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ESOTERIC
is a project of
The Nashville Feminist Collective

HBIC

Whitney Washington

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Founder

Brooke Sonenreich

We want YOU to contribute to ESOTERIC!

The theme of our next issue is **RELATIONSHIPS** ...and contemporary love

chosen families
conflict & resolution
to the self
to substances
interracial relationships
friendships challenged by politics
friendships as source of support
non-monogamous/poly relationships
relationships affected by disability
relationships affected by transition

We center the work of women and gendernon-conforming people of color.

Send your poetry, short fiction, personal stories, artwork, reviews, comics, etc. to esoteric.nashville@gmail.com
by June 30, 2017 (for RELATIONSHIPS)

Please include image descriptions with your submissions so that our zine may be accessible to those who use screen-readers to experience Esoteric through the NFC website. Image descriptions are straight-forward descriptions of the image, using whatever terms you like. If you include an image of yourself, we especially need an image description so that you may describe yourself as you want to be understood.

'Skins" -B.Elae And thank you for your best efforts in holding me together while a world so beautiful yet so careless attempted to pull me apart Unapologetically wearing your best suit the color of honey, and pouring glitter over my scars And though your presence makes them stare, they are more captivated by the presence of a story waiting to be told A cocoon for my most delicate pieces Incessant in trying to keep me safethough you are only mine only for so long Picked to grip the most expensive pieces of me And then to peel away and turn to fairy dust Allowing my soul to finally develop her wings

"Nest" -B.Elae

Helping hold me together made up of many genres of songs
I'd spent time looking for a place to live,
when I'd had somewhere all along

and fly towards complete peace

with the rest of me

B.Elae is a writer, poet, spoken word artist, and victims' advocate born in South Bend, Indiana. She began writing at a young age and has continued using poetry and letters to share her story with hopes to touch others. Her work has been featured on blogs including "HerStory" and in multiple magazines including Indiana University South Bend's Michiana Monologues. She is currently working on her first solo poetry and letters book which will be released later this year. To view and follow more of her quotes, letters and pieces, or to contact her to perform, follow and contact her on Instagram at: b.elae or on Facebook at B.Elae! We welcome all inquiries, booking engagements, conversations, and opportunities for meeting and working with great people. <3

NFC Voices

Esoteric asked 2 questions at our Jan members' meeting:

1.) What was your experience of/reaction to the Women's March (Jan 21, 2017)

2.) Where do we, as a social justice community, go



from here? Respondents identified themselves in their own terms.



RONI, Middle Eastern/North African bisexual: "It was a lot of people – it was exciting to see older feminists. It was validating to know not only young women are feeling this way. From here I'd like us to become more intersectional and center Black women."

FELICIA, liberal female "quadroon with a heart of gold": "Overwhelming in a good way – especially that there were so many young women.... From here I'd like to see us gaining momentum for Nashville organizations that don't have a voice."



BEX, very disabled non-binary Latinx: "I boycotted for disability reasons. Accessibility advertised for the march was very minimal. Disabled [people I am connected with] had been excluded from the planning of the march. From here I'd like to see the movement become more accessible – to include various forms of

protest and contributions to reforming society as equally valuable."

JAHLANI, Black Muslim bisexual non-binary woman: "As a Black woman it made me happy...in a way to see white women come out to support a march in such huge numbers, but it also made me wonder if they will come out for our marches, because in the past white women have condemned Black Lives Matter protests...and said they're not necessary and things like that. You know, white feminists and stuff. I would like to see more inclusiveness. Nashville's march was very inclusive, mostly women of color were the speakers. And I didn't see [much] white supremacy, but there were moments when I was like, 'Hmm – that sign shouldn't say *Native Lives Matter* because *Black Lives Matter* is a phrase created by queer Black women for Black people and Black people alone.' Native people have their own hashtags and movements...that I'm fully behind."

