

SPRING 2002

Dear Diary-

We arrived chanting down in Denver, down in Denver, even though it was beautiful and sunny. When we got to the Metro College campus the converted church we were scheduled to perform in was already full of about 3 hundred diverse students waiting to be enlightened. There was even a SOLD OUT sign on the front door! The audience was hungry and we fed them lots of guerrilla facts. We also gave them the stats of the local Denver Theatre Center, which received lots of boos. Our favorite was mingling with the crowd after the gig. We met some awesome women, including the mother of young Javier, the first child who I didn't scare in my mask.

We packed up our Guerrilla-mobile (a rented Buick) and went further south to Colorado Springs. But we couldn't pass up the opportunity to take a quick stroll through Focus on the Family, the organization that had once gotten an anti-gay and lesbian bill passed in the state. We just had to take pictures of ourselves in front of their welcome sign. Although the anti-gay and lesbian bill is no longer law the group is still a major force in the state. We arrived in Colorado Springs where we presented our Gig in the auditorium that also doubles as the home for the community theatre company. In the dressing room there were about 60-framed posters hanging that depicted the history of the company. Wouldn't you know it, not one was a poster for a play by a woman. When we told the audience this fact the artistic director of the company, who was in the audience, actually got up out of his seat and went back stage to check our stats! Once again the audience was great and everyone there asked if we could stay longer to help fight Focus on the Family. After our performance we drove back up to Denver in a snow storm and stayed at our favorite hotel, AmeriSuites.

-Hallie Flanagan

Metropolitan State College – Denver, March 2002*

*Voted best multi-cultural event on campus

Dear Diary,

Well, by the time our tiny plane hit the runway in Sioux City, Iowa, I was stuffed with pretzels and coffee and Buena Vista University was getting good and ready for Guerrilla Girls On Tour. Now Buena Vista is settled in Storm Lake, but the week before, some of the students ventured to Des Moines to check out Eve Ensler's "The Vagina Monologues." It was one of activities the undergrads attend to celebrate Women's History Month (March, for those of you in the dark, hello). The students, thus inspired, took to the streets with chalk, proudly announcing on walkways "I love my vagina!" and "My Vagina talks" and "I got good vag." Vagina even took over t-shirts--some women took to wearing "I've got good vag" on their backs. Some male students protested. They were upset, wrote letters to editors how they were horrified at the behavior and would never allow their daughters to attend such a crass institution--all of which I found interesting. See, the school mascot is the beaver, and the same boys who were too delicate for "I've got good vag" t-shirts have no problem wearing shirts that say, "I like beaver warm and my beer cold." Huh. Go figure. Aphra and I recognize a good thing when we see it, and with vagina fever taking over the campus, it was obvious we had to open our Gig holding up signs that said VAGINA. Vagina lovers cheered, and the humorless students sat quietly. And that's pretty much how the rest of the Gig went, till the Q & A session. This young man started things off with a question from the back. "Do you guys have your rabies shot?" And all the quiet students were suddenly all a titter, and the quiet spectators were out to discredit us. Another baseball-capped boy tried to challenge us: "What do you think of Title IX?" "We're all for equality in spending in sports for men and women," said Aphra. "No, you're missing the point. Title IX has nothing to do with money!" But before the kid got to high five his friend, another guy in the audience shot back. "Yeah, since the Guerrilla Girls On Tour have talked about theatre and politics, I don't see why you have to answer a question about sports." Applause, laughter; heated glances. People rustling in their seats, talking. It was like a scene from "West Side Story."

Things only seemed to escalate when we mingled with students. One young man cornered me. "What do you think about the statue of the firemen in New York City? It was three white guys who put out the flag, but now it's like a black guy and a Spanish guy? How can you say anything against George Bush and Mayor Guiliani? You know, George Bush has to push back those Mexicans because they keep sneaking into Texas. You can't say nothing about Jesse Jackson without everyone jumping down your back. How come everyone gets hyper about

Matthew Shepherd, but when a Northwestern football player died, we can't say anything. Do you listen to Dr. Laura? She says you know feminism set women back. She says women are the luckiest people on earth. You know, we can't say anything. Don't you understand white men are the only unprotected race on earth? You should understand, you're a white woman."

I'm a white woman? I mean I know I had a mask on but my name IS Anna May Wong and didn't he listen to my intro? Apparently not. I was so shocked that anyone could think like this. He was so racist and sexist, I felt like I was meeting a Nazi.

Next, after greeting some supporters and students who thanked us for coming and hugged us, Carla, the head of ACES who brought us to the school, was visibly distraught. She told us that there was a male student who was threatening to sexually assault us and that he was waiting for us outside. Great. I didn't know what the hell we would find outside the auditorium, but Aphra and I went, and there he was: This chubby boy, playing solitaire on his lap top with a sign taped to his computer: "How's this for free speech: Sexually Assault a Guerrilla Girl On Tour! Or at least that's what Aphra told me it said as I was too upset to really read the sign; the message was too violent. But I decided to take his picture, because we need to show people that yeah, the world still needs the Guerrilla Girls On Tour. I sat next to him on one side, Aphra on the other, and we posed, the kid silent the whole time.

