

A QUEEN FOR THE BOOKS

The 2016 SLUG queen talks bar clowns, books and baby dolls

Do you remember what your favorite color was when you were a kid? Winter Peterson remembers hers: multicolor.

“I saw that on a container of glitter when I was a kid and thought it was one color,” she says. “But no — it was all colors.”

Since then, her worldview hasn’t gotten any less colorful. Peterson calls herself a “recreational, loud, gaudy person,” and she can often be seen around Eugene in drag or even a clown costume. “People don’t expect to see clowns out at the bars,” she says.

Peterson has gone by a lot of names over the years. As a bar clown, she’s Ding-Dong. As a drag queen, Peterson used to go by BabyJesus, but now she’s Heavy Flo. She has the names “Jack” and “Jane” tattooed on her fists. “I’ve been a little indecisive about my gender,” she explains. Now she’s Winter, a name she describes as “androgynous, with a touch of feminine.”

As of Aug. 12, Peterson can add a new name to this list: Eugenia Slimesworth, the 34th Eugene SLUG queen.

The SLUG queen is the outrageous figurehead for the Society for the Legitimization of the Ubiquitous Gastropod. SLUG queens, despite their name and inexplicable theme, don’t actually do a whole lot for actual slugs. Rather, the queen runs with a platform — be it animal welfare, anti-domestic violence activism, park restoration — and appears at events around Eugene to promote the cause.

SLUG queens consider the “raining”

queen a goodwill ambassador for the city.

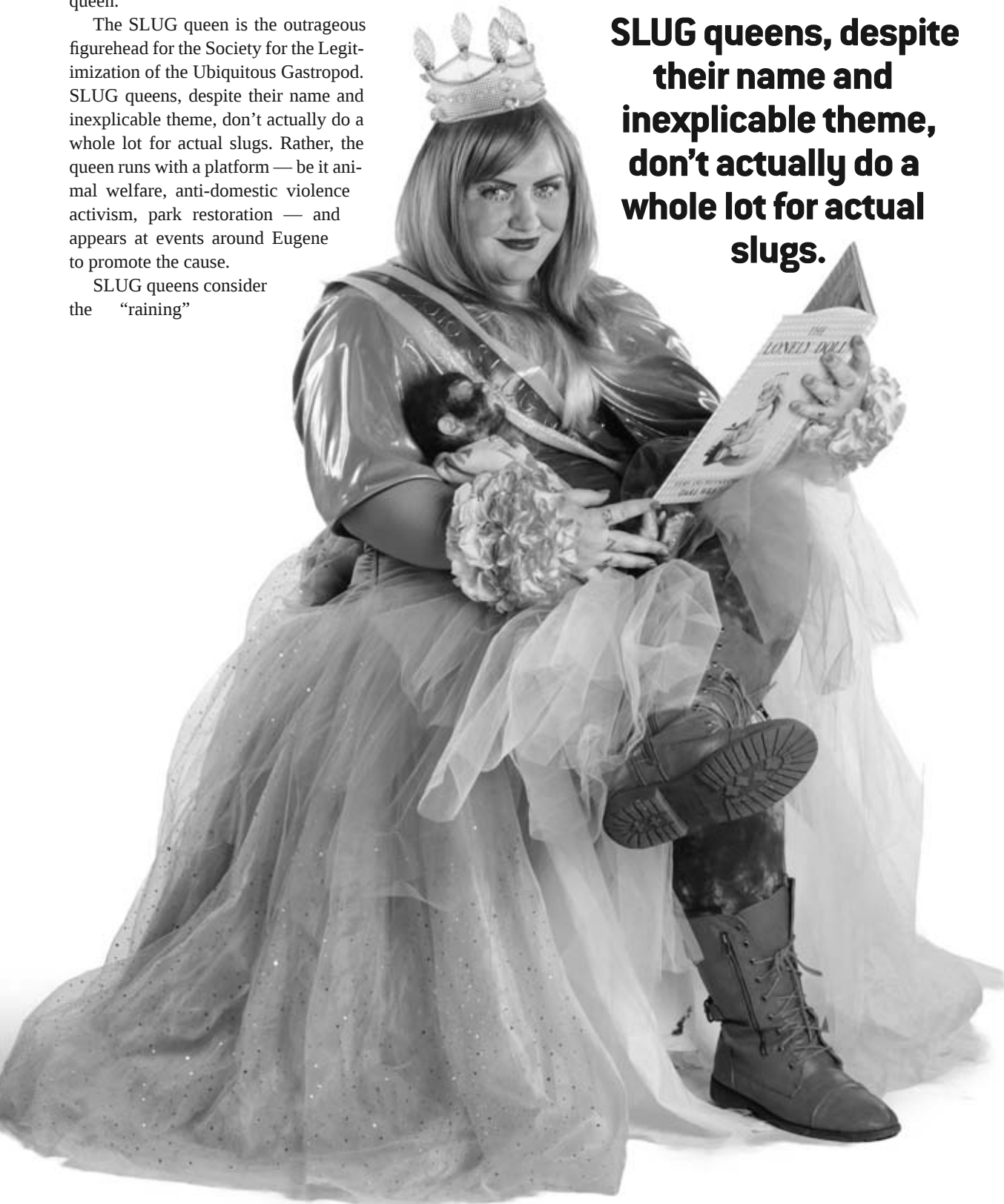
Peterson, an avowed bibliophile who works at Lane Community College’s campus library, has chosen to promote and raise funds for Eugene’s public libraries. In addition to the SLUG queens’ public events — including the Maude Kerns Art Center’s Jell-O Art Show (exactly what it sounds like) that SLUG queens participate in each spring, she says she hopes to make regular appearances at public libraries around Eugene.

