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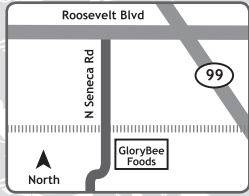
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BOOKS BY MOLLY TEMPLETON

A Sassy History

From Cute Band Alert to closing time

HOW SASSY CHANGED MY LIFE:
A Love Letter to the Greatest Teen Magazine of All Time, nonfiction by Kara Jesella & Marisa Meltzer. Faber & Faber, 2007. Paperback, \$18.

Sassy, which appeared in 1988, was a magazine-shaped beacon to disaffected teens. While *Seventeen* and its ilk were busily instructing girls how to get guys and stop zits, in *Sassy*, being different was OK; being thoughtful, angry, creative, politically aware and, most importantly, yourself took priority (and boys were welcome too). In the magazine's pages, zines, riot grrl and underground music took hold in stories written in unforgettable voices, like that of Christina Kelly ("Christina + Rage = Power" read one issue's spine). *Sassy's* writers sounded like smart older sisters who knew how to couch important information and ideas in friendly, fascinating tones.

On the outside, Marisa Meltzer and Kara Jesella's *How Sassy Changed My Life* takes after the magazine it discusses: Oversized and thin, it runs a parade of *Sassy* spines across the cover, a memory-inducing visual that makes me want to dig through my mom's closet to see if I can find my own old issues. Inside, the text is in two columns, again suggesting magazine design. But the knowing, experienced, first-person voice is absent; though Meltzer and Jesella write in clean, clear prose, they sometimes seem a bit distant from the page. They've still created a lovely, thoughtful, thorough examination of the history of both *Sassy* and a specific period of the magazine industry. I just wish it were ... sassier.

Throughout *How Sassy Changed My Life*, plenty of voices do crop up. Meltzer and Jesella did piles of research, talking to

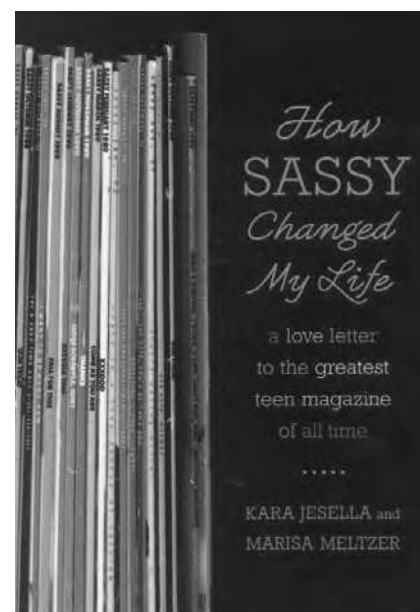
ex-*Sassy* staffers and soliciting comments from readers. From the magazine's origins as an American version of the Australian teen mag *Dolly* to the crumbling of the empire and the celebritization of former editor-in-chief Jane Pratt, who went on to lead a magazine with her name, the book offers an insightful, even-handed take on the little magazine that, for a little while, could. The authors interviewed nearly everyone who was on the *Sassy* staff, including a few who didn't love their time there; their book considers the financial side of magazine publishing and the influence of advertisers

who weren't ready for the mag's frank take on touchy topics, and the open-minded, left-leaning publication's weak spot when it came to race.

But the positives, of course, outweigh the negatives — both in the exploration of *Sassy's* existence and in what Meltzer and Jesella's book has to offer. The *Sassy* story is more than just the story of one magazine that tried to break

the mold; it's a reminder that things haven't changed much since the magazine folded in 1994. "All the problems *Sassy* had in grappling with the mainstream media are still very much alive — if not more so," Meltzer and Jesella write in the book's final chapter. Perhaps, as they go on to suggest, blogs, with their millions of first-person voices, have taken on part of *Sassy's* role. Maybe increased access to non-mainstream publications means that the smaller magazines that arose in *Sassy's* wake — *Bitch*, *Bust*, *Venus* — are finding more readers. And maybe Jesella and Meltzer's love letter will put these questions — and all the issues *Sassy* raised in its wonderfully informal, sassy style — in front of old fans who, inspired by the magazine, have gone on to become writers themselves.

EW



BOOK NOTES: Nathaniel Englander reads from *The Ministry of Special Cases*, 7:30 pm 5/17, Powell's on Burnside, Portland. Nicole Mones reads from *The Last Chinese Chef*, 7:30 pm 5/18, Powell's on Burnside, Portland. Poet Vern Rutsala reads from his work, 7 pm 5/19, Visual Arts Center, Newport. Daniel Handler (aka Lemony Snicket and also the author of the adult novel *Adverbs*) in conversation with Decemberists singer-songwriter Colin Meloy, 5 pm 5/20, Powell's, Beaverton. Kara Jesella and Marisa Meltzer read from *How Sassy Changed My Life*, 7:30 pm 5/21, Powell's on Hawthorne, Portland. Matt Love reads from *Red, Hot and Rollin'*, 7 pm 5/23, Knight Library, UO. Writer Linda Hogan speaks as part of the Native American Philosophies series, 6:30 pm 5/23, Gilfillan Auditorium, OSU. Floyd Skloot reads from *Patient 002*, 7 pm 5/24, Knight Library, UO. Edward T. Haslam reads from *Dr. Mary's Monkey*, 7 pm 5/24, Tsunami Books. Suzanne Collins reads from *Gregor and the Code of Claw*, 7 pm 5/24, Powell's, Beaverton. Jack Malebranche reads from *Androphilia: Rejecting the Gay Identity, Reclaiming Masculinity*, 7:30 pm 5/24, Powell's on Hawthorne, Portland.