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featuring
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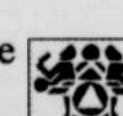
Why? To fill out a survey inquiring about the HIV prevention needs of American Indians & Alaskan Natives

How Long? Through June 2, 1999; surveys take about 25 minutes

How much? **\$15** for participating

Where? NW Portland Indian Health Board
527 SW Hall Suite 300
above the Portland State Bookstore

Contact Amanda for an appointment: 228-4185

BOOKS

Family, once removed

Author Jan Clausen talks about her life as a lesbian, and her life with a male lover

BY KRISTINE CHATWOOD

How old were you when you came out? As my book sort of explains, my coming out was really a very long process over a few years. If you want the year when I said, "I am a lesbian," that was 1974, when I was 24.

You became quite active in New York's lesbian community, didn't you? Yes. That's very true. Much of that was literary activism. I was also involved in feminist-leftist organizing, not necessarily exclusively lesbian, but always situations where a lot of lesbians were very active.

Were you starting to build a reputation and a career as a lesbian writer? Yes. Certainly that was something I was doing individually, in the sense of wanting to be recognized for my work. But it was also in a very exciting and lively mix of lesbian women.

What happened to that writing career when you became involved with the man you call Benjamin?

Perhaps it's kind of a leap to go from the beginnings of the career to that point, because I think it's kind of hard to say what the total mix of factors is that contributes to the way anybody's career develops. The problem for any writer who isn't a mass market writer... is audience and the need to be connected to some group of people who understand what you're doing, who are interested, who want to read it. I certainly had that as a lesbian writer. Again, not enormous mass popularity, but a real sense of being connected and of having an exchange with an audience, having venues for lesbian poetry readings, lesbian fiction readings.

When I became public about being involved with a man, I didn't fit that category anymore. I felt that people no longer included me in the same way and that I didn't get asked to do things. I will say that I felt not only hurt, but in a way it made no sense to me that work that was lesbian work—I certainly consider my two novels and my book of stories, for example, to be lesbian works and I know that they can't be understood in a heterosexual context, and yet it seemed that they started to sort of drop off of reading lists, not to be considered in the only context where they could be really understood.

Why did you choose to become involved with a man and end a long-term lesbian relationship? Why did I choose to become involved with a man? And end a long-term lesbian relationship, in which I understand you were also helping to raise a child? Our daughter, at that point, was a senior in

high school.... There had been a lot of tensions in the relationship for a long time. I think that I would have left that relationship fairly soon, one way or another.

I was restless, but I didn't seem to be able to make up my mind to go. There was also a lot of my lover and I had in common, a lot that we'd built together, a lot that we understood about each other that nobody else understood.

With this new attraction to a man, I entered another crisis period. At that point in the relationship, there'd been too many crises. Clearly, something had to give. Either I had to stop creating crises all the time or I had to decide that I didn't want to be in this relationship anymore.

In coming out as a lesbian—one thing I say in the book is that it was like marrying a gender, it was like saying, "I choose women; I choose to be faithful to women forever." I also said that for me, that was mistake. That was kind of an ideal of fidelity that I wasn't going to be able to live up to. I became a lesbian with

a lot of very romantic feelings about women as a group and women as individuals. Those never disappear, but they are mixed with a lot of other things, including feelings of intense disillusionment and anger.

With whom?

With women as a group, with the high expectations of what this community of women would be. And not

just any women, but this almost utopian movement of lesbian feminists.

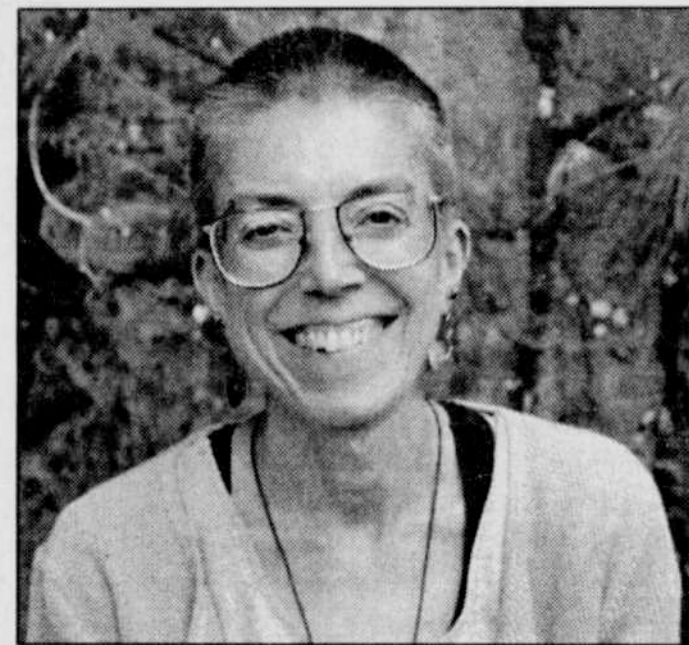
Are you saying that, partly, you made this decision because you were disappointed with the lesbian community?

... There were a lot of ways in which I'd been hurt. That made it easier to say I no longer believed that living as a lesbian is the best possible way to live. In other words, I think there could be a variety of good ways to live and that could be one of them. But I'm not going to prioritize that above everything, given that I'm attracted to this person who's a man, and he's attracted to me. At one time I would've felt I owed women a kind of loyalty I don't feel I owe anymore.

Do you feel that there was anything important you did lose by entering into a relationship with a man?

Yes. I mean, in the book I say that I lost identity, or I lost a part of identity. That's been very painful and hard to deal with. In a way, being able to think of myself as a lesbian really kind of anchored who I was, who I thought I was.

■ JAN CLAUSEN reads from her new book, *Apples & Oranges: My Journey Through Sexual Identity*, at 7:30 p.m. Wednesday, May 26, at Powell's Books on Hawthorne, 3732 S.E. Hawthorne Blvd. For more information, call (503) 238-1668.



Jan Clausen