

## WHO IS THERE FOR ME?

by Dee Farmer

There is somebody for everybody. Who is there for me? These were the thoughts that were on Darlene's mind as she approached the pew. She knelt on the cushion inside the pew and before bowing her head to pray took notice of her surroundings. There were only a few people in the cathedral on this rainy morning. The candles flickered while rain clouded the colored windows and elderly ladies holding rosaries in one hand crossed themselves in the name of the Father, the Son, and ... with the other.

Today, the emptiness of the cathedral only seemed to mark the loneliness of Darlene's life. Usually, it was comforting to be alone in the spirit filled ... But, not now; it reminded her only of the lonely nights, occasional physical relationships and being alone in a world where everybody was after the American dream. She bowed her head and prayed: Oh Father, God I know that you have always been there for me. I know that you love me and the Holy Spirit is my comforter. But, God I am so lonely. I hurt so ... I don't have anybody to share my

dreams, hopes and all my silliness . . . Father, when I was little and everybody called me "the little ugly duckling" I prayed that you would let me grow-up to be pretty. And, you did. When I identified myself as a lesbian my family and friends abandoned me. But, you were there for me. You gave me the strength to overcome . . . Now, oh Father, God please give me somebody who can love me for me, please Father, please . . ."

Darlene left the cathedral still thinking about her prayer. Though, she was certain that many people did not understand she was certain that God did. After all doesn't God know everything, she thought.

If she had somebody who loved her, was for her and about her she would no longer have to seek comfort in one night stands, late night television and evening walks around the neighborhood.

Martha had grown up with Darlene. She married early to an older man and settled down in the role of housewife. Her and Darlene were close as children. But, after Darlene's coming out as a lesbian Martha's husband (Frank) had treated her so cruelly that Martha and Darlene only nodded to one another in passing. Darlene had recently heard the news that Martha's husband had beat her causing her to have a miscarriage.

And, she was now in a women's shelter on the other side of town. She headed to see her after leaving the cathedral.

At the House of Ruth Darlene was meet by a stern face lady who interrogated her thoroughly before allowing her to enter the premises. And, then only after Martha had said ~~it~~ it was alright.

Soon as their eyes meet they were in each other arms. Martha sobbed through swollen lips, blacken eyes and a bandaged nose. It's going to be alright Darlene told her over and over again. It's going to be alright.

They sat down with coffee. Martha said: "I am so glad that you come I really needed somebody ...". As she told the story of how her husband had abused her over the years, calling her names, beating her with belts across his knee as if she were a child and sometimes kicked her the tears rolled down her checks and onto her chin.

She told how two nights earlier he had come home "awful" late. And, when she asked him why he was so late he slapped her then pushed her and slapped her some more. When she tried to take refuge by the living room sofa he began to literally rip her clothes from her body. She said, he told me "I'll teach you who wears the pants around here." "And, at the same time he was

hitting me and hitting me. I didn't even know I was hemorrhaging until after he had went to sleep," she said. "I tiptoed out of the house with just my purse and took a cab to the hospital. When I told them I didn't want to go back home they helped me come here." At the end she attempted a smile - - which belied the swollen lips, blacken eyes and tears that marked her face.

At the door they hugged each other goodbye and Darlene promised she would visit again the following day.

That night Darlene prayed that God would be with Martha. That, he would make her well and heal the pain in her heart. She forgot all about the prayer she said in the cathedral that morning.

The next day Darlene was running a little behind schedule and didn't have a chance to stop at the cathedral for morning prayer. She was trying to think of what she could take Martha that would make her feel better.

When she arrived and gave Martha the gift wrapped packaged Martha was surprised. She hesitatntly opened the package and then laughed. "Oh, he is so cute," she exclaimed. The entire time Darlene was there Martha held the teddy bear in her arms, and sometimes hugged it. Darlene knew she had gotten the right thing.

As the time came closer for Martha to leave the shelter she became worried about where she would live and find work. Finally, it was agreed that she would take the extra bedroom at Darlene's house until she was able to get her own place.

~~After~~ she was settled in at Darlene's they spent time shopping for clothes, laughing over lunch and searching the want ads.

Sometimes, Darlene noticed Martha would have a far away look as if she were in another world. She always wondered, what she would be thinking about? Was the abusive relationship with her husband haunting her memory? Was the love for her husband aching in her heart? Darlene was completely unprepared one day when Martha came back from one of those far away places and said: "What is it like to be a lesbian?"

Darlene was certain there was no protocols for being a lesbian. The feelings and experiences varied from one lesbian to another. However, she could explain what it was like for her and she did. She began: "Being a lesbian for me has been more positive than negative." The negative is, it can be a very lonely and frightening. People who you thought were your friends suddenly no longer want to be your friend. Family that you thought would love you through thick and thin no longer want you around. The good: I am who I am. It feels good

that I don't have to hide who or what I am, but can freely be myself." At the end of the discussion they laughed and decided nothing in the world was without problems.

A couple months later, their use to be innocent touching became sensational, hugs became passionate and looks became caresses. The night that they made love on the floor in front of the stereo system the lyrics "it don't hurt, now; no, it don't hurt now" played through the speakers -- expressing the feelings of their hearts.

For four months they had a beautiful relationship. They feed each other, bathed one another and read to each other. Sometimes they simply laid in the dark and talked. Darlene's prayer was answered -- though she never thought about it.

They had slept in late and was shocked by the knock at the front door. Who could it be? The thought seemingly hit them both simultaneously. Martha instantly thought it was her husband. Darlene figured it was probably just a salesman or the gasman. She put on her robe and went to answer the door.

Soon~~y~~ as Darlene opened the door and saw guns pointed at her she screamed. Martha came running. The police officer said: "Are you Darlene \_\_\_\_\_ . We have a warrant for your arrest."

As she got dressed under the watchful

eyes of the police officers her and Martha stold glances at each other. They were looks of hurt. Looks of being wounded. Their world was being invaded. The system was stealing their love.

The officer placed Darlene in restraints and began escorting her to the patrol car. When she stooped to get into the car she <sup>and</sup> turned her head ~~and~~ there was Martha standing in the doorway crying and looking so lost and hurt. It was just like when she had first seen her in the shelter. As the patrol car pulled away Darlene tried to fight back the tears, but couldn't. She watched Martha standing in the doorway until she couldn't see her any more.

She leaned her head against the seat and thought: Why did they have to catch me when I finally had somebody to love me? Why did I write those damn checks? ;;; But, that had been four years ago.

At the police station she was permitted one telephone call. When Martha answered the telephone you could hear the hurt in her voice. Darlene tried to explain about the checks. But, mostly they cried and said I love you to one another.

On visiting day Martha was the first one there. They put their hands up to the glass barrier as if to touch. Their eye's beheld one another. Just being so close meant more than any of the words they said. Before, they knew it the phone

was dead; the visit was over. They didn't want to leave. As the officer lead Darlene away Martha's heart screamed with pain. Martha stood at the glass until they had taken Darlene through one of the steel prison doors and she could not see her anymore. Darlene went back to her cell and cried into her pillow.

Martha was there every visiting day and at every court appearance. She was there when the judge sentence Darlene to twelve years in prison.

Martha tried to be strong for Darlene. When Darlene would call crying on the phone saying she didn't know how she was going to make it. Martha would try to reassure her that everything was going to be alright. And, she would always be there for her.

Martha was good as her word. She continued to visit Darlene during her stay at the local jail. And, when Darlene was transferred to the prison upstate Martha drove half the night once every month to visit. They wrote each other constantly.

But, after the first year the visits became less and less frequent. The visits went to twice a year then to once a year. Finally, Martha moved out-of-state and their contact was completely lost.

In prison Darlene lived with alot of the same kind of homophobia she had experienced during her teenage years. The name calling, isolation and

harassment she recieved from other prisoners was not new to her. It was just that she thought she would never have to "live" with it again. None of these things had really mattered when she had Martha, but now it was as if the whole world was tumbling down on her.

She noticed how the staff and inmates whispered when she passed them. How when she sat at the table all the other inmates would get up and leave. She felt so lonely and rejected. Who is there for me ... This was the thought that was forever revolving in her mind.

Even the inmates who had hugged her so tight in the shower, made passionate love with her in the middle of the night and confessed to care during moments of passion didn't associate with her in public. Apparently, what she had shared with these inmates had just been to ease the pain that they felt, all the inmates, ~~and~~ from being locked away from family, friends, husbands, lovers and children.

Sitting on the side of her bed compemplating the pains of prison life Darlene wondered ... She looked around ... there was Diania laying across her bunk with her walkman radio on and her eyes closed. Probably thinking about her kids, her lover or her mother that wore pretty hats every Sunday and always cried at the end of the visit. And, over there is ...

Diania looked up just as Darlene was turning here attention elsewhere. Diania rubbed her breast and slid her hands over her thighs. She got up from her bunk -- never taking her eyes off Darlene -- retrieved her shower articles and headed for the shower room. Darlene followed ...

It was time to ease the pains of doing time ...

Dee Farmer  
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August 8, 1992

Judy Greenspan

[REDACTED]  
Oakland, California 94610

Dear Judy:

Enclosed is a carbon copy of my piece,  
Who Is There For Me? It is fiction on a lesbian  
relationship. I like the feel of the piece. But,  
I think the relationship is too predictable and the  
female-male abusive relationship is stereotyped.

Please give me your thoughts. I am thinking  
about submitting to Cold Iron or perhaps one of  
the prison writing contests. The piece still has to  
be edited. Plus, it could be longer -- more detailed  
-- it's just that I can't stand something that goes  
on and on ... Just give me the facts!! (smile)

Well, let me know what you think.

Love and Sisterhood,

  
Dee Farmer