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I felt a little proud of myself that he kind of lost his temper and got really red in the face and was banging the table and screaming about crack babies in the inner city because it just showed what kind of ignorance ... that he really hadn't thought about these issues ... that it was just a rhetorical question for him.

S.Z.: You've said, "I've been poor and that doesn't scare me." What is your experience with the issue of class in our society?

A.G.: I don't come from a family that identifies as working class. I definitely come from an intellectual class where there is not a lot of money, but there is a different kind of emotional opportunity and a different kind of way that the world is going to receive you based on what somebody can tell when they meet you.

I've always had that privilege. The nice thing about not being afraid to be poor is that you *have* to not be afraid of being poor if you're going to be an artist or a writer. Part of that is also having confidence that I'm not going to experience the kind of abject poverty that is a reality for many people around the world.

S.Z.: You have two children. They are 17 years apart. That's a pretty large age spread. What are the advantages and disadvantages of raising your children separately?

A.G.: After I had Maia, I came back to

California and after that, I primarily had relationships with women — if I was even in a relationship. So either I wasn't having sex or I was having sex with women. You don't just get pregnant by accident.

(My son) Max has a donor in Portland whom he has a relationship with and he has a donor grandma in the Bay area. I had always sort of meant to have another kid and, as I said, the opportunity didn't present itself organically.

My partner at the time, Sol, wanted to have a kid. I thought my daughter Maia would be home for one more year and so they would have that year together and I thought that would be kind of nice. Of course, as soon as I announced that I was pregnant, Maia announced that she was going to graduate from high school a year early and so she actually went off to college about three days before Max was born.

S.Z.: For both Maia and Max, it is sort of like they get all the benefit of single childhood and siblingdom.

A.G.: I know! When they are older they can check in and be like, "She was crazy, right?"

S.Z.: You and the Feminist Zine Culture have had a huge influence on one another. Where does feminism stand?

A.G.: (Laughs). Well I don't know. It seems to be going along at its regular snail pace. I don't know. I'm pretty bummed about the fact that there are so few print publications at this point, but I feel like the feminist process is hanging in there in terms of print publication. Bitch is still around. Ms. magazine is still miraculously around. It's nice that it's not just mainstream misogynist press that still gets to be in print.

When I first started Hip Mama, it was in the context of a real explosion of feminist zines and use-created zines and all of that was very inspiring to me. I know there's the internet and all now, but there was something that was really inspiring about homemade media — something you could

hold in your hand, and there were all of these people all over the country making this stuff. If you didn't feel represented in the media you saw around you, you just created it. You didn't need a big budget to do it.

S.Z.: You started Hip Mama 20 years ago. The first issue was 500 copies and your senior project in college. Can you map out the Hip Mama experience for us a bit?

A.G.: Part of the reason that I started doing it was inspired by the whole "family values" campaign and welfare reform and all of that, but it ended up getting a lot of attention because I was on welfare and because I became sort of a welfare advocate via the magazine. We got a lot of national attention for it, which was great because it really did get out there to the readership that I was going for. Welfare moms read Glamour magazine and then they found out about Hip Mama.

In the beginning I really thought the reader would look a lot like I looked at the time: young, urban, poor, single. Pretty immediately the demographic proved itself to be bigger than that. It was people who wanted to tell the truth about their experience with motherhood. They could be married, gay or straight, they could be of a different income level, or education level. More than talking about my experience as being younger, urban, in college, I think people really responded to telling any truth about being a mom. The world of parenting media at that time was just completely dumbed-down, stupid 'how-to' articles: Experts telling you what to do and a bunch of minivan ads.

S.Z.: Digital media vs. print media?

A.G.: The Portland collective that has run Hip Mama wanted to go all digital for financial reasons, which is totally understandable. Hip Mama has always been really important to me as a print project — something you can hold in your hands, take to the park. I'm not against digital media. It has its place.

S.Z.: "The End of Eve" is a memoir you wrote about your hospice experience. In the book, there is a part when your mother asks you, "Do you think memoir writing is a way to express anger or a way to pay tribute?" Does this memoir express anger, pay tribute or both?

A.G.: I thought that was an interesting question that she asked me. I'd never thought about that in those terms even though I had written a memoir and had been teaching memoir writing in Portland for seven years.

