

PROFILE

A change of view

An attorney went up a mountain and came down a publisher-editor

by Risa Krivé

May 25, 1995, marked the 10th birthday of Eighth Mountain Press. The first decade of this Portland-based feminist press has produced 20 books of feminist literary and nonfiction writing by women, with an emphasis on writing by lesbians. In this short time the publishing company has become significant in the realms of both feminist publishing and mainstream media.

Like the giant publishing houses, Eighth Mountain Press produces books of high literary quality and outstanding artistry. Similarly, this small press enjoys international distribution and financial success. But any distant relation to its multinational corporate cousins ends there—because Eighth Mountain Press is, literally, a publishing house. It is a lovely old house in a tree-shaded residential neighborhood near Laurelhurst Park, where publisher Ruth Gundle lives and from where she conducts all of the business of the press. Thousands of books are housed in the basement, a couple of comfortable offices sit on the second story, and a black pooch named Perdita presides over the front porch.

This domestic haven produces a profusion of poetry and prose. Offerings range from collections of stories and essays to travel guides. The press publishes two books each year, and hosts a nationally recognized poetry contest every other year, judged by such poet laureates as Audre Lorde and Judy Grahn, with publication of the winner's book of poems.

Rejecting the conventional wisdom which dictates that a business must continually grow in order to prosper, Gundle has kept the operation of Eighth Mountain Press deliberately small. Gundle is both publisher and editor. She searches for new talent, and produces, markets and promotes each book. She is assisted by a freelance proofreader and student interns. Marcia Barrentine designs the gorgeous covers featuring artwork by Northwest artists.

Ruth Gundle climbed many mountains before founding Eighth Mountain Press. Like many auspicious conceptions, the birth of this publishing company was unplanned. Gundle was living the life of a successful leftist lesbian lawyer. She argued several cases before the Oregon Supreme Court as litigation director of Oregon Legal Services, including the triumphant case that forced the state to grant Medicaid funds for abortions. She taught at Lewis & Clark College's Northwestern School of Law and sat on the governor's commission to study the controversial issue of comparative worth. But status and success did not replace satisfaction. Gundle said that working as an attorney, "whether...on behalf of Exxon...or anti-nuclear protesters...is just boring as hell. You learn the worst of human nature and...how corrupt the system is. But you don't learn important truths that are useful to your life."

Tired of wasting words to salve the wounds of a worn-out system, Gundle cut her legal commitments to cultivate her interest in literature and her friendships with writers. Without making a career choice, she published *Trying to Be an Honest*

Woman, a collection of poetry by eminent author Judith Barrington. No one would distribute just one book, so Gundle told people she was launching a press. As she convinced others—and through a series of fortunate "coincidences" developed the tools and skills necessary for running a small press—Gundle convinced herself that she should continue on this path.

Contrary to the struggles of most small publishers, Eighth Mountain Press enjoys considerable commercial coups. Recent bestseller *A Journey of One's Own* by former No on 9 political leader Thalia Zepatos, is the first and only book of its kind to provide "Uncommon Advice for the Independent Woman Traveler." Entertaining encounters

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PHOTO BY TEE CORINNE

from the author's own cross-cultural experiences are intermingled with practical and expert advice for traveling women. Topics include traveling alone, traveling with a group, bargaining, dealing with sexual harassment, traveling with a child, using foreign currency, finding the cheapest airline tickets, and all of the other myriad details that make the difference between exhilarating or excruciating travel experiences.

New York Daily News stated, "This is the best women's travel resource we've seen, ever." Quality Paperback Bookclub agrees. They recently bought the rights to the book. Given this wider audience, the book will further inspire and enable women to ease on down the road.

Praise for other Eighth Mountain Press titles has been equally superlative. *The Advocate* describes *Minimax* by Anna Livia as "Spellbinding...a blend of...magical realism, science fiction, and lesbian-feminist political savvy." *Bay Windows'* review of *Dreams of an Insomniac* by Irena Klepfisz said "This work is some of the most powerful to come out of the feminist publishing movement." *San Francisco Chronicle* describes *The Eating Hill* by Karen Mitchell as "a rich and magical look at Black Southern culture." *The Nation's* review of *Between the Sea and Home* by Almitra David said "This book, these poems...are...as beautiful as words can be."

The beauty of words is apparent in the name Eighth Mountain Press. Ruth Gundle chose this name for its personal matrilineal significance. Her mother's maiden name, Achtenberg, means "eighth mountain" in German. Gundle later learned that in Jewish theology the Eighth Mountain is the home of Shekinah, who is the female form of God. It is also the home of this publishing company, where the power of the press creates worlds out of words.

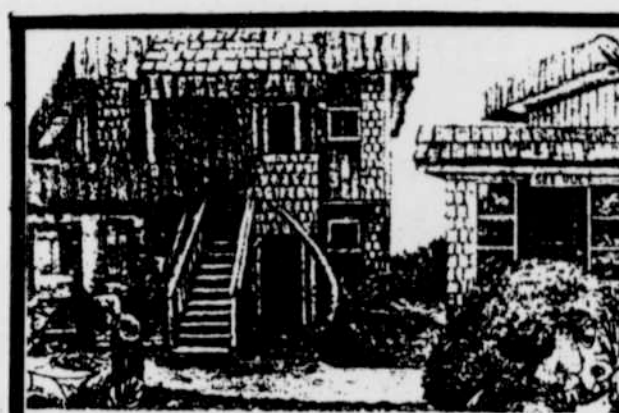
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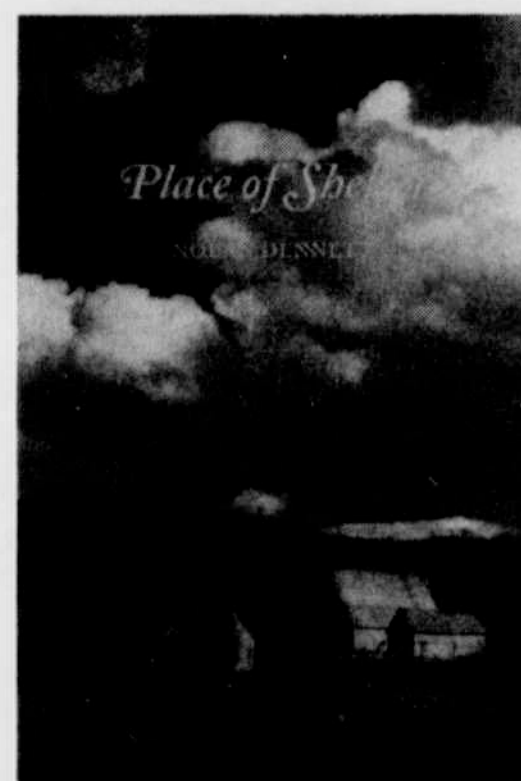
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