

Elizabeth Shanklin, one of our most serious feminists and scholars, died without fanfare or notice, presumably of pneumonia at the Methodist Home for the Aged in the Bronx, February 19, 2021, at the age of 87. Her friends and comrades found out seven months later. She died alone and her unclaimed body was put on a refrigerated truck from the city morgue. She was buried in a pine casket on plot 416, Hart Island, on Long Island Sound, just east of the Bronx, in a grave probably dug by an inmate of the Rikers Island jail complex.

For most of her adult life, Liz taught English and Reading to students in the New York City Public schools, at the same time immersed in studying the ideas of Matriarchy. Like other feminists of the second wave, Shanklin viewed the society around her as fundamentally disordered: corrupted by corporate crime, racial hatred, and contempt for womenkind. Other activists worked for various reformist solutions to these problems. Shanklin possessed a more uncompromising revolutionary vision: men must develop their potential to nurture others; mothering done exclusively by women is detrimental to the species; the social importance of motherhood and children is too great a responsibility to be left to women only; men must evolve, or the species will not survive. Maternal practice is urgently necessary for social transformation.

For Shanklin, Matriarchy was not merely a mirror image of Patriarchy in which women dominated men. Matriarchy was a mother-centered society based on maternal values where nurturing and preserving all people, all life on the planet, determined its reason for being; the only form of society that could be genuinely peaceful.

One is not born with such adamant beliefs. Shanklin originally yearned to be an actress. Her father, a special agent for the FBI in Dallas, had denied his only daughter's longing to go to an acting school in New York City and her mother was no help, always distant and indifferent. So, Liz was forced to settle for a small college in South Carolina where she studied education. Being controlled by cold and autocratic parents resulted in a life-long determination to go her own way. She soon discovered a love of history and eventually graduated from Columbia University, Sarah Lawrence College, and completed classes for a Ph.D. in Women's History at the City University of New York. Teaching during the day, she tutored and taught reading to individual students at night in her apartment in the Bronx for 38 years.

The invisible death of this radical feminist comes at a time when the freedom and progress of women worldwide is being severely curtailed by organized misogyny, an increasingly self-aggrandizing fantasy imposed on us by male governments and political parties, a kind of bizarre reverie that dreams men must control women at all costs.

Shanklin would of course dismiss such thinking as nonsense just as she dismissed the idea that modern feminism is shallow, consumerist, and dominated by selfish white women. But she realized she lived at a time when poverty referred primarily to women and children; when women were forced to choose between mothering and paid employment; when women struggled to maintain their right to have control over their own bodies. But she differed from most feminists who saw mothering as putting women in a second-class position in society. Shanklin recognized only the power of motherhood.

In 1990, she began studying how the struggle of women in the United States tried to reconstruct the true meaning of motherhood. During these many years of study, she developed a fiercely uncompromising

nature that did not endear her to those not in lockstep with her emerging revolutionary beliefs. Liz was brilliant, inspired, complicated and charming, but also difficult, stubborn, and infuriating. She had many admirers, but many shunned what they perceived as her extremism.

She became Chair of the Bronx County Green Party which under Shanklin's encouragement and guidance presented grassroots democracy, social justice, non-violence, and ecological wisdom as their party platform. In 2002, she ran for the House of Representatives on the Green Party ticket. Eventually, her radicalism caused her to leave the Green Party. At work, she was always a leader and union activist, even after she retired.

That her final resting place is a Potter's Field where for 150 years homeless people, stillborn babies, victims of AIDS, and more recently victims of the pandemic can be found, is profoundly ironic and sad. She was literally thrown into the ground with the most unloved and unsupported and deprived individuals, people she had spent most of her life trying to make society recognize and help.

Oh, If I were able to get to City Island and take that ferry to Hart's Island and then find a bus to finally stand, hours later, before my friend's grave in front of plot 416, perhaps I could reclaim for myself the spiritual truth she so revered: that preserving and nurturing life here on earth as generations of women have always aspired to do, is the main task of humanity. Be as it may, her lonely effort on behalf of all the lost souls everywhere is a stunning and beautiful achievement and perhaps it is somehow fitting that she now lies among them.