I think it's really bigger than that. Ideally, the people you write about in a memoir aren't going to read it. That's not who it's for. It's not about processing our relationships with each other. It's about having a conversation with people who weren't involved.

My daughter is a pretty good sport about my writing in Hip Mama, but the stories aren't for her. They are for other parents, for the most part. They are for other people who are going through hard times or even just times.

Did you know that like something like 30 percent of Americans are taking care of disabled or dying relatives at any given moment? But you very rarely hear people talk about it in an honest way.

I think it was kind of a narcissistic question (that my mother asked), knowing that she would appear in the book. "What does this have to do with me? Are you angry at me?"

So the answer to the question is kind of both, but the answer is also kind of neither. The book is, of course, all about Eve — I wouldn't want to take that away from her — but it's not for her.

S.Z.: At one point in the book, early on in your mother's care, you make the comment, "It boggled my mind to think that people poorer than me dealt with this kind of thing every

day." What observations can you share about the hospice experience from a class perspective?

A.G.: Hospice is wonderful. But I thought, and maybe this is just ignorance, that they would be there 24/7, and they're not, they just stop by. They deal with the medication, they deal with medical issues that you really aren't qualified as a home caregiver to deal with. The people involved are wonderful and complete lifesavers in so many ways. Politically, it certainly seems to necessitate a lot of money. Hospice, without money, is to send people home in a condition where they can't be left alone and just kind of assume that someone — usually a female — is going to step up.

S.Z.: In "The End of Eve," you make reference to a pretty horrendous role model for mothering and you give a few concrete examples of your mother's abusive behavior. As a reader, I felt as though there was a lot we didn't know about Eve, and though you never discuss it explicitly, did your mother suffer from mental health issues?

A.G.: In the '80s, when I was a teenager, she had a bipolar diagnosis. She didn't deal with it. She tried to be medicated for a while and she had violent reactions to the medication. She was very adamant that there was nothing wrong with her. She rebelled against her diagnosis and was essentially unmedicated.

Psychologists who have read my book are like oh, well she's classic borderline. There's no question, it often coexists with being bipolar. To my knowledge, she's never had that diagnosis. But if she did have that diagnosis, she wouldn't have shared that with me.

S.Z.: There was a stigma around having a bipolar diagnosis in the 1980s. There is still a stigma that is attached to mental illness, but today there is also a gentler understanding of living with mental illness.

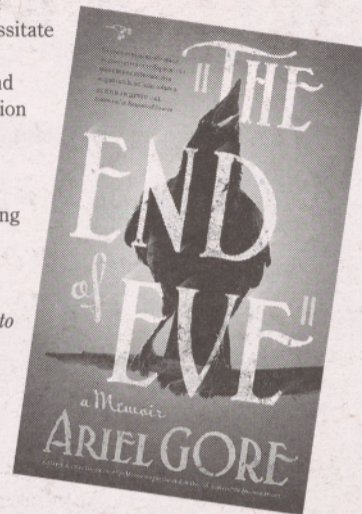
A.G.: Particularly something like bipolar. It's considered treatable. She was very beautiful and in her world, she was functional. So there's that too. I didn't really want to talk about diagnosis in the book because it wasn't part of our experience. We always knew that she was pretty much crazy. But we didn't deal with the mental health system or anything like that.

S.Z.: What does it mean for life to bear witness to death?

A.G.: We have this cultural fantasy about dying with dignity, that taking care of people as they are dying will be this hard but ultimately beautiful thing. We imagine that relationships will be healed and everyone will die the way we imagine some Tibetan Buddhist master would. My Facebook friends kept sending "love and light" and talking about the beauty of death. But for me it wasn't like that. Death was ugly. And undignified. Not everyone is ready to die when their time comes. Very little was resolved. My mother died the way she'd lived — mean and complicated.

S.Z.: You have such a resilient spirit. Where do you think that comes from?

A.G.: The upside of being abused as a kid is that you do develop a resilience and you do develop a kind of fearlessness. I'm 40 now. I can say that I like living my life this way. You wonder if it's the wisest way to live your life to be like, well, if all else fails, it'll make a good story. So far, that's served me well enough.



Ariel Gore will be at the new Reading Frenzy on Mississippi on Sunday, March 2 at 4 p.m. for the relaunch of Hip Mama and then at Powell's on Burnside, 7:30 p.m. March 3 to promote her memoir, "The End of Eve."

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