After locking ourselves into our motel room and pushing furniture in front of the door (I'm not kidding. Better safe than sorry) we spent the night talking about how in the 17 years we have been around we had never gotten a threat like that before. And we are in Iowa!

The next day, we headed back to campus for a classroom visit and were greeted in the parking lot by Carl, the security guard. Apparently, before our gig and during the night, that same boy with the laptop had posted signs that said, "How's this for free speech: Kill a Guerrilla Girl," and it was time for safe measures. We got copies of his missive once we were in the classroom. "Actually, this is not free speech," Suzanne the Women's Studies teacher said, holding up the sign. "This is a hate crime, which is illegal." It's unnerving, fer sure, to have your life threatened. It's just a young student, and maybe he didn't know what he was saying, but there are also guns easily available at the local Wal-Mart. We went around the room to hear what students had to say. Some said they were ashamed by the behavior of the audience to the point they were thinking of transferring; some were scared of that disturbed kid who threatened us. We talked about the problems of the campus. There was a date rape case that was on a lot of people's minds; we talked about the problem of creating a safe reception for campus guests like us GGOT. We encouraged them to call campus security if they were feeling unsafe, that they needed to keep up their excitement and turn into change. One girl seemed distraught said "It's no way to live, to wake up and have to call security right away." She's right, of course, but what's the alternative? All this hoopla and anger and hostility was sparked by, what, one tiny word? Not a curse word, not a dirty word, but a part of the female anatomy? That's ridiculous. Because you say something someone doesn't like, are you not aloud to speak? Do you deserve to feel unsafe? Last I heard, this was still a democracy, not some fascist state. You have a right to say what you want, you need to stick up for what you believe is right. After that death threat, I realized there's no room for keeping quiet; you keep quiet, you're just agreeing to the bullies. The next campus guests were drag queens, invited for gay pride week, and we talked about possible security measures for those guests, and it was exciting place to be--that class room. Yes, it was scary and unnerving that someone might get hurt, but also, it was wonderful--you could tell that change was imminent. Several students said they had found their calling due to these events. One woman said she was going to law school, and another admitted "I'm scared of what's going to happen on this campus next, but I'm excited too. I have totally found my calling." It was inspiring to be around such bright women and man (the class had one male student--a whip smart dude who talked down Title IX guy in our audience the night before) who were excited and creative about making change happen. Yay, tolerance! Yay, equality! It was great to end our visit with these students because it really helped my blood pressure go down. Here's my poem for Iowa.

Vagina Haiku.
A va-va-voom vag
turns a Buena Vista to
Vista Hermosa

[Anna May Wong](#)
Buena Vista University*, Storm Lake, Iowa – April 2002

*We will return to Buena Vista U in February of 2003 for a follow-up weekend of workshops and master classes with the students.

Dear Diary-

Feminists can be your best friends or your worst enemies! On this Gig I received my first piece of hate mail. (Well, maybe it wasn't really hate mail but it was VERY critical.) Anyway, we did our signature Gig and in true GGOT fashion had prepared by doing a 5- minute research on Colby College by looking at their web site. (Everyone always asks for current stats so how more current could we get!) On the Colby site we found that the theatre department had only produced one woman playwright and had no women directors. We informed the Colby audience of this fact and low and behold, a professor in the theatre department (who happened to be sitting in the front row) got very upset with us for dissing her department! But did she say anything then? NO! She wrote us a scathing letter the next day! (See Girl Talk) In her letter she accused us for not mentioning the fact that in the theatre department there is a female professor (currently on hiatus) who specializes in plays by women. Well excuse me! If she can quell her guilt by going to bed at night justifying the discrimination in the department with a professor currently on hiatus then good for her. (As if you can take a hiatus from sexism and discrimination!) Just guess who was the speaker the month prior. Hint: Relative of someone whose last name is Bush. So the important thing to remember is beware when armed with facts. Some people will hate you for it.

Coco Chanel –
Colby College, Maine – April 2002

Dear Diary,

We arrived in San Francisco in a layer of fog. Yes, we were exhausted from our tour and SF was the last stop. We checked into the Stanford Terrace Inn under our assumed names, and immediately took the shuttle bus to the mall. OK, I could say that we immediately went to the Stanford Library and looked up the records of former provost and graduation speaker Condelezza Rice, but we went shopping instead. The next day we felt guilty and hit the museum on campus where we counted only ONE painting by a woman in the modern art section! We consoled ourselves by having expensive chicken salads in the museum café and left for our Gig. Our tech person, Hap, was great and had us set up in no time. The room we performed in was more of a lecture hall and there was no entrance in the rear so Coco and Anna May figured out a way to crawl in through the back windows to start the Gig. As Coco yelled out 'Hello Stanford' from the back her voice boomed out from the speakers in the front of the room so for a moment the audience thought they were all having an out of our bodies, ourselves, experience. The crowd was great and we connected with a law professor who volunteered to help us challenge the law that states you can protest in a mask. The next day we led a workshop for 20 students who, over the course of the afternoon, came up with some amazing ideas. By the end of the day they had 5 great posters and all had their protests voices warm and ready for action. One of their posters Vanity Fare is so good we are considering ripping it off!

Aphra Behn
Stanford University, Palo Alto, California – April 2002