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# Winning Isn't Everything

But it certainly gets my attention

I must have a thing for award-winning authors. I've been living with Oregon Book Award winner **Marc Acito** for 21 years, but that didn't stop me from shamelessly flirting with **Michael Cunningham**, Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist (*The Hours*) and screenwriter (*A Home at the End of the World*).

Cunningham and I were together recently in New York for a screening of his new film, *Evening*, based on the novel by O. Henry prize-winning author Susan Minot (with whom I haven't flirted yet). Cunningham has masterfully simplified Minot's narrative (there are 50 characters in it) while writing vivid scenes for Meryl Streep, Vanessa Redgrave and Glenn Close to sink their teeth into.

After viewing the film, I sat down with Cunningham to talk about the movie and his novels.

**Floyd Sklaver:** First off, what's with the baking metaphors?

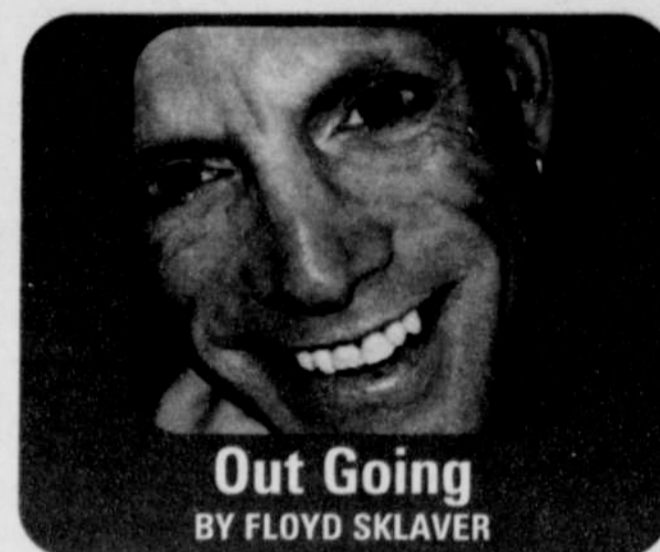
**Michael Cunningham:** It's true that I've written two novels with prominent cakes in them.

**FS:** Three.

**MC:** What was the third?

**FS:** *The Hours*, *A Home at the End of the World* and *Flesh and Blood*.

**MC:** There's not really a prominent cake in *A Home at the End of the World*.



a metaphor for the creative act...the fundamental human desire to create something perfect.

**FS:** In a similar vein, what's with all the *ménages à trois*? Were you involved with one when you were younger?

**MC:** Oh, when I was younger in many, but rarely for more than a night. I just think that as you start up from one, three is the first interesting number. One is just one; two...can only be symmetrical. Three gets interesting. Three can be perfectly balanced; three can be off-balance. Three feels dramatically interesting to me in a way that two does not.

**FS:** Which character in your books is most like you?

**MC:** While Virginia Woolf [in *The Hours*] felt most autobiographical, if we're just talking in terms of the characters' whose lives are most outwardly like mine, they would be the white gay guys who struggle to come to terms with their sexuality and who fall in love very easily with the wrong and the right people.

**FS:** You've said that a writer shouldn't adapt his own work for the screen, but what was it like to adapt someone else's words?

**MC:** It was difficult but I guess a more interesting and invigorating challenge than adapting your own stuff—to take a story that's already been written and try to keep it true to itself and also make it your own.

**FS:** Is that why you made *Buddy* gay [in *Evening*]?

**MC:** I made *Buddy*, let's say, sexually ambiguous; *Buddy* is sort of pre-gay. What he is at that point in his life is sort of in love with everybody.

**FS:** How gorgeous is Hugh Dancy [who plays *Buddy* in *Evening*]?

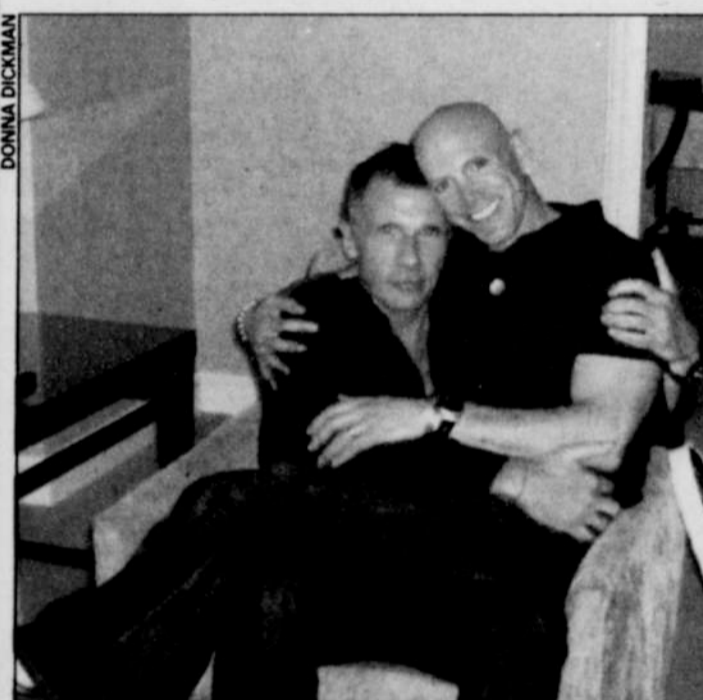
**MC:** My lord. He's such a movie star. Isn't he fantastic? If he doesn't become a major movie star, there's no justice in the world.

**FS:** So I'm out of questions, but I just want to sit here and look at you because you're so beautiful.

**MC:** OK, we can do that, just stare at each other for a while.

And that's where our interview ended—just before I became too *Out Going*. 10

FLOYD SKLAVER wants to know about your event. E-mail him at [floydsklaver@comcast.net](mailto:floydsklaver@comcast.net).



Floyd flirts with Michael Cunningham in New York.

**FS:** Excuse me. Sissy Spacek is teaching Colin Farrell how to bake throughout.

**MC:** Well, it's a pie. You know, you don't start writing with these thoughts in mind; they just emerge as the book starts to accumulate. I've always had a certain thing about women's lives. I mean, duh, it comes from my mother.

**FS:** How so?

**MC:** My mother was incredibly driven and a huge perfectionist. Everything had to be perfect, perfect, perfect, which drove her and all of us kind of crazy.

**FS:** Like the mom in *Flesh and Blood*?

**MC:** Very much like the mother in *Flesh and Blood*. And I guess when I grew up and started to write about all kinds of people, among them women who are trapped in lives that are a little too small for them, cooking has always seemed like