

# FAITH NOLAN

**Prominent Halifax singer-songwriter speaks to the Gazette on lesbianism, socialism and racial issues..**

by julie sims

Faith Nolan is a performer from Halifax who had a concert in the Dalhousie McInnes Room on October 8. Her performance was part of the Atlantic Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Conference, and was presented by the Bisexual, Gay, and Lesbian Association of Dalhousie, BGLAD! And I got to interview her!!!!

First, I should tell you a bit about the concert, in case you missed it. First of all, Faith asked for the lights to be turned up so that she could communicate with the audience. During the performance she joked a lot. One time she did not pause long enough between her songs so no one had a chance to clap, she said, "You know, you don't have to clap for me, it happened to me many times," and she pretended to cry. Another time she said, sarcastically, "Once I had a friend who was a lesbian, she was very clean. She didn't look like a man or anything!!" (I'm having trouble deciding which things she said were funniest so I'll write one more.) For one song the opening act, A Bunch of Women Who Sing (a local group), go up to sing with her. She called this the "cross-cultural" experience. Faith, a black woman, with A Bunch of Women Who Sing, ten white women.

Now it's time for the interview. I have only done one previous interview, which was for the radio, so I was completely terrified. I explained this to her; she was great. I'd ask a short question and she'd elaborate so I don't say much in this interview.

**Faith:** As a singer, guitar player, songwriter you get like, not really deep people who interview you for music festivals and things. They always ask you things like, 'Oh, so when did you start to play the guitar? What does music mean to you? And isn't music so spiritual?' It's like, 'Yeah, I play guitar, so?! Why don't you interview someone who builds a house and ask how the carpentry works?' That's the technique of it, that's just technical stuff.

**Julie:** So, you are a socialist?

**F:** Yes, I'm definitely a socialist, left socialist. I find the issues are all connected. Some people have monocause, because they're only concerned about the issues that affect them directly. They haven't really seen that the struggle for their own equality is the struggle for everyone's equality. I suppose we need people who are extremist and only do one thing, but it's more divisional and creates a lack of caring because people think I'm doing enough here so I don't have to worry about anything else.

**J:** You sang a song that went, "If you don't know my people, how the hell can you know me?" So I'm wondering how can we get to know your people?

**F:** By having friends in my social life and by going to demonstrations that support their (Philippine workers, natives, etc.) struggles, then I, as a black woman, get to know. That is the only way.

Many people on the first approach, when I've gone to demonstrations for various things, have been hostile. Particularly if they were not of my race, my sex, my class, whatever. There's been hostility. That hostility is bread of distrust, and there's a reason for that distrust. [Many issues] have juxtaposed themselves because of racism, which has been used as a divisional tool.



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I have to say, 'I know I don't understand your struggles fully but I know that you suffer and I'm willing to go as far with you as I can. I know that by my own actions, my different abilities, I have discriminated against you, and continue to do so because I'm working to try to change myself and change society so these things won't happen.'

**J:** Are you from Africville?

**F:** No, my sister spent a few years in Africville. And my parents spent some time there when they came in from Cape Breton. I was born on West Street in the North End.

**J:** So, you know a lot about Africville? There were 800 people living there, they lived there for 150 years, and it was the largest black ghetto in Canada?

**F:** Yes, black community, actually.

**J:** OK, this is what I wanted to talk to you about. During your concert last night you called it a 'ghetto'. At least one person is offended that you called it a ghetto, so I was wondering, is 'ghetto' bad?

**F:** A ghetto is any group of people who are similar, who share a similar

thing. You know many people call Church Street (Toronto), 'the Gay Ghetto'. But ghetto, to be honest and true with the word, ghetto stems from where black people lived in the United States, and it was seen as being a slum. Africville was not a slum until it wasn't given its proper services. They located the dump for Halifax not even a mile away, so all the rats and diseases came up there. It was purposely neglected. It started out as a wealthy and well-to-do black community. I mean no offense [by calling it a ghetto]. I should not have used that word. I would correct myself because it was a community.

**J:** What about lesbian and gay issues?

**F:** I think it's important that the lesbians and gay struggle also includes the struggles for women's equality, for racial equality. Because lesbians and gays are not just white. We can't ignore lesbians and gays in Russia. Therefore we can't ignore the struggles of those people.

People are not just compartmentalized by the type of genitalia sex they are having. Really we can't ignore the struggle against patriarchy because that's what homophobia is all about. That men have to be butch and women have to be femme and they have to get together on those terms. We have to fight against that. It's not simply, let me rub my genitals against this person with genitals like me. The right-wing administration will say, 'Yes, go ahead, we accept you.' If you say, 'We want the boundaries changed. We want that men can stay home and nurture, and women can go out.' Then we have trouble. It's easy to be accepted as lesbian and gay as long as you are a right-wing fascist lesbian and gay. We are not going to have to change the system. We are just going to call ourselves Mrs. and Mrs., and Mr. and Mr. We're not going to question what Mrs. means and what Mr. means.

**J:** So...what else do you want in the paper?

**F:** I'd like to say that the Black Women's Collective is starting up again in Toronto. And I've been working for a couple of years on building a camp for women, focusing on lesbians and women of colour. We're hoping to create a political education atmosphere. It's called 'Camp Sis'. Anyone who would like to find out more or get involved, you should write to us, PO Box 690, Station P, Toronto, M4S...oh my god, I forgot my postal code. Anyway, it will just take a while to get there.

It's important to note that we are moving forward and we have moved forward. Remember that ten years ago I could not sit in this university and say that I was a lesbian. I remember a lesbian and gay march I went on in the late '70s in Halifax, we wore paper bags over our heads so we wouldn't be recognized. So times are changing. We have to take credit for where we have gone forward and that we continue to move forward because we will stand up, and we will speak out.

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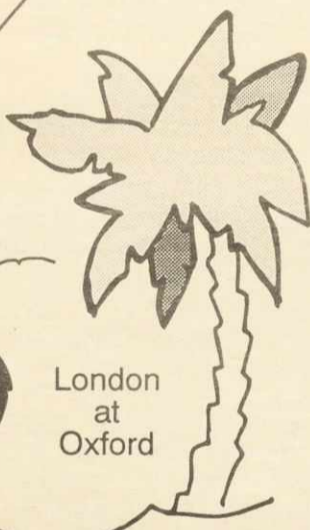
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