Self-portrait

Tonight I lie in bed with the woman who will one day be my wife and she tells me her origin story

while I struggle to pinpoint my own. I remember only playing and singing in the bleachers: Hey baby,

I wanna know if you'll be my girl. Often now I dream that everyone I've ever known is gathered in a room waiting for me, talking in low voices and checking their watches. All the years of my life spread out.

A 17-year-old girl sits in the corner biting her pinky nail, following the guests around the room with her eyes.

I sit beside her but don't know what to say, and she does not recognize me,

as I didn't then, and couldn't—lacking the native language I had not yet heard spoken.

Performance and Purpose:
An Interview with Dorothy Allison

Last July, Fiction Editor Tammy Stoner sat down with the amazing Dorothy Allison to talk with her about writing, performance, and life. The video was uploaded to the Gertrude Press website at gertrudepress.org. Here is a transcript of what Dorothy Allison had to say:

"There are performance poets and there are performance artists who tend to be more confrontive—like Karen Finley—physically acting out on stage. There's much more emphasis on physical action for performance artists than for performance poets. Performance narrative, which is closer to what I think I do, is a kind of live story telling that really uses voice in strong, structured ways. "Two or Three Things I Know for Sure was originally written as a performance, and it was written in conjunction with the photographs I got when my mother died. It was done in a theater that was half-round, so on the rounds we did slides—mostly snapshots that my mother had collected over her lifetime, beginning with pictures of her when she was eleven and twelve years old. There was a picture of her taken when I knew she was pregnant with me but you can't tell and then all these photographs of me as this radical, young, lesbian feminist marching in the street, us with a van we took around the south that said 'Free Joan Little'—all these great photographs. I constructed the whole of Two or Three Things I Know for Sure around those photographs.

"In the performance we would flash the photographs. I did the various text and we had musical accompaniment. The first performance at Camera Works was about 65 minutes, but the audience wouldn't leave and they stayed for two hours. We had to talk. It was like we had to talk—we had to process.

"This, for me, is political art, and part of the politics of the art action is that you have to be present afterward. You don't get to run away. It's not about being exhausted or being drained; it's about someone telling you something