

But Belge concedes that there was a little trepidation in putting the book out. "I had angst about my parents reading it. When they did, my dad wanted to know what a 'rack' was, and my brother started saying things like, 'You gold star you.'" (A "gold star" is defined in the glossary as "a dyke who's never slept with a man.")

Even though they live in the same place, Belge mailed the book to her partner after it came out and didn't show it to her during the process of writing.

"It's interesting to see how our partners became these characters, and we're excited for everyone to meet them," says Daggett. "I chose to change a few things at the last minute, and I'm so glad I did."

While Lipstick & Dipstick come at their readers from a lesbian perspective—and then, within that, two sometimes very different points of view—the duo find some universal threads in the advice they dispense. Belge says of some responses to the book, "We have straight people telling us, 'You should write a book for straight people.'"

Daggett adds, "We all struggle with the same handful of big issues, and they manifest themselves in different ways."

It's the banter between the two characters of Lipstick & Dipstick that continually leaves devoted readers craving more. And sometimes when the two seem like they're having a disagreement, it's really that they're saying the same thing differently. They always agree that in relationships there should be no cheating and that, for lesbians, there should be no straight women. "We're firm on those—almost abusive," says Daggett.

Lipstick & Dipstick receive a lot of questions about sex from a lot of women who aren't having it—or are having it with the wrong people. There are a lot of coming-out questions from young readers and women who are married, which might be the springboard topic for the next book.

When asked about the worst stuff they've heard from readers about breaking up, the subject quickly galvanizes the two into a back-and-forth of support and motherly finger-wagging.

Daggett leads the charge: "The worst is stringing people along."

With Belge in quick pursuit: "Yeah, people getting shit on."

"Lesbians have a hard time breaking up."

"Break up. Move on."

Daggett hits a ruminative last note: "Usually breakups are the result of things that should've been addressed way before, but some women let people dump on them."

The two answer every letter they get, even if the responses aren't those selected for publication, and refer people to alternate resources if the question is beyond the scope of their simple advice. They find that they also get repeats, with younger readers writing them again with more questions.

Lipstick & Dipstick get one or two questions a day at their site from all over the world, with a lot coming from Texas and the South, and even some from those in the military stationed in Iraq. "It's mind-boggling," says Daggett.

The response from readers constantly surprises the women, and they sometimes even find that they are asked for on-the-spot advice,

helping them understand the influence they have on those around them. "We started doing this for fun, but we've gotten serious about our place in the community. We didn't expect people to need us as much as they do. We want to be there so people don't feel alone. They give to us, and we give back," says Daggett.

Belge finds that their impact is actually more significant in locations more off the beaten path. "It's interesting going into smaller communities. I mean, what's another lesbian in San Francisco?" she says.

Belge and Daggett have started moving into live performance with their characters, even hosting a mock talk show this year for an audience of 400 at Nike headquarters for National Coming Out Day. "It's a funny, campy, irreverent style with nuggets of truth," says Daggett. "But it's hard to lift characters off the page."

So they worked with an acting coach to help make the shift from writers to performers. Lesbian comedian Suzanne Westenhoefer, a fan of the Lipstick & Dipstick column, even worked with them on their jokes and delivery before the Nike show. "We hit it out of the park; it couldn't have gone better," says Daggett.

Belge adds, "We enjoy performance now."

As luck would have it for the pair, a Human Rights Campaign representative was at the Nike event and asked them to host a season premiere party for *The L Word* Jan. 6 at Bagdad Theater. They will also be hosting a women's party at Winter Pride next month in Whistler, British Columbia. "Things have started to fall in our lap," says Daggett.

While the two try to enjoy the moment with the publication of their book, they are also continuing to move forward on other Lipstick & Dipstick projects while the iron is hot. They have a reality television show in the works in conjunction with *Curve* that will be a spinoff of the column as well as other speaking engagements and ideas for their next book.

But for as much as they've got going on with Lipstick & Dipstick, that's just one project for these prolific writers. Daggett recently sent the final draft of her first novel, *Jukebox*, to her agent. It's the chronicle of two debutantes who fall in love. She is also adapting the book into a screenplay. Belge, a freelance writer, pens for an assortment of outlets and is the guide to all aspects of "lesbian life" on About.com.

It is the fullness of perspective that keeps bringing readers back, and even when they get honest answers they might not want to hear, they have to respect that Lipstick & Dipstick are always going to tell it like they see it. Of the partnership's success, Belge says, "We have different opinions, but there's a common lesbian experience that is unique and we see the same." 10



Belge (left) and Daggett film a television pilot for a reality show they have created in partnership with *Curve* magazine.

GINA DAGGETT and KATHY BELGE will read from Lipstick & Dipstick's *Essential Guide to Lesbian Relationships* 7:30 p.m. Jan. 22 at Powell's, 1005 W. Burnside St.

They will join Queen Bee and her Delicious Little HoneyPots and burlesque performer Sahara Dunes for the HOT FLASH FOURTH ANNIVERSARY PARTY from 5 to 9 p.m. Jan. 26 at Barracuda, 9 N.W. Second Ave. Cover is \$8.

Lipstick & Dipstick will appear live and in character for their book release party during the monthly dance party POP TART featuring Rose City Sirens and Ashleigh Flynn 5 to 7 p.m. Feb. 10 at Holocene, 1001 S.E. Morrison St.

They will also join authors Diane and Jake Anderson-Minshall (Blind Eye Mystery Series) and Gabrielle Goldsby for MURDER, ADVICE, ROMANCE AND FEMINISM: A NIGHT OF QUEER READINGS 6:30 p.m. Feb. 28 at In Other Words, 8 N.E. Killingsworth St.

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