NFC members helped Power Together TN with some of the planning for the March. NFC ensured that women of color were highly represented in the speakers, and the line-up was coordinated by Anna Carella. Speakers at the March were: Brenda Perez (Sureñxs En Accion), Jahlani Smothers-Pugh (Gideon's Army), Martha Lugo and Veronica Zavaleta (TIRRC), Heidi Rogers (Nat. Asian Pacific American Women's Forum), Zulfat Surara (American Muslim Advisory Council), Marisa Richmond (TN Transgender Political Coalition), Jayanni Webster (West TN labor organizer), Francie Hunt (Planned Parenthood), Zacnite Vargas (TIRRC), Rev. Judy Cumming (New Covenant Christian Church), Kutonia Smith-Bond (MCRU), Briana Perry (NFC/Healthy and Free TN), Jackie Sims (Project Return/Open Table), Renata Soto (Conexion), Bonnie Dow and Holly McCall (WTF/Emerge TN), Nella Pearl Frierson (Brooklyn Heights Comm. Garden), Brandon Thomas (Candidate for TN State House), and Vencen Horsley (Freedom Riders).



On MLK Day 2017, Whitney Washington and Christine Doza were invited to speak on the WXNA show "Transmissions" about Esoteric, NFC, (intersectional) feminism, racial justice and politics.

As an Asian Female, my flesh has been dangerously defined by society. My "demographic" is largely excluded from media such as television, film, music, and news, except as a token symbol of diversity or an entire genre of pornography - "Asian." My personhood is often defined by either model minority or hypersexualized stereotypes, constantly threatening my well-being and safety and resulting in a life of constant trauma, coping, and healing from trauma. To give meaning to my suffering, I find refuge in music and community, hoping to help others feel less alone in their own silenced traumas and struggles.

Recently I learned that while 1 in 4 women are sexually assaulted [in their lifetimes], 51% of Asian women are. As an eleven-year-old child, I experienced childhood sexual abuse and entered into adolescence with post-traumatic stress and a pattern of re-victimization. Boys would ask me which way my vagina slanted. In middle school, the first boy I had consensual intercourse with immediately objectified me by commenting on how the stereotypes about the "tightness" of Asian bodies was true. At the age of fifteen, I fell prey to a repeat statutory rapist not realizing what I had experienced until adulthood. Into adulthood, I have experienced date rape, intimate partner abuse, and sexual harassment.

Through years of sliding-scale counseling at the Sexual Assault Center of Middle Tennessee, I have been addressing things like re-victimization, establishing healthy needs & boundaries, and how to take care of my body and my self. Not only are brains altered by trauma but so are bodies. I currently prioritize massage as a way to address my chronic pain, connecting with rather than dissociating from my body. Basic things like drinking enough water, breathing deeply, exercising, eating a balanced diet consistently, and sleeping are a constant challenge, especially because with post-traumatic stress you are constantly in fight-or-flight mode.

Music has always been my main source of healing. It is how I connect with my innermost thoughts and feelings, processing and reprocessing them. I theorize that much like EMDR [eye movement desensitization and reprocessing] therapy, playing music provides bilateral stimulation as we engage both sides of our bodies and brains, allowing us to

reprocess traumas and deep emotional experiences. Through playing music, composing, performing and recording, I find meditative states and form profound connections with myself, my community, and my support system. Through singing, I connect with my body, my breath, and my voice.

As a musical artist and educator, my primary goals are to spread the countless benefits & healing properties of music to others in hopes of cultivating healthier individuals and communities. As founder & piano instructor of Melodia Studio, I teach students as young as three and as old as retirees. My long-term goals are to offer infant & toddler music classes and eventually form a non-profit connecting private music instructors to low-income students in their own neighborhoods, making healing through music accessible to all.

Artistically, I hope that by sharing my experiences, others may feel less alone. Born and raised in the American South, my latest album attempts to honor and explore my American heritage and the African-American roots of American music - blues, jazz, rock'n'roll. I have gone to great lengths to make it an all-analog vinyl album, theorizing that acoustic and analog sound waves have more psycho-acoustic healing properties than digitized sound. For my next major project, I hope to learn more about my Vietnamese roots, exploring Vietnamese and American folk music, building a bridge between my heritage in the American South and the Vietnamese South. I hope by doing this, I can heal & connect more deeply with my own flesh and blood, the flesh and blood of my peers, and the flesh and blood of all peoples.

