

other inexcusable offenses: stealing and showing up late. But Gray stays on Joy's good side. She calls him her "Eugene son" — her real son, who is 20, attends Washington State — and even sponsors him when he puts on punk rock benefit shows for WomenSpace by paying for the flyers and posters. "We both care about people," Gray says. "I think that's why we get along."

Her husband, Dean Knudtson, maintains that getting along with Joy is simple: "Joy likes to be the boss," he says. "It's important that people understand that." Brails is her restaurant, and she's determined to run things her way.

Joy says that's why her original stint with Brails, when she co-owned the restaurant with her sister, didn't work out. "I decided I don't want to have a partner," she says, so about 12 years ago, she gave up her share in Brails, leaving her sister with full ownership.

At least one good thing came from her first Brails experience: She met her husband. Knudtson, a Vancouver-based contractor who specializes in building Starbucks coffee shops, was working on the Starbucks store at 18th and Pearl when he became a Brails regular. But it wasn't the sandwiches that kept Knudtson coming back. It was Joy, who he says was "exactly the same" back then, all smiles and energetic banter. When Knudtson returned to Vancouver, Joy and her son followed.

But in 2001, her sister was having health problems and could no longer work. Brails was in decline, and Joy knew she needed to whip the place into shape. She bought a house next to her sister's and moved in with her son and young daughter, now 7. During the week, Knudtson stays in Vancouver. On weekends, vacations and whenever a Starbucks is being built nearby, he stays

in Eugene. Although the separation is difficult, "Joy likes her freedom," he says.

This independent spirit dates back to Joy's childhood in Seoul, Korea, where she lived until she was 19. "When I was growing up, I was kinda troublemaker," she says. "I could have finished college there, but I didn't want to. I wanted to come to the United States." Her sister had already emigrated, so Joy left college and moved to Alaska, where she got her beauty license and worked as a hairdresser. Later she moved to Eugene.

These days, Joy's rebelliousness may



The staff of Brail's

have faded, but her outgoing, determined personality has not. Business at Brails is booming and in 2004, *Eugene Weekly* readers voted Brails "Best Hangover Breakfast." But Joy's not done yet. She's thinking of expanding the diner's hours to include dinner, but she doesn't know how many people would come in. Her real dream is to open a second Brails in Springfield. Joy says she's not sure whether that will ever happen, but Knudtson wouldn't be surprised to see it. "She just pushes ahead, keeps moving," he says. "I can't see her slowing down yet." \*

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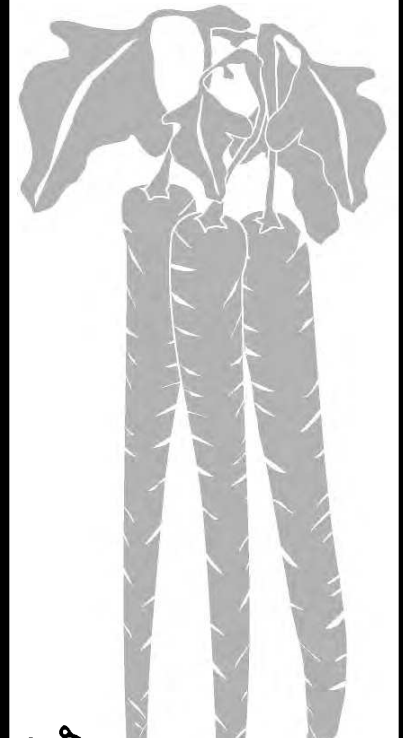
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