

This is no urban legend: In the late '80s, the roaring mouth that is Lea DeLaria lived in Portland, Ore.

So how does a rising young lesbian comic with a big-city attitude find herself in the land of "healing-sister-mountain-woman-rain feminists" for a few years on her way up? The usual answer: "I met a girl and moved to Portland."

Over the years she's blown into town many times, and when she was here in '98 touring in the musical *Chicago*, she collected yet another Portland girlfriend. DeLaria immortalizes this now-ex in her first reference work, *Lea's Book of Rules for the World*.

In a long, detailed list of her sex-toy handmaidens, this is one of the entries: "Two tiny unnamed penises that I bought for the stupid bitch in Portland, Oregon, who dumped me right after I spent \$150 on two tiny penises."

DeLaria refers to that passage as "an evil moment in the book," but it's clear she's bitter about the experience. She

also says the bitch in question still lives in the Rose City.

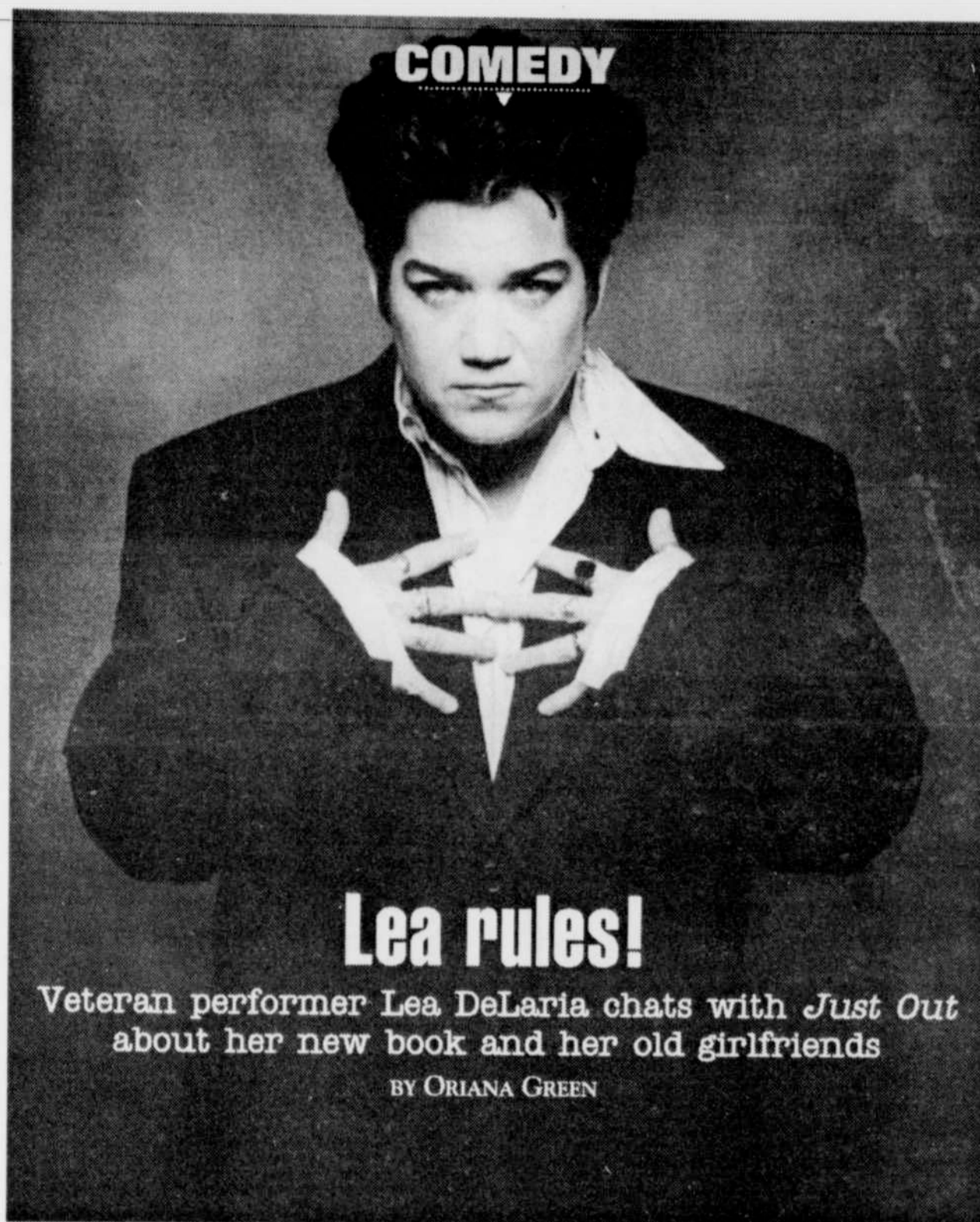
As someone who breaks societal rules just walking down the street, DeLaria writes passionately on the subject: "Who wrote these uptight rules? What Puritan came over on the fucking Mayflower and said, 'Here are the rules?' FUCK THE RULES."

