

# LISA KRON



AND

## THE FIVE LESBIAN BROTHERS

*The Secretaries* premiered in New York City 25 years ago. Wow! That's so

hard to believe, in so many ways! Mostly, I think (I hope!) the play holds up, though, of course, there are some elements that date it (most notably the frequent references to word processing codes that long ago were swept into the dustbin of technology). But the issues and dynamics that drive the play have remained surprisingly topical – disconcertingly so, really. But rather than parse that further, I thought instead I'd like to offer some background on the play's genesis by way of the introductory notes the Brothers put together when the play was first published, way, way, way back, such a long time ago! I hope you enjoy. Thank you so much for coming!" -**Lisa Kron, May 2018**

**BABS:** We wanted to write a musical and Moe had seen a version of *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers* at the Edinburgh Festival that year and was smitten with it. We would play lumberjacks and turn the story on its ear. We rented the movie and were horrified by what we saw: the glorification of rape in song and dance. The men were "doin' what comes nat'rally" and the women would come to like it in the end when they saw what a cool house they could have.

We went on retreat to New Hampshire and began writing about lumberjacks and doing improvs about church suppers and pancake



# IN THEIR

breakfasts. We had the shy lumberjack, the singing lumberjack, the mean lumberjack. We put them on the mountain, in the smokehouse, at the restaurant with a terrace overlooking the valley, and in the office where their brides worked at the lumber mill.

Nothing happened in these improvs because we had no idea what lumberjacks did aside from yell timber and dance on logs like they did in the movie. We wanted to kill these guys. Dominique had just been reading some where about motorcycle girl gangs who kill and torture men for sport. Everyone's face lit up and much excitement and animated discussion in the group commenced. **Now we were getting somewhere. Fuck the lumberjacks. We would play the "brides" in the office at the lumber mill.**



**MOE:** *The Secretaries* was a true product of our collaboration.

**DOMINIQUE:** Something about the brilliant fall colors and piney smell all around us encouraged us to hold onto the idea of lumberjacks. Lisa kept pushing for the introduction of the secretaries who worked at the lumber mill, and eventually we gave them a try. Almost immediately we saw that we had found the vehicle for our simmering anger.

Sick and disgusting scenes of the ravages of internalized sexism came pouring forth. We were relieved beyond words that we finally



# OWN WORDS

found the play we were already booked to perform in a few months. Lisa summed up our feelings when she impulsively scribbled on her writing pad, then held up for all to see à la Norma Rae, the words,

**“Writing Itself!”**



*Original Production with the Five Lesbian Brothers*

**PEG:** I think this was the first time we consciously used our writing to deal with our dynamic in working together. I remember it was a time when we were worried that Lisa might be leaving the Brothers (actually, aren't we always worried that someone is leaving), but we took that fear and turned it around and decided to analyze what happens when someone new comes into a tightknit group...and Patty Johnson was born. Susan Curtis was born when Dominique was being interrogated as an improv exercise. Ashley Elizabeth Fratangelo was an homage to Elizabeth Ashley. We were obsessed with her SlimFast campaign at the time. Needless to say, it permeates the script.

**LISA:** The play examines the ways in which women who are trapped inside of sexist structures can, in a Stockholm syndrome-y kind of way, become the enforcers of sexism, enforcing rules around weight, food, sexuality. Proof that **we were covering uncharted territory** was in the disconnect between the responses of men (notably male reviewers) and women. Men confused the play for a revenge fantasy, which it is not. But women knew this office and they knew these women. They recognized these dynamics immediately.