Ariel Bui's self-titled album can be found at local record stores, digital retailers, or directly from the artist herself at www.arielbui.com, where you can also find upcoming events, archived radio shows & more. She hosts Hello Hooray on WXNA 101.5 FM Mondays from 11-noon, bringing on guests from Nashville's arts & activist community. And for more information about music lessons, visit www.melodiastudio.com. To directly support a woman of color in the arts, you can become a monthly patron for as little as \$1/mo at Patreon.com/arielbui for exclusive behind-the-scenes.



I Am Boldness

Esoteric's Interview with Nella Pearl Frierson of Brooklyn Heights Community Garden - 2/20/2017

Esoteric: What made you interested in doing the centerfold for this issue?

Nella Pearl: Well, body imagery among women is very important. I am sixty and a half (years old) and I've finally started loving the skin I'm in, know how to take care of it, and also how to make it better. And I wanted to get across to some young women – and some older women – that you are enough. That your shape is your shape, so own it. If you want to change it, by all means do that, but never be, say, a full figured woman and just wish that you were smaller, and not do anything about it, or just hate yourself because of how you look. So I want to tell the world that I am beautiful and you are too.



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E: What has your journey to body positivity looked like over your lifetime?

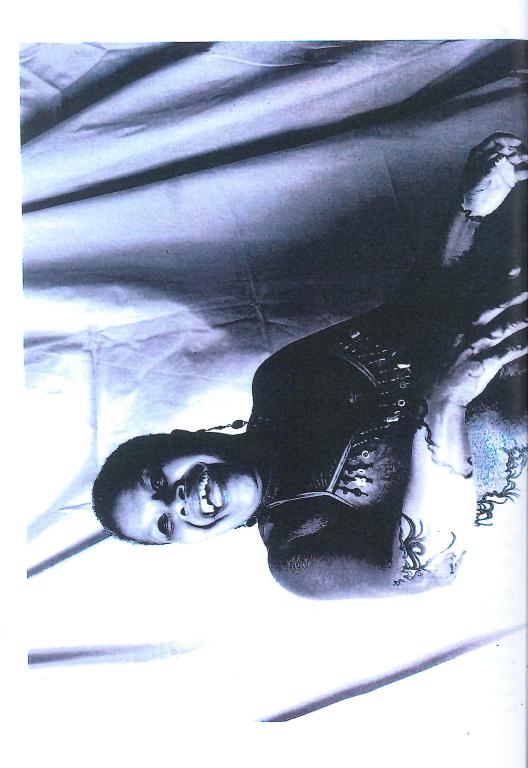
Nella Pearl: All my life I was told I shouldn't wear that, I laugh too loud, I don't sleep enough, I sleep too late, I do too much, I'm too silly, I dance too much - sit down! Now I live my life boldly, out loud, on purpose. I am bold! I am alive! I will live my life my way, with joy, love, and laughter! I came from a family of ten children. When I was born my father wanted a son, so I heard that all my life. And I never liked my feminine side - never liked my curves, my big lips, my breasts – because I wanted to please him, so I was in denial of what were actually my gifts. I fought that up until I was in my late thirties, when I just concluded that I am enough. I am beautiful. It took me a long time because I always tried to look like what I saw on TV or in the magazines, or even what I saw in my own home. My sisters were real tall, thin, curvy, real hair down to their shoulders. I never had any hair. I had acne. I stuttered. I always had a big fat face with a gap in my teeth. I always felt ugly because everybody would say to my sisters, "Y'all are so pretty!", and they would see me and say, "Is she your sister???" And that would just stab a hole in my heart. But my sisters, they loved me and would say "YES she's our sister. Why did you say that?" And they'd say, "Oh no reason." But they never did say I was beautiful. So I was looking for my beauty on the outside, that someone would give to me, or say to me. But I realized that my beauty is inwards as well as outwards, but I have to own it. I have to be the one to say, "I am beautiful, I am enough, and I am special."

