

Bloodroot Feminist Vegetarian Restaurant & Bookstore - Reflections

Overview

Bloodroot Feminist Vegetarian Restaurant and Bookstore opened in the Black Rock neighborhood of Bridgeport, CT in March 1977. Founded by a collective of Lesbians under the guidance of Selma Miriam, Bloodroot served as an important gathering place for Lesbians, especially on Wednesday evenings. These are a few reflections of long-time patrons of Bloodroot.

Summary

On June 29, 2024, Wanderground and a small group of Old Lesbians gathered at Bloodroot Feminist Vegetarian Restaurant and Bookstore for brunch, conversation, and fun. The event was co-sponsored by Wanderground and Rainbow Elders (based in New Haven, CT). Overall, those who attended agreed that Bloodroot has been (and continues to be) an important gathering place for Lesbians. Bloodroot offered a place where Lesbians meet their friends, access reading materials and artwork, attend music performances or listen to speakers and authors, and enjoy delicious vegetarian food. Lesbians could safely be “out” – hold hands, kiss, hug – and generally be free to be themselves.

Those who agreed to be interviewed remembered specific events such as attending a concert by Maxine Feldman, enjoying Wednesday “women-only” nights and the G.Knapp Historical Society, sharpening kitchen knives and washing dishes, sponsoring organizing events for Connecticut NOW (National Organization of Women), and coming to better understanding of oneself as a Lesbian.

“It was—it’s been a wonderful place! Thank you, thank you, Bloodroot, thank you, thank you! It’s like coming home.” – Interview with Kathy Lewis

Audio Quotes from Interview

🔊 — indicates sound clip available

Barbara Gill – A Safe Place (1:03)

🔊 Years ago, when Bloodroot first was established, I was significantly younger and alone, and just looking for a place to go where I can just be—period—you know. And on Wednesdays, especially, this was a safe place to go, and I chose to sit, isolated, in the corner, by myself, and that was fine, and just to get the energy and the reinforcement of who I was—and who I still am. And the energy continues to this day to be the same welcoming, safe place—



M: For Lesbians.

B: Yes, and I think that's a tribute to the women [who founded Bloodroot]. I knew Selma briefly prior to her establishing the restaurant and—I just have fond memories of those times of being safe and welcomed. Here I still am, feeling those same things

Kathy Lewis – On Maxine Feldman (:51)

🔊 Maxine Feldman was a singer-songwriter friend of ours and she came here one night to entertain. She's a big woman with a very powerful voice; she didn't need a PA system but they had one for her and, um [indistinct].... When [Bloodroot] first opened up, I was wondering every time I came here: are these neighbors accepting the fact that Lesbians are coming here? So here's Maxine with this wonderful song that she had written, it starts off very low and [indistinct], and ends up with the very last word as loud as she could sing it: "LESBIAN!" And I thought, well, if the neighborhood didn't know yet, they know now. [Chuckles.]



(Archive note – the song is "Angry Atthis" and can be found on the album, Closet Sale)

Kathy Lewis – On the G. Knapp Historical Society (1:13)



🔊 Oh, Goody Knapp, yes! [Clears throat.] In order to have a women-only space, we had to have an organization. In order to say Wednesday nights would be women-only, we had to have an organization [that met on that night]. We named it after a woman who was hung as a witch back in 17-something-or-other: we named it after her, the Goody Knapp Herstorical Society.

M: 'Cause she was hung in this area, the Black Rock area.

K: Yes, yes, [indistinct]. Kim—my partner, Kim Kimber—[who was] only four-foot-five inches tall, would sit on an end table chair so she had a good view right out the window. [Clears

throat.] If she saw a man coming, she would say “Noel!” And Noel would get the message and drop whatever she was doing and run and get a menu [that] said: “Wednesday: Goody Knapp Hers[torical Society]”—or, “private meeting only,” or something like that, and she would run out the door with the menu and give it to the guy, so [indistinct]... But I could, I could still hear Kim shouting, “Noel!” [Laughs.]