DeLaria is an acquired taste. In fact, some people never develop an appreciation for her brash style, but she is a queer pioneer who has plenty to say.

There's an abundance of other self-revelatory passages in the book, including this admission, item number one on her "intimacy fact sheet": "In my entire life I have never had a serious relationship with someone residing in the same city as me." She goes on to write, "In fact, I find a continent between us provides me with enough 'space.'"

Then there's this tidbit: "I have five pierces in my left ear. I have one pierce in my right nostril. I find this nose pierce particularly helpful in providing an extra breathing hole for cunnilingus."

Despite such passages, the thirty-something DeLaria is now more guarded about her current relationship of a year's duration. However, she does claim to love the Rose City and divulges that her new love's brother



lives in Portland, so they bop out to Oregon a lot.

So what's she like about the place? "The slacker attitude...everyone says they're moving to New York in a year, but they never do. I love that people sit around in coffeehouses and read Proust," she says, still sounding amazed. "It's both the best thing and the worst thing about Portland."

For someone who seems like she sprang fully formed from the head of Bea Arthur, DeLaria has roots that are surprisingly Midwestern. She grew up in Belleville, Ill., the daughter of an Irish mother and an Italian father. (As she writes of such unions, "Their children will only know how to fight and screw.")

She was able to endure 12 years of parochial school with the "Little Sister of the Pit Bull" and the obligatory plaid skirts because, she explains, "the girls

in my school wore ties." And so a butch was born.

DeLaria began her comedy career in 1982 in San Francisco, where she soon earned positive attention for her in-your-face style. "I was a rocket punk dyke—on the edge of the edge," she recalls proudly.

Not that she's mellowed much! In her book, she likes to make lists, such as "examples of things that go up my butt, no lube: 1. Why is there Prozac for dogs? How can you have the ability to lick yourself and still be depressed?"

Her early success was with queer audiences, she says. "I made it in a marginalized way first. I never needed the mainstream, I never sought it. I was making a good living playing to 1,000-seat audiences before I was ever on TV," she explains, then laughs. "I had greatness thrust upon me."

One of her many claims to fame is that she was the first open-

ly gay comic to appear on national television. On March 30, 1993, DeLaria strode confidently out to center stage on the *Arsenio Hall Show* and quickly took control of the audience, which was treated to an authentic fire-breathing butch dyke in fine form. From then on, new opportunities flowed her way.

It has helped that she's always appealed to both lesbians and gay men. DeLaria explains it this way: "I talk about lesbian things but with a faggy sensibility." She adds that now her audiences are wildly eclectic, which is just how she likes them.

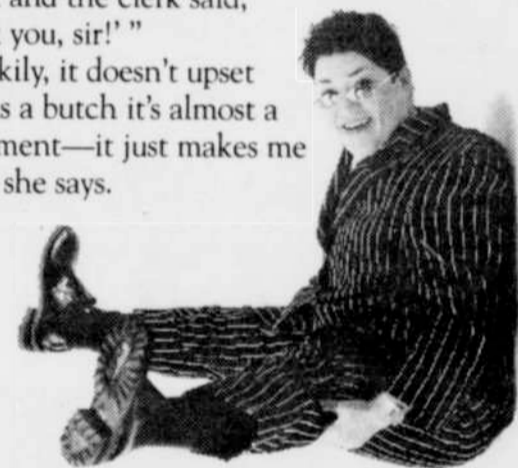
The most remarkable aspect of her ever-growing success is that DeLaria has always been out. Way, way out. Never-for-a-moment-passing out.

So does she resent other celebrities still clinging to the closet? Surprisingly, no.

"People can only be who they are," she says. "People need to stop worrying about who's out and who's not. Look what happened to Ellen...and that's going to make it harder for other celebrities to come out. Homophobia is real—it's no different for us."

In her rule book DeLaria reveals: "Every day of my life someone refers to me as sir." She confirms the truth of that claim with a recent example: "Just yesterday I was actually buying lipstick and the clerk said, 'Thank you, sir!'"

Luckily, it doesn't upset her. "As a butch it's almost a compliment—it just makes me laugh," she says.



She's also made peace with her size, but in her book she relates some remarks she made at the Texas Lesbian Conference that got her into trouble.

She said, "I'm a proud fat woman and all, but I think there's a slight problem when I'm the most svelte person in a room." Booming ensued.

That she is indeed comfortable in her own skin was underscored recently when she appeared at a benefit with an array of gorgeous Broadway stars. "We shared one big dressing room, and I'm running around with my shirt off, scratching my ass, and they're all like worried about their bodies and changing in the

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