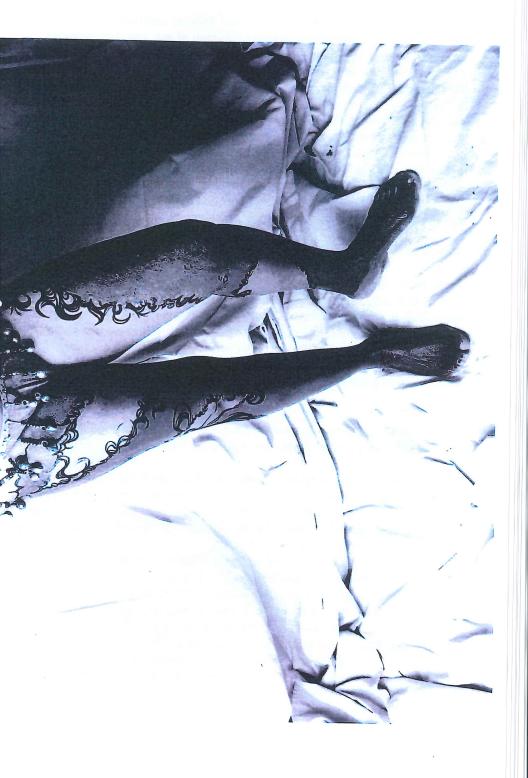
E: Do you have any body positivity role models?

Nella Pearl: I can't think of anybody off the bat, but I have five biological daughters, and they all work out, they all call each other gorgeous, they text each other and say to each other, "Good morning beautiful," and "Your hair is banging." I have one daughter who chants. Her name is Iyen. She has Yen Threads Spiritual Arts. She says "I am somebody. I love myself. God loves me. And together we possess purpose, power, and positivity. Thank you God for letting me be me!" Now, look how powerful that is!

E: So you didn't really have role models, you had to BE a role model for your daughters?

Nella Pearl: I had to be a role model because coming up in my generation everybody wanted to have their hair permed, a really teeny tiny waist line...so certain things I just didn't possess that I didn't think were necessary...that you had to put on makeup – I never liked makeup, so I never indulged. But the average person would put on makeup, they had to





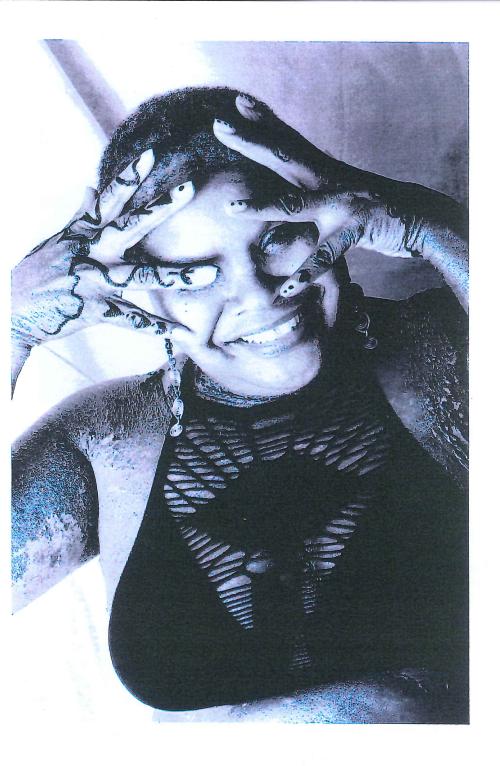
have a certain kind of dress. I never liked dresses until now. So I just decided that my daughters were an extension of me, and they were all different shapes and sizes and colors, and they were all beautiful. And we would sit outside, and we would say affirmations about how beautiful we were, and how smart we were, and how great our day was going to be. We would say, you can't stop a tank – we would say this when we were up against a big obstacle. We would say, angels fly when we were backed in a corner and it seems like nowhere to go but up. We would say, everything is going to be all right when worry sets in. And I did that with them from birth. I didn't know that I was doing something positive – I didn't know that I was building their character and helping them to enjoy their bodies and have self-confidence. I didn't know that. I was just making sure that they didn't fall into the same hole of not liking themselves as I did.