“If they need me for story time or any other event the library wants me for, I’ll be knocking down the door for that,” Peterson says.

She also plans to compile a calendar of pictures of the old SLUG queens, with all the money going to public libraries in Lane County. One of the SLUG queens’ most beloved credos is “once a queen, always a queen,” so there are no former queens: just old queens (or very old queens, if they’ve been royalty for more than 20 years; exquisitely or sustainably old queens have held the title for 30-plus.)

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Anyone over 21, regardless of gender identity, race, creed, disability or “any other restrictions of any kind,” can be queen, according to the 2016 SLUG queen application form. Species doesn’t seem to be a limiting factor, either: Among Peterson’s competition for the title this year was a pit bull in a cape, going under the name of GastroPluto the Perfect and representing Eugene’s Greenhill Humane Society.

The SLUG queen coronation, which has taken place annually at the Park Blocks and has had an on-and-off relationship with the now-defunct Eugene Celebration, looks a bit like a John Waters-hosted beauty pageant crossed with a high school graduation on mushrooms. It’s often impossible to see the stage beneath the skirts, frocks and dresses worn by both the competing queen wannabes and the old queens who present it.

The One More Time Marching Band, which serenaded the event, doesn’t have any qualms about drawing attention to itself; many, if not most, of the players this year wore at least one stuffed animal on their heads. The same could be said of the audience, many of whom weren’t wearing much at all.

The coronation truly is a sight to behold, and though it’s easy to lump it in with Eugene’s proud eccentric tradition, it’s really part of an older, purer camp that thankfully hasn’t yet been co-opted by hipster irony. It’s right in line with the loudness and gaudiness Peterson loves so much.

Something else Peterson loves un-ironically is her doll collection, one of which — a sasquatch baby — she brought to her photo shoot at *EW* (Peterson says she also loves Sasquatch lore). She started collecting a few years ago when, at a thrift store in Atlanta, she found a type of doll her friend collected and purchased it for her. But before she could send the doll to her friend, she fell in love with it.

“Most of my dolls are antique composition dolls from the thirties and forties, some are handmade reborn babies — made to look extremely real — and then there are a bunch of random cuties: Kewpies, vintage Barbies, a Dolly Parton doll, a Cabbage Patch clown, a polymer fetus, etc.,” Peterson says. “They have their own room, and I like to talk to them every day when I go in to get something from the closet or just peek in to see how they’re doing. I’ll say ‘Hello, girls! Your mother loves you very much! Are you having a nice day today?’”

She adds: “I’ll take one out with me sometimes like if it’s a special occasion. I have one doll who has met Bernie Sanders and one who has met John Waters.”

OK, back to the SLUG queens: Peterson, a Fort Lauderdale native, settled in Eugene about a year and a half ago and heard about the SLUG queen competition upon arrival. Needless to say, she was instantly enthralled.

“When I first saw it I immediately thought, ‘I’m gonna run for this someday,’” she says. “I decided this is the year.”

In keeping with her bibliophile angle, Peterson’s winning performance at the SLUG queen pageant’s “talent segment” entailed a mimed performance to an Auto-Tuned remix of a pro-book speech from beloved kids’ show host Fred Rogers, of *Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood* fame.

Her outfit, co-designed with her friend Eli Rise — who also helped develop the choreography for the “Slugettes” who backed her up — probably helped her chances as well. Remarkably, it was mostly just cobbled together from stuff she had lying around, in addition to a flamboyant green cape contributed by Rise.

The only thing Peterson added to the costume was a bunch of dollar-store fake flowers, which she promptly pasted all over her bike helmet.

“I gotta get a new helmet now,” she sighs, “but it was worth it.”

It was by far the most extravagant, and “multicolor,” costume of the night.

“The idea of matching clothes never really made sense to me until I was way too old,” Peterson says. “It’s still foreign to me.” ■