

LITERARY PROFILE

As lesbians and gay men living in the last decade of the 20th century, we are in a unique position to peer across the precipice that separates us from the conventions of the past and the unknown landscape of the future. Hochman serves us a smorgasbord of individual choices for coping with and celebrating life's mundanities and mysteries. From friendship to food, motherhood to mental illness, dogs to death, *Everyday Acts and Small Subversions* provides a harvest of sweet delicacies and bitter roots that were grown in feminist ground. Hochman shares these personal stories as an affirmation of the feast of life. She invites us to partake of the possibilities—to imagine and invent the rituals and relationships that will nourish and enrich our own lives.

Hochman, who lived in Portland for seven years, recently moved back to Philadelphia, her city of origin. Visiting Portland for a book promotion and vacation, Hochman reminisced about the book's beginnings, from a booth at the bustling Heathman Bakery and Pub.

"I had published a column in *Just Out*—that later became part of the book—a piece about what it was like to live with my two best friends during the time that they got engaged and planned their wedding, from my perspective as a lesbian watching this ritual unfolding that I could not have access to. It was based on this that Ruth Gundle of The Eighth Mountain Press approached me and asked if I had any interest in doing a book. So we got together and talked about the ideas that I was interested in, the ideas that seemed to grow out of that column, and what she was interested in, and really conceived of the book together in collaboration."

Hochman says, "It was exactly four years from the beginning until publication in February of '94. It's very exciting. I still get a tremendous thrill out of seeing the book in bookstores and seeing people reading it. I'm sure that seasoned authors get used to that, but at this stage it's still very exciting and fun for me. I'm starting to get a response from people who tell me their stories and tell me what the book has meant to them."

The success of the book is due as much to Hochman's skill as an interviewer as it is to her insight and ability as a writer. Each profile extracts the essence of what is important in a person's life and paints a picture that is easily accessible to the reader.

"Initially, I interviewed people I knew—in my own circle and in circles that the editor-publisher knew. I started out with very local references and then webbed out from there. I wanted to have some geographic diversity, although there are a lot of women from this area in the book."

While Hochman's book focuses on lesbian, heterosexual and celibate women, it explores issues that are fundamental to the lives of lesbians and gay men who live outside of the structure of the dominant culture. Lacking the social sanction and legal protection awarded to husbands and wives, and without the status and legitimacy conferred on heterosexual parents, the lesbian and gay male experience necessitates adjustment and adaptation, invention and improvisation. *Everyday Acts and Small Subversions* reinvents the concept of "family" without summing up a new definition of the term—rather, it flings the topic wide open. Hochman's eyes shine warmly as she gives her personal definition of family.

"It's the people to whom I feel committed over the long haul. It's the people you've thrown your lot in with...it's the people I feel emotionally connected with. It also has something to do with a sense of time. It doesn't necessarily mean that I've known them for a long time, but that I have a sense of the relationship extending over time into the future. And also, for me a big part of it is people with whom I feel I can be myself—people with whom it's safe to let down my guard."

Hochman readily shares her thoughts on what makes a family work. "Communication. Talking to each other is probably the most critical



A growing sense of the possible

*Lesbian author and journalist Anndee Hochman is a former resident of Portland and onetime writer for Just Out. Her first book, **Everyday Acts and Small Subversions: Women Reinventing Family, Community and Home**, was recently published by Portland publisher The Eighth Mountain Press. The book is a collection of interviews and articles chronicling the author's development and the unconventional lives of individual feminist women of the '90s. It records the unique ways that single and partnered women of various ages, ethnicities and orientations are creating meaning in their lives through new definitions and expressions of, mainly, work and relationships.*

by Risa Krivé

ingredient...as a way of understanding and hearing what the other person's experience is, how it's different from your own, and how to live with each other.

"What else? Laughter. Having fun. Letting go. Love, obviously, but that goes without saying. It seems so much a part of the kinds of families that I look at in the book—families that people chose or gravitated to out of love rather than out of the automatic nature of being born to these people. Being as honest as possible about who you are in a family is not always an easy thing to do, for all kinds of reasons. It's scary to tell the truth, it's scary to *hear* the truth sometimes, but families in which the truth isn't told have a pretty hard time."

The book also seeks to redefine the concepts

of partnership and wholeness. "There are several women in the book who are quite content and fulfilled without sex. They are all women whose lives are filled with intimacy, love, companionship, sense of continuity, sense of commitment—without one single primary person they are involved with. Those stories are not often told. Probably even more [pervasive] than the presumption that everybody is heterosexual, is the presumption that the ideal state is for people to be paired up. It makes it hard for a woman who doesn't support that, to live a life outside of that and not worry about whether there's something wrong with her."

Hochman herself lives with her lover Elissa. "We consider ourselves partners. We consider

our commitment lifelong. I think that we'll most likely live together most of the time."

The book discusses the unique rituals and ceremonies women create to mark meaningful passages in their lives. However, Hochman herself is ambivalent about having a ceremony to commemorate her partnership. "We talk about that. We may do that someday. We have a lot of rituals in our lives. We had a very moving goodbye ritual with our Portland friends before we left, a ritual that I felt brave enough to create partly because of doing the book and hearing about things other women had done."

"Sometimes I very much want the chance to say some things about what our relationship means to me in front of all the people who matter to us and to invite them to be invested in our partnership in that way, to celebrate it publicly.... I feel resistant to the idea of the ceremony being a way to earn legitimacy, because I think that we are legitimate simply because we are a couple and care about each other. And that is evident to anyone who knows us and makes it real whether or not we ever stand up in front of a bunch of people and say things to each other. I think that's the heart of my dilemma about it."

With the future unknown, Hochman is meanwhile busy writing freelance. One upcoming project will bring her back to Oregon. "In the summer we're definitely going to work on the Flight of the Mind women's writing workshop out here, which we've done for the past two years. I don't have another book in the works, although having finished this one, I've actually begun to think that it would be enjoyable to write another book. While I was working on it people would ask me, and I would say, I can't imagine writing another one because it's so hard."

Writing a book is hard. So is navigating one's way through the uncharted territory of life on society's frontier. "There are external obstacles that make it difficult to live a full life. Trying to live in a way that is not recognized or understood, trying to live in an unmarried, committed relationship that the culture doesn't support in any one of 5 billion ways—starting with when your taxes are due—leaves people with a narrower sense of what is possible."

"The limits are the human limits that all of us have that make it hard sometimes for people to live together and love each other and work together. Jealousy, getting irritable and grouchy and small-minded, are obstacles getting in the way of any kind of meaningful relationship."

Hochman does not bemoan the difficulties of diversity within the conformist culture. "The interviews left me very hopeful about the kinds of lives women can live in the midst of a culture that doesn't always support their choices, that doesn't always let them know that they have those choices. Here are all these women flourishing and taking risks and creating very meaningful lives for themselves. To me, it's a very celebratory book. It left me with a sense of great possibility."

Everyday Acts and Small Subversions explores the joys and challenges of creating new connections to community and pathways to personal fulfillment. It does not attempt to provide a road map. Hochman seeks to open new possibilities by sharing the experiences of women searching for new ways to live and love.

"I gained from the book a willingness to tolerate untidiness—in the book, the writing...and in my own life. Nobody has the answers to these matters. They are lifelong discoveries and negotiations and subjects for discussion. There is no formula. It is possible to live and die in the untidiness."

"It's a real exercise to learn to simply let the dilemmas exist, let the conflicts be there. It was a good lesson for me, coming from being a journalist where I learned to wrap things up neatly at the end."

And yet...what a neat ending it provides for this interview.