E: So you believe in the power of affirmations to shape your reality?

Nella Pearl: For sure, because what the mind thinks, the mind becomes. So if you consciously say positive things to yourself – set positive goals – there's no way that negativity can just arbitrarily take over if you have positive affirmations in mind. The main positive affirmation that we use is, "Start where you are. Use what you have. Do what you must. Just get busy." That positive affirmation pertains to anything: your health, how to cook, if you want to go to school, even if you want to have a baby – just start where you are!

E: How do you plan to incorporate your body positive outlook as you live out the rest of your life? What's your plan for your next quarter life?

Nella Pearl: I plan to be active, to ride bicycles, hula-hoop, jump rope, swimming. Go to my grandson's basketball games and my granddaughter's band performances. I plan to write poetry and sing at the top of my lungs. And be grateful and thankful. And I will be gardening with purpose! I have Brooklyn Heights Community Garden, which is a community garden. It's over 9 years ago that we started it. And this helps me with body positivity because body positivity starts with your mind. In order for it to make sense, you have to be in good health, or seeking good health, and eating healthy. That's where the garden comes in. Fresh air. And to have ownership of something makes a person more appreciative of everything around them. Your body encases your spirit. So you have to learn how to love it and how to be one with it. I also want to help others rise and become unstuck, so I got certified as a Life Coach specializing in decluttering, sharing how only surrounding yourself with things that bring you joy and love simplifies your life and helps you be much healthier.



E: Any inspiration for your body art?

Nella Pearl: The inspiration for my body art is that I am boldness. I live boldly.



Body painter Megan Pollard and Ms. Nella Pearl

E: Any closing thoughts?

Nella Pearl: I have a poem I would like to share. It's entitled "Sun Awaken Soul." The poem just means: live life right now, give it all you've got, wake up and look for a brighter day, because it's there - just go get it!

Sun awaken soul
Sun awaken soul
Morning comes
Wind caresses skin
Birds sing nature's orchestrated songs
Flowers blossom
Multicolored butterflies flutter to and fro, to and fro
To and fro moon
Lit up sky
Night falls
Gods mourn
Sun repeats, repeats

The End of the World - Christine Doza Lesbian Erotica

It was not in the Bronco and Irene held her beer to her throat. It's what they'd gone to town for, beer and tampons, and now they drove through the desert back to the beach house.

They didn't talk much.

Jody crumpled her empty and handed it to Irene, indicating with the tilt of her closely cropped head that she wanted another. The coastal road was straight and flat and the speedometer's needle hovered at 80 mph. Irene stretched over the bench seat of Jody's vintage Bronco, got another beer from the carton in back, popped it open and pushed it into the space between Jody's thighs. Jody's face had browned in the unyielding sun, even under the protection of her beat-up old straw cowboy hat. Her blue eyes were sharper and even more intelligent, their paleness almost harsh, raptor-like, against her golden skin.

Jody liked Irene to touch herself while she drove, so Irene slipped her left hand under her shorts. She wore no underwear, and her clit and lips were already sore from what they had done to each other that morning, what they had done every day of this thought-arresting, sun-wrought, heat-dizzying trip. What had smoldered between them during the hour they had spent drinking grey-hounds at the bar in town. What was in the air even now, the dry desert air whipping through the cabin of the Bronco, all the windows open.

Jody glanced over at Irene and turned her eyes back to the road, only the slightest smile hinting she'd liked what she'd seen.

Irene's pussy was in a state of constant arousal, her fingers slippery immediately. She took her hand out of her panties and reached over to wipe the pussy juice into Jody's hair, tickling the velvety bristle of short hairs on her neck, brushing her fingertips just barely against their clipped tips. Irene's eyes caught the speedometer. 85 mph. No matter, it was straight and flat all the way back to Jody's beach house which stood alone in the desert, facing the glittering sea. She put her right hand down her panties, her left palm remaining against the back of Jody's head. She felt like she could come on command, if Jody would only look at her. Rocks and scrubby cactus flew by in the landscape outside the window, the sky so blue it was white. The fingers of her right hand were wet up to the last knuckle.