(Archive note – More about Goody Knapp can be found in The Witchcraft Delusion in Colonial Connecticut, 1647-1697 by John M. Taylor. Located in Wanderground in Mev Collection of Bloodroot files)

A NOTE about Kathy Lewis: Kathy had been a woodworker and she knew a lot about keeping her tools sharpened. She volunteered weekly to sharpen the kitchen knives at Bloodroot and became known as “the Queen of Swords.” (Dual reference – a play written by Judy Grahn published in 1987 AND a card in the Tarot Deck.) See more about Kathy Lewis in the Exploring Archives Collection.

Also, Kathy Lewis has two pictures of family members hanging on the “Portrait Wall” at Bloodroot. In an email dated May 23, 2025, Kathy wrote: “These pictures have been hanging on Bloodroots walls for almost 50 years now. I’m super honored to have them there.” Picture of Kathy standing front of the wall is included in the file.

Photo of three women: “On the left is Kathleen Dunn my mom’s best friend their whole lives and the woman I’m named after. Mom (Anita Altermatt Lewis) is in the middle. My uncle’s wife Francis is on right.”

Photo of woman in front of wagon with pitchfork: “The woman with the pitchfork is my Dad’s sister, Florance. She sent me down her gay genes.”

Linda Bray

Linda Bray recounts feeling welcomed to Bloodroot as an evolving Lesbian and mother, as well as her involvement with vegetarianism and vegetarian restaurants and softball.

... coming here on Wednesday nights, it was just a—a safe place, you know. Actually, as an evolving Lesbian, um... the first time I came here was with a guy.

....[He was] someone who, when I think back, you know, was quite androgynous, but it was a great education... for him, that we came here together. And then, of course it was only right that I came back after having really come out.... You know, in some ways, knowing that it was a pretty open place for everyone... [that] may be partly why it’s continued, [why] it still exists is that.... It was open to people who wanted good vegetarian food—and was known for that—and then to be able to come back for women-only nights as someone who had been married to a man, had a daughter.... Actually at that time, coming out in New Haven, it was pretty radically Feminist and not super friendly, at *that* time, to women with children that they had had with a

man. There were Lesbian places that didn't feel welcome to those of us that had kids from former marriages, etc., and I did bring her here. So, during that transitional time, it was—it was great to come here [Bloodroot] as a tolerant place, and then later as a safe space, and then of course it was, a couple years later, it was coming her with my to-be spouse.

Donna Stimpson

Donna Stimpson, former president of Connecticut NOW, recalls meetings at Bloodroot.

"... I am a past president of Connecticut NOW. I'm also a former member of the National Organization for Women's Lesbian Committee. We had chapters then, back in the day, there were over 9,000 women who were members of Connecticut NOW, and we would have regional meetings, and so Bridgeport was one of the places—*Bloodroot* was one of the places that we would gather and have discussions and discuss laws that we wanted passed or demonstrations that we were gonna have in the area and also in Hartford."

Related Items in Wanderground Collection

- Bloodroot cap & T-shirts
- G. Knapp T-shirt
- Cookbooks (Political Palates 1-3)
- Bumper sticker – Vegetarians Taste Better
- Photos
 - Kathy Lewis in front of picture wall and two-family photos
 - Photo of Lesbians who met together for lunch, June 29, 2024
- Post & Greeting Cards
 - Selma Miriam
 - Photos by Noel Furie
- Closet Sale album by Maxine Feldman

Details

- Interview with: Barbara Gill, Donna Stimpson, Kathy Lewis, Linda Bray
Topic(s): Reminiscences and/or feelings about Bloodroot, G. Knapp Society, women's night, Maxine Feldman, women's spaces
- Date & How Recorded: June 29, 2024 via Digital Recorder
- Interviewed by: Mev Miller
- Summary Prepared by: Mev Miller