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BOOKS**Yo mama**

Portland's hippest queer parent turns 10

BY GINA DAGGETT

If *Hip Mama* magazine is, as is oft quoted, "conservative America's worst nightmare," then Ariel Gore is Freddy Krueger.

Since Gore turned in her senior project just over 10 years ago at Mills College in Oakland, Calif.—issue No. 1 of *Hip Mama* magazine—she has become the ultimate hip mama. "I sort of slapped a subscription form on the back to make it look real," she says. "Then people subscribed, and I was like, 'Oh.'"

By accident, Gore gave mothers permission to take back their lives and provided a platform for nontraditional parenting.

Before the 33-year-old conceived *Hip Mama* she gave birth to her daughter, Maia, now 14. "At the time the whole family values campaign was just starting," she explains, "and so as a teen welfare mom, I was Satan."

She wanted an alternative to the parenting press, which, she says, is completely inane and totally apolitical. "They're just stupid service magazines to tell you what brand of cream to put on your kids...they're stupider than women's magazines." Whoa!

But it was more than just coming up empty-handed at the magazine rack.

"Becoming a mom can be such an isolating experience," says Gore, who is raising Maia in Southeast Portland with her partner, Maria. "Especially if everyone in your community isn't having kids at once—like in queer communities."

Gore says that she felt like a "big dork" when she had Maia and that she couldn't really connect with other mothers. "You try and find this world of mothering and...they're all just talking shit, and it is super-isolating. The hard parts [of motherhood] are totally glossed over. There is this sort of dark humor among mothers, but there's also a Prozac pretty face that everybody puts on it," she remembers.

So Gore decided to become, if you will, one mother of a mother. And *Hip Mama*—a mostly reader-written forum packed with more personal essays than expert advice—reflects the shift.

Soon *Hip* became a hit. *Time* magazine called Gore "the reigning mother superior." *The New Yorker* said she "provides succor to moms who cannot relate to our culture's



PHOTO BY SUSSANNA FROHMAN

Ariel Gore celebrates the 10th anniversary of her groundbreaking magazine and publishes a new book to boot

Even though *Hip Mama* is a magazine for nontraditional moms, Gore has realized along the way that her ideas about what's traditional and nontraditional often doesn't quite match up with real

life. "The thing that's surprising to me all the time is that super-suburban people are just like me...and then there are crazy queer moms who are really secretly conservative."

The dyke publisher and author believes that parents are usually the worst sex educators and that it's vital not to add to the shame kids can feel about sexuality. "It's important not to be weird about your own sexuality," Gore proffers. "It's tricky; an important part of someone's emerging sexuality is privacy and boundaries...I think the main thing is to be comfortable with your own sexuality, which is a long process."

In between each quarterly *Hip Mama* issue, Gore's not far from her computer. In the past 10 years, she's penned four books—the latest, *Whatever, Mom: Hip Mama's Guide*

to *Raising a Teenager*, is co-authored with her daughter. (Gore playfully says Maia's getting a chance at a rebuttal.)

In the end, Gore hopes *Hip Mama*, this year celebrating its 10th anniversary, will be a part of the expansion of people's concept of being a mother. "It's a constant effort to share our stores and be real and remembering the super-obvious things like totally sacrificing yourself to your kid's alleged happiness isn't going to get you anywhere," she shares. "As kids grow up, they want to feel like they have interesting mothers. They don't want to feel like somebody gave their life for them. That's a bad place to be." ■

Visit HIP MAMA at www.hipmama.com.

GINA DAGGETT is a Portland free-lance writer. Reach her at www.ginadaggett.com.

REVIEW

WHATEVER, MOM: HIP MAMA'S GUIDE TO RAISING A TEENAGER by Ariel Gore with Maia Swift; Seal Press, 2004; \$14.95 softcover

Thirtysomething Portland mom Ariel Gore—the quiet and unassuming publisher of *Hip Mama* magazine—has several books under her belt: birth and parenting helpers *The Hip Mama Survival Guide* and *The Mother Trip*, the memoir *Atlas of the Human Heart* and the co-authored anthology *Breeder: Real-Life Stories from the New Generation of Mothers*.

The queer author's new book, *Whatever, Mom: Hip Mama's Guide to Raising a Teenager*, was written at the shock of daughter Maia turning 13 and declaring her cool, alternative, tattooed mom to be a "major freak."

Maia's journey to independence has just



begun, and that robs the book of a host of personal experiences, stories and insights that will still be provided to Gore during the next few years. Still, *Whatever* is well-rounded by thorough research and statistics, as well an abundance of chapters with voices of teens of all ages, including Maia's.

Topics tackled are common teen issues like drinking, curfews, sex, drugs, suicide and, of course, uncool parents like Maia's: "There isn't

really anything you can do about your mom or dad embarrassing you.... I think it's something that can never be properly fixed."

What is most appealing about *Mama Gore* is her truthfulness. Her parenting books are intimate looks into daily joys and painful moments that come with raising a "woman child," and she is never afraid to admit that she's on unknown territory, searching and doubting, struggling to let go and thrive in transition.

With a healthy dose of humor and panache, Gore volunteers gentle guidance for the journey to come, always exposing the limits of the society that bred us. And truly groundbreaking is her reassurance to all mamas in mama-bashing patriarchy that being and doing the best they can is enough: "Whatever is going on, you already have everything you need to meet this moment in your life. You do not require a makeover."

That is the beauty of Gore in a nutshell.

—Els Debbaut