Irene hitched herself up and got her knees beneath her, leaned over into Jody's lap to slurp up some of her beer. It was warming quickly against Jody's cunt, the hot air roaring around them. She sucked more of the beer out through the top of the can, the beer foaming in her mouth as she moaned and smacked, her left hand going back between her own legs, Irene not even thinking about the fact that Jody was driving, just knowing she was, knowing she herself would in no way disturb that, that her body was attuned to Jody's and to the Bronco and the desert and the baking asphalt of the lonely road. It was like that when they were fucking, they were one organism, and her body would not block Jody's sight, or her



They were beyond thought, or rather, their thoughts had transcended to include the body, not dismiss it.

Irene took her hand away from her wet cunt and pulled the beer out from between Jody's legs, put it in the cup holder that mounted the hump on the floor. Still kneeling low she put her hand between Jody's legs, where the tight denim was wet. She could smell Jody, like ocean and leaves and always the faintest whiff of Vetiver. The scent was a ghost. Even when months had gone by since she had seen Jody, that smell, worn by someone walking by in a bar, or a trace left on a forgotten tshirt, detonated inside her like a sleeper cell. She nibbled the edges of Jody's thighs, snuffling into her crotch, breathing in the familiar smell of their mingling, the smell of them together.

She felt Jody's hand skim up the back of her thigh to find her swollen pussy, which pushed like an overripe peach past the narrow strip of her shorts' crotch. Jody never stood on ceremony and shoved as much of her fingers as she could up Irene's snatch. It was like Jody was born to fuck. She was a genius at it. She could do it while drinking a beer and driving a car. Irene moaned and finally let her mouth find the bulge between Jody's legs. Kissing it through denim wasn't nearly enough and careful of the steering wheel she unbuttoned Jody's fly and pulled down her zipper, reaching in to pull out the rubber cock. Speedometer 90.

Jody had tormented her with this thing, fucked her on the couch, the stairs, the middle of the Spanish tile floor. First thing in the morning on the mattress they'd dragged to the roof, in the shade of the porch in the otherwise languid afternoons. She fucked her raw and senseless, then fucked her through the pain of being fucked, her flesh burning at the touch, crying out at the pressure as Jody demanded to be inside her and Jody saying disingenuously, "Don't worry babe, it hurts me too." And Irene wanting her so bad, wanting all she could get. she was incapable of saying no, she took it doggy style, she rode on top of Jody, sweat pouring down her back, growling she withstood missionary position, Jody on her knees between Irene's legs, maneuvering, caressing, grabbing her legs to pull her closer, filling up every hole she'd ever had or imagined she could have, absolutely no gaps left for loneliness or anguish when Jody was inside her, touching her everywhere, exploding her synapses. Thrusting harder than she thought she could stand, she felt the leather of the harness pushing into the solid bone of her pelvis, and beneath the harness was Jody's body, her cunt, the hairs shorn close to the skin, the scent of Jody's dripping pussy, and Jody herself - mysterious, sardonic and aloof. prone to month-long disappearances. Not knowable at all except like this. Knowable completely like this. Getting fucked by Jody was a soul-fucking.

So now in the Bronco she deep-throated that cock, or tried to. Honestly, it was so big she had trouble getting her mouth around it. But why bother. The theater of that could be left until later, when Jody could see it. She gave the cock a friendly parting slurp and pulled back to settle in her seat.



The sky was unyielding. Irene wiggled out of her shorts. Jody's eyes were pinned to the road. The needle pushed toward 95. The cock pointed toward the dome light. Nothing but hard, straight road ahead.

Irene swung her body toward Jody and carefully got a leg around her, straddled her. Jody, keeping one hand on the wheel, guided her, her hands completely fluent in the language of Irene's body, communicating with the slightest touch, a change in pressure. Jody's right leg was nailed to the accelerator, the muscle solid and taut beneath Irene's bare ass. Irene's own right leg was jammed against the door, the foot folded beneath her, the left leg splayed out awkwardly on the bench seat. Her legs. were open to the coolness of Jody, cool somehow in this heat, her white tank top untouched by sweat, her face unmoved and giving nothing, the paradoxical softness of her breasts bound tightly in the white sports bra.

