss
with such a deep smile;
Becoming lost in you was so easy.
As years pass
And the sun casts a shadow on darkness itself
and books crumble noisily into dust
one shared heartbeat remains transfixed in time.
i fled;
for you were too (not) strong enough
to hold me tight,
and keep away the night
did you see?
i waved
slightly—
almost unnoticeably.
did you hear?
i called your name
quietly—
almost a whisper.
it’s been so long
since our time together
did you see?
did you hear?
oh, god!
i hope not—
i can never face you again.

shall we laugh?
shall we sing?
shall we count the joys
a broken heart can bring?

or should we cry?
should we moan?
should we tell the pains
of being alone?

let’s not laugh,
let’s not cry.
let’s just try forgetting
the meaning of good-bye.

---

**Untitled, Pair**
By: Greg Kerekes, 1970s
Box 5, Folder 5-45

I don’t think like you
We don’t think at all like each other
But I try to
each time, after we’ve made love.

I don’t think I really like you
But I wanted to find a way to
To justify your
being so important to me
I still have to have reasons

You trickle down inside of me drop
by drop, like wine
held on the back of my tongue

I try to play the connoisseur
And congratulate myself

For sampling you slowly
Instead of in one heady gulp

Box 5, Folder 5-45
**LOVE SONG**
By: Peter Thomas, 1970s
Box 5, Folder 5-45

I knew I’d find you.
Did you know too?
At first calmly waiting for the time
We would meet and you’d be mine.
Years pass, still alone,
My heart no longer has a song.
Then fears set in
Making all the tears begin.
Baths, parks, bars to dance at,
On the smallest chance that,
You’ll be there.
But when, but where?
A hundred bodies, a hundred faces,
A hundred beds, a hundred places,
Until destiny finally intervenes
by very ordinary means,
and one lonely night on a sandy shore
we simply meet and want much more.
Hands clasp, lips caress,
Bodies firmly press,
And at long last, my friend,
The loneliness is at an end.

**ONE PHILOSOPHY**
By: Grant King
Box 104, *Fifth Freedom* April/May 1976

flowers in books will fade
like friends that would have stayed
I say don’t press
you’ll make a mess
of things you haven’t made.

**UNTITLED**

Look at this energy between us.
It bounds in small arcs from eye to eye,
lip to throat, fingers to cheek,
swimming like neon, that cold fire,
in this sharp autumn night.
We meld colors, two smooth stones
washed with phosphorescence,
bleeding charged air, electric song.
We kiss each other’s auras.
We are the perfect Kirlian photograph.
Still the rain does not come
and we wait in our separate
cells
like monks
we don’t know why

in a dream
this morning
I met history

its smile was your smile
only i
knew it wasn't you

it was holding a baby
in its mechanical arms

i still don’t understand
why we like monks
every morning
bathé in the lake
not noticíng each other

but examining our nakedness
on the shore
and sometimes masturbating
but
not together

sort of a moment or two
before and after the other

history says: you can’t forget
and the baby cries
throwing up blood &
jolting like a broken machine

it’s then i notice it’s only
made of glass &
when history drops it,
it shatters.
The Painful Mystery
By: Bill Schuckhardt, 1978
Box 85, Folder 85-41

I've often watched you singing in the night
hiding the harm you do to yourself
behind the several smiles you use
to drive away the tightness
of your doubts
and make a lair for liars of your hours.

I've often watched you wrapped
in the tightness of black webbing
hugging the security
of your painful mysteries
within which the whole of you
is contained
in who knows what
tortured measure you will not admit.

Your kinship with the night
is but a brief and renewable thing
masking out the train of time
wasting tomorrows as yesterdays were wasted.
What will it take to make you
step away from your rigid stage of fear?
Come outside
to where the trees scratch the moon.
You may discover the freedom
of wide open laughter
in a new wide open tune.

Once Upon a Lie
By: Dave Wunz
Box 104, Fifth Freedom May-June 1975

I don't hang around where you are
Just to be near you,
It just happens you're there.
It doesn't bother me
if you don't notice,
I don't even care.
You didn't put this lonely,
haunted look in my eyes,
even though it came
the day I left
the day part of me died.
It's not because of you
that when I go to bed at night,
before sleep comes, I cry.
Go free yourself!
Love someone else!
Go find some other guy...
I'm not one of those fools
who expound loves' immortality
in prose, poetry, and rhyme.
Who say love doesn't die,'
it can't just be killed,
it just gets buried alive by time.
What we had once is gone.
Finished! Through!
What came before was before!
I don't love you,
you don't matter to me.
And I don't write you poems
anymore....
Graveside Sequel

By: Jimmie Gilliam, 1990
Box 39, Folder 39-18, Buffalo Journal

Freezing rain
on top of the freak snowstorm
kept us at the foot of the graveyard

we were not there, Mother
when they lowered your coffin
through the thick gate

broken earth/your grave
lies quilted/the funeral flowers
wrapped in ice

lilies of the valley
Cordie’s yellow rose/for faithfulness
our sweetheart roses shaped into a heart

your beloved violets
mountain irises/purple batons
you hand to me/I pass on
to Jill and Jenny

I dream you sat up
in your coffin at the funeral home
accuse me/you went off and left me
and I wasn’t even dead

you have sewn me
a grey coat/woven with sad thread

you would have me believe guilt
is the legacy of daughters

I am here to resurrect you Mother
I lift your body up
through red clay/fresh
the afternoon sun
breaks the iris free
their silver ice

you wear the classic black dress
the one you made yourself/from the Vogue pattern

I drape a long scarlet scarf
around your neck/sensual
red angles
between your breasts/your legs

I could never compare with you/Mother

It’s time for both us/to give up the grave
**Alone**
By: Fifth Freedom Editor
Box 104, Fifth Freedom December 1980

I sleep alone—again
It seems so many nights it’s been
Like this.
Alone.
No one to ask me where I’ve been
Or what mood I’m in
No kiss.
Alone.
An empty bed awaits me
No person or body waits for me.
No bliss.
Alone.
Dreams and fantasy
(hopefully) come quickly to me
Alone.

**Untitled**
By: Donna Serbert
Box 104, Fifth Freedom June 1976

If you profess a love of me
love also, the cadaver within me,
the blackness which creeps like moss,
where no eyes will ever see.
Yes, love the cadaver, as well as the niceness you believe me to be.

I have walked through your darkness
through mountains
of splintered glass
and carried dried roses from their grave
to a plastic bag to preserve the greatness
of their bloomed glory.

Yes. I am bargaining—
my cadaver heart for your darkness.
Yes. I dare deal with love—
love my walking dead heart,
and we will breathe spring,
and I will preserve the roses,
and pick up the glass,
and you will not bleed.
XIX
By: Heather Koeppel
Box 104, Fifth Freedom September 1976

do you feel it,

don’t you

i’m going to trace your smile
with my finger tips
pull you down
on top of me
and taste the inside
of your mouth
again and
again and
again

someday
i’m going to
love you
not in a shy way

XXVI
sappho
whatever happened
to the little girl
in the library
bored with kids stuff
who decided to
read the
skinniest book
in the
adult section

a thin blue book
of greek poetry

looking up the
isle of lesbos
on a map

UNTITLED
By: Madeline Davis
Box 89, Folder 89-35, February 1969

and even yesterday
in your room
as you raised your body
on one arm
to say — our clothes half discarded—

Lest make love

I could not believe how beautiful
your face made the candlelight

UNTITLED, II
June 26th, 1958

for you, and with you, and of you
I live. and for you I breathe
and of you. my me— which is soul
and flesh of the earth is you—
no longer my own.

I am a poet, not of the world
but of you, and for you, and with you.
I do not love you, for I do not love
love me, no, not me; but I am
of you and with you, and for you
I am yourself.