

ELANA DYKEWOMON

b. October 11, 1949

d. August 7, 2022

**AUTHOR
& ACTIVIST**

Her debut novel was the first to be identified as a “lesbian book” by The New York Times.

“You can try a hundred things in your life, and ... you can still go on trying.”

Elana Dykewomon, née Elana Michelle Nachman, was a feminist activist and author, best known for her three popular lesbian-themed novels. She published five poetry collections, wrote short stories and essays, and contributed to numerous lesbian periodicals.

Dykewomon was born in Manhattan to Jewish parents and cleaved to her religious identity, particularly as she matured. When she was 8, the family moved to Puerto Rico, where her father opened a law practice. She knew she was “different” as a preteen and felt “sharply alienated” by the toxic masculinity and oppressive heteronormativity of the culture. She attempted suicide after a doctor told her she couldn’t possibly be homosexual.

Back in the United States, Dykewomon studied fine arts at Reed College before receiving her BFA in creative writing from the California Institute of Art. She earned her MFA from San Francisco State University.

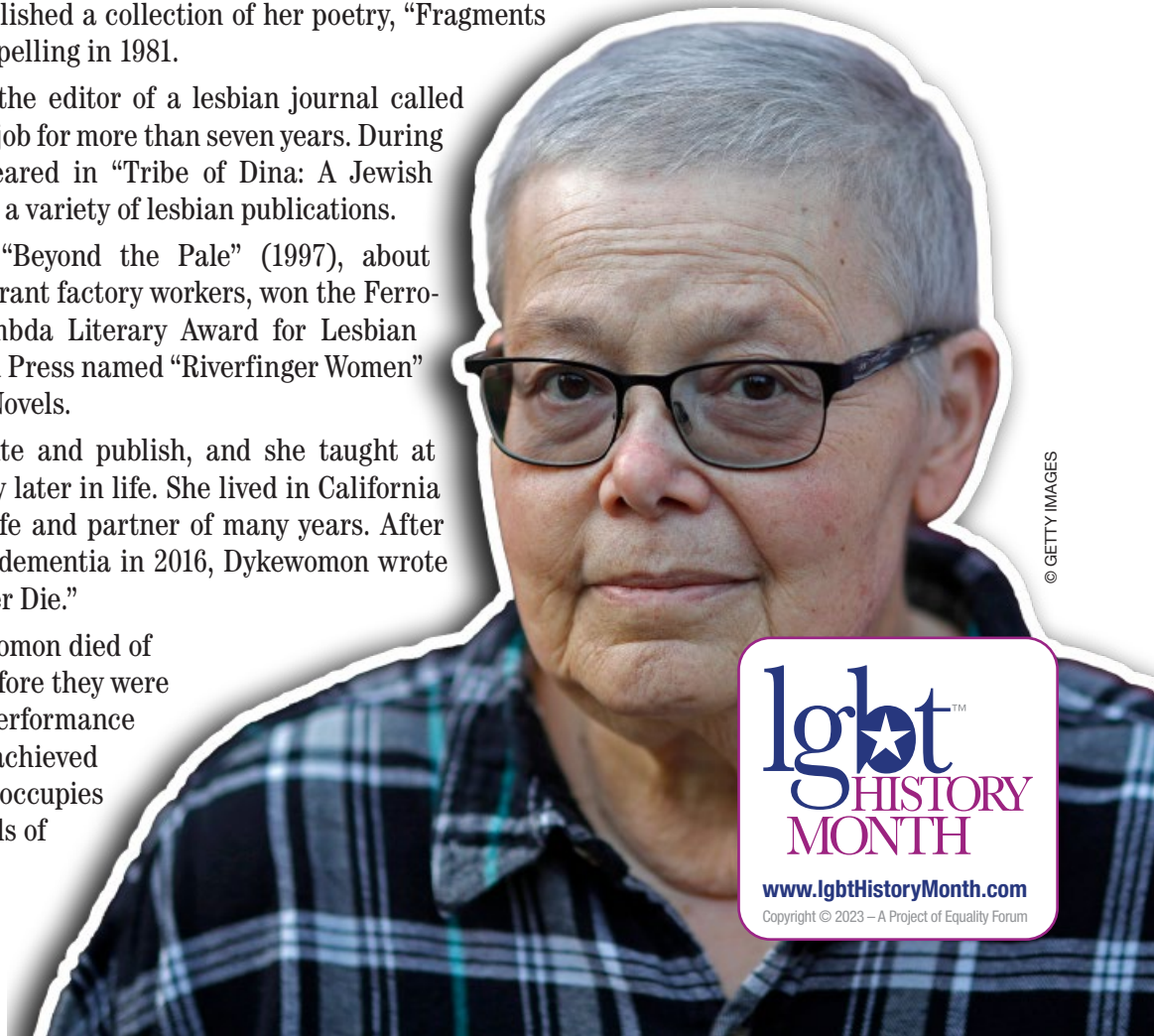
In 1974 Dykewomon published her debut novel, a bawdy coming-of-age story titled “Riverfinger Women,” under her original name. It was the first work to be identified as a lesbian book by The New York Times. By the time she published her second book in 1976, “They Will Know Me By My Teeth,” a collection of poetry and short stories, she had adopted the pseudonym Dykewoman, later spelling it with the second “o” to delete the word “man” from the name. She published a collection of her poetry, “Fragments from Lesbos,” under the new spelling in 1981.

In 1987 Dykewomon became the editor of a lesbian journal called Sinister Wisdom. She held the job for more than seven years. During this period, her writing appeared in “Tribe of Dina: A Jewish Women’s Anthology” as well as a variety of lesbian publications.

Dykewomon’s second novel, “Beyond the Pale” (1997), about lesbian Russian-Jewish immigrant factory workers, won the Ferro-Grumley Award and the Lambda Literary Award for Lesbian Fiction. In 1999 the Associated Press named “Riverfinger Women” to its list of 100 Greatest Gay Novels.

Dykewomon continued to write and publish, and she taught at San Francisco State University later in life. She lived in California with Susan Levinkind, her wife and partner of many years. After Levinkind died of Lewy body dementia in 2016, Dykewomon wrote the play “How to Let Your Lover Die.”

Surrounded by friends, Dykewomon died of esophageal cancer minutes before they were set to watch a live-streamed performance of the play. Though she never achieved commercial success, her work occupies an essential place in the annals of American LGBTQ history.



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