Irene lifted herself up, carefully, carefully, and slipped the cock inside her drenched and hungry pussy.

With her left hand Jody clenched Irene's ass, pulling her in tight, controlling the rhythm because she knew Irene couldn't. With her right hand she drove. Her foot did not budge from the accelerator as they moved together, against each other, sweat and cum coating the insides of Irene's bare legs, the Bronco filling with the salty smell of it, the roar of the wind making words impossible, making Irene scream louder than usual, inviting her to release the animal inside her. 100 miles per hour. She wanted Jody as she'd wanted no other woman before, as she she'd want no other woman again. Because she knew there'd be other women, kinder women, gentler women. Women she could talk things over with and pick up groceries for. Women who would have dinner ready when she got home, whose doctor's appointments she would ask about, women who would sleep next to her for weeks, months, even years at a time. But not Jody. Jody would not be hers forever. Someone else's maybe, but not hers.

In the car she called out to Jody, called to this lover, this woman whose friction it was impossible to withstand, impossible to make mundane, impossible to hold, and the wind snatched the words from her mouth, carried them into the pitiless desert wasteland. Jody's cock was inside her, far up in the reaches of her guts, and Irene was humbled by it, made whole by it, crazed, ecstatic, exhilarated beyond shame, beyond thought, beyond the everyday concerns of the body. They'd drive like this until they reached the house at the end of the road, alone except for a few outbuildings. Laughing off their recklessness, the awkwardness of peeling away from each other, at the cum stain that spread across the driver's side and up the back of Jody's jeans. Tumbling down into the shell and sand, chasing each other naked into the cold salt tongue of the sea at the end of the world.



Natural Health - Yoga

Cat-Cow

- 1. Get on your hands and knees (Table-top pose).
- 2. Ensure that your knees are directly under your hips. You can check for this by placing two fists between your knees. Your thighs are perpendicular to floor. (Your hips are not as wide as you think, and you'll only need 6-8 inches between your knees.)
- 3. Your wrists are right underneath your shoulders, with approximately 8-12 inches between hands. Arms are straight.
- 4. Find a neutral spine: Check that your tailbone reaches gently toward back of your mat. (Note: this is more of an energetic feeling than a movement.) Your heart and the crown of your head are reaching gently toward the front of mat. Lengthen out the spine and find neutral space, checking that your shoulders are not hunched and your back is not bowed. Make sure that your neck is long by checking that your shoulders gently pull away from your ears. Very lightly tuck

and lift in the belly by engaging the abdominal muscles. This helps stabilize the low back. Don't suck in your belly and hold your breath.

5. Let the back bend. Tailbone and crown of your head lift up to the

Cow Pose - Inbreath

ceiling. Heart is lifting forward and up.
Shoulders stay away from the ears. Shoulder blades stay down the back. Gaze up toward the ceiling. Front of throat and neck feels very long and spacious.



You're a calm and stable cow.

Cat Pose - Outbreath

6. Tailbone and crown of head lower to floor. Back of the heart (space between shoulder blades) lifts towards ceiling. Chin falls toward the chest. Gaze toward the navel. You're an angry Halloween cat.

Repeat Cow and Cat pose, back and forth, staying with your breath. Start with at least 5 rounds. (One round includes a cat and a cow.)



Focus on the breath, and let the breath guide the movement. Inhale for the entire movement of the Cow pose. Exhale for the entire movement of the cat pose. Breathe through your nose. You want the breath to be smooth and even. Start with a 4-count on your breath (count to 4 for each inhale, and 4 for each exhale). No need to rush let the body feel relaxed. Once you are familiar with the movement, you might like to close your eyes and really tune into the breath.

To finish, sit back on your heels or in a cross-leg position and be inside your body.

Benefits of regular cat-cow pose include: gentle spinal loosening and warm-up; gently loosens shoulders and hips; tunes